

# **William McDevitt papers**

**Ms. Coll. 1365**

**Finding aid prepared by Sam Allingham.**

---

Last updated on August 28, 2018.

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

2018 August 20

---

## Table of Contents

---

Summary Information.....	3
Biography/History.....	3
Scope and Contents.....	4
Administrative Information.....	5
Controlled Access Headings.....	5
Collection Inventory.....	7

---

## Summary Information

---

<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Creator</b>	McDevitt, William
<b>Title</b>	William McDevitt papers
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1365
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1905-1947
<b>Extent</b>	0.2 linear foot (1 box)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	William McDevitt was an author, bookseller, and Socialist political agitator who operated bookstores on Sutter and Fillmore streets in San Francisco for more than forty years in the first half of the twentieth century. This collection includes correspondence from Upton Sinclair (1878-1968) and others concerning bookