

# **Corneille McCarn Rucker papers**

**Ms. Coll. 286**

**Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.**

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Last updated on November 03, 2015.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2015 November 3

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Creator</b>	Rucker, Corneille McCarn
<b>Title</b>	Corneille McCarn Rucker papers
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 286
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1893-1987
<b>Extent</b>	1 linear feet (3 boxes)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Corneille McCarn Rucker, an aspiring poet, was raised in Nashville, Tennessee and Hawaii before attending Vanderbilt University. She was the first woman to publish in <i>The Fugitive</i>, an influential poetry journal. It appears that despite this success, Corneille, in general, had a difficult time publishing many of her poems. This collection documents the lively social life and literary aspirations of a well-educated young woman in the early 20th century. Corneille McCarn Rucker memorialized her life in an extremely narrative and vivid fashion through letters, diaries, writings, and scrapbooks.</p>

**Cite as:**

Corneille McCarn Rucker papers, 1893-1987, Ms. Coll. 286, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## Biography/History

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Corneille McCarn Rucker, an aspiring poet, was born in Nashville, Tennessee, probably on July 27 in either 1896 or 1900 to Jefferson B. and Mary D. Allison McCarn. Corneille's father, Jefferson B. McCarn (1862-1947) was an well-known attorney in Nashville and served as district attorney general of Davidson County from 1908 until he was appointed United States District Attorney for the Territory of Hawaii in 1913, a position he held until 1915. Corneille, her mother Mary (1872-1965), brother Andrew (1897-1984), and sister Mary (1899-1964) joined him there. Both of her parents (known by the family as "Munner" and "Dow") wrote poetry; and her father may have been best known for serving as chief prosecutor in the Edward Carmack murder trial.

After returning to Nashville and during World War I, Corneille worked in the Error Department of the Old Hickory Powder Plant. Corneille attended Vanderbilt University from at least 1917 to 1920 where she appears to have had a vibrant social life, in part through her membership in the Tri Delta sorority. She was the first woman to publish in *The Fugitive*, an influential poetry journal. It appears that despite this success, Corneille, in general, had a difficult time publishing many of her poems. In 1927, Corneille married Dr. Anthony Warren Rucker (1900-1979). Warren Rucker graduated from Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Virginia, and probably obtained his medical degree from Vanderbilt. After their marriage, Warren opened a private medical practice while Corneille wrote poetry. The couple lived in Martinsville, Virginia; Nashville, Tennessee; Columbia, Tennessee; and Franklin, Tennessee. In 1987, Corneille published *Christmas is Love*, a compilation of fifty years' worth of Christmas poems which she had sent annually to her friends.

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection documents the lively social life and literary aspirations of a well-educated young woman in the early 20th century. Corneille McCarn Rucker memorialized her life in an extremely narrative and vivid fashion through letters, diaries, writings, and scrapbooks.

The first series, I. Correspondence, includes letters to and from Corneille, although the vast majority are addressed to Corneille. The bulk of the letters are from her friends and speak to an active social life in Nashville, Tennessee and Honolulu, Hawaii. The letters are personal; full of accounts of school, sports, parties, relationships between friends, gossip, and emotions. Several young men express romantic feelings for Corneille, but it is unclear if the feelings were reciprocated. After about 1920, many of the letters refer to Corneille's efforts to publish her poems and are generally very supportive and congratulatory. In relation to Corneille's writing, a brief letter from John Crowe Ransom (a professor at Vanderbilt and a founding member of the Fugitives) may be of interest. There are a few glancing references to suffrage, race relations, and World War I and a few letters from magazines either rejecting or requesting poems written by Corneille; but the bulk of the letters illuminate the increasingly liberated life of young men and women in the first quarter of the 20th century.

II. Diaries includes three diaries; two of which document Corneille's time in Hawaii from 1914 to 1915. The first of these two diaries, which was written in April 1914, is written in the margins of *Diary of One Month in Honolulu*, by Katherine M. Yates. Corneille writes of life with her family as well as her social interactions, practicing on her ukulele, reading, sewing and making beads, and school. The second volume, dating from 1915 and 1918, is written in eight "chapters," each headed with the date and a title: "In which I have a swim at Waikiki Beach," "In which I got to a card party at Sophie Wacker's -- with Brian," "In which I go to Marion's moonlight swimming party and wear a 'loud' bathing suit," etc. The eight sections describe in great detail Corneille's social life in Hawaii, and the last entry appears to have been written just prior to her return to Tennessee. Following the eighth segment, there is one entry from July 22, 1918 in which Corneille describes and writes a love letter to an imaginary "ideal" soldier in France. Finally, this volume includes two undated drafts for a short story, "A Story of Many Lands." In the third diary, written from June 11 to 17, 1929, Corneille writes about her daily life with her husband Warren, visits with her parents, her still active social life, and the process of writing poetry. The diary includes drafts of poems and newspaper clippings regarding her father and presumably her friends. Only 21 pages of this volume were filled.

The third series, Coursework, includes exercises and essays for English III in 1915; essays on literature and current events for English 15 in 1920; a French exercise; reading lists; and lists of misspelled words, most of which are undated. A few of the reading lists are dated 1920 and one is addressed to Mr. Ransom (her professor at Vanderbilt), so it can be assumed that at least some of this work was completed during her college education. Many of the essays from 1920, which were clearly written for English 15, include the term "editorial;" and these relate to current events including war, crops, and women voters.

Series IV. Writings includes the bulk of Corneille's writings. Researchers will find fragments, music, poems (alphabetized by title--researchers should be aware that no poems with titles from A to C exist), and short stories. Publications that include Corneille's works are included in this series. If researchers are interested in all of Corneille's works, they should also consult her correspondence, her diaries, her coursework, and her scrapbooks.

Corneille's two scrapbooks are included in Series V. The first scrapbook, "My Him Book," includes photographs of young men pasted into a published template-volume designed by Elisa E. Edwards. This volume is filled with photographs and Corneille's captions and comments. Many of the young men pictured in this volume also wrote to Corneille or were described in her diaries or friends' letters. Corneille cut a portion of an unidentified letter that states, "For you, dear, have had more men in your young life than any of my acquaintances" and pasted it into the back cover of the volume. The second scrapbook, entitled "My Memory Book," includes lists of friends, with portions of letters cut and pasted into the volume; newspaper clippings, largely relating to friends' weddings, lists of weddings, and wedding memorabilia; description of and letters relating to "my mysterious romance;" Vanderbilt University newspaper clippings, official letters, and memorabilia; Tri Delta sorority memorabilia; rejection letters for her poetry; memorabilia from servicemen during World War I; and a detailed account of William N. Carruthers (a beau) being accused of passing bad checks for fancy neckwear.

The final series consists of material not created or collected by Corneille, but, rather, her family. Most of this material was created by her mother, Mary D. Allison McCarn, who is referred to as "Munner" by Corneille, her family, and her friends. There are several letters written to and from Mary McCarn as well as a scrapbook that she probably compiled containing clippings of poems written by her and her husband Jefferson McCarn (known as "Dow" in the collection). There is also one published volume of poems written by Katharine Rucker.

## Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2015 November 3

Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.

### **Access Restrictions**

This collection is open for research use.

### **Use Restrictions**

Copyright restrictions may exist. For most library holdings, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania do not hold copyright. It is the responsibility of the requester to seek permission from the holder of the copyright to reproduce material from the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

### **Source of Acquisition**

This collection was acquired in two separate purchases. The bulk of the collection was sold by Franklin Gilliam Rare Books (Charlottesville, Virginia) in 1996. A secondary collection consisting of twenty-four letters was sold by Michael Brown Rare Books (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) in 2015. All items from the 2015 accession are marked with the accession number on the envelope (when it exists) or the letter.

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **CORPORATE NAME(S)**

- Vanderbilt University.

### **FORM/GENRE(S)**

- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Poems
- Scrapbooks

### **GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)**

- Hawaii--Social life and customs
- Nashville (Tenn.)--Social life and customs--20th century

**SUBJECT(S)**

- Friendship
- Manners and customs
- Poets, American--20th century
- Women college students--United States--Social life and customs
- Women--United States--Social conditions--20th century

## Collection Inventory

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### I. CORRESPONDENCE.

	Box	Folder
Letters to Corneille (correspondents include: Leila Armstrong, Evelyn, Jack, Julia A. [Maney], [Marse], Alvin McCarn (uncle), Louisa Regen, and Paul Wyatt, Jr.), 1909-1915.	1	1
Letters to Corneille (correspondents include: Mary Anderson, [Frank] B. Barker, Archie A. Coates, Agnes [McCarn], Rob, <i>Southern Woman's Magazine</i> , and ["Wanzer"]), 1916-1919.	1	2
Letters to Corneille (correspondents include: Bruce, Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Ray K. Daniel, Ethel M. Galway, Blanche Goldston, "K," Ellene Ransom, John Crowe Ransom, Frazier Reams, Ruby, the <i>Saturday Evening Post</i> , and Brad Scrub), 1920-1927.	1	3
Letters to and from Corneille (correspondents include: Louis Cochran (author), Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Fisk Tillett, MacMillan Co., Jefferson and Mary D. Allison McCarn (parents), Dorothy Shelley, Whittlesay House, and unidentified authors/recipients), 1928-1947, undated.	1	4

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### II. DIARIES.

	Box	Folder
1914 April.	1	5

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1915-1918.	1	6
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1929 June 11-17.	1	7
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### III. COURSEWORK.

	Box	Folder
English 3, essays, poems, and other exercises, 1915.	1	8
English 15, exercises, 1919-1920.	1	9
French exercise, reading lists, and spelling lists, 1920, undated.	1	10

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### IV. WRITINGS.

	Box	Folder
Fragments, undated.	1	11
Music manuscripts and fragments, undated.	1	12
Poems (manuscripts and typescripts), D-L, 1920-1945.	1	13
Poems (manuscripts and typescripts), M-R, 1920, undated.	2	1
Poems (manuscripts and typescripts), S-T, 1925-1926, undated.	2	2
Poems (manuscripts and typescripts), U-W, 1912, undated.	2	3

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Poems (published) in <i>Vanderbilt Observer</i> (probably), <i>The Fugitive</i> , <i>The Scy</i> , and <i>Christmas is Love</i> , 1916-1987.	2	4
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Short stories ("Oui, oui Marie, or Uh-huh Mary" and "Room for Joy", circa 1931, undated.	2	5
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#### V. SCRAPBOOKS.

	Box	Folder
"My Him Book," photographs pasted into store-bought volume designed by Elisa E. Edwards and published by C.R. Gibson & Company, New York, New York, circa 1924.	2	6
"My Memory Book", circa 1914-1925.	3	1

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#### VI. FAMILY PAPERS.

	Box	Folder
McCarn, Mary D. Allison, letters to and from (correspondents include: <i>The Christian Advocate</i> , Clara Mai Howe, Kate, Jefferson McCarn (husband), and F.E. [Parnsell], 1899-1902.	2	7
McCarn, Mary D. Allison, letters from Allison (possibly from her son Andrew Allison McCarn while at camp) and unidentified (includes an anatomical drawing and medical advice relating to the kidney), 1913, undated.	2	8
McCarn, Mary D. Allison, scrapbook of clippings of published poems by her	2	9

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and her husband, Jefferson McCarn, 1893-1905.

Rucker, Katharine Kennon, published book of poems, *Echoes*, 1931.

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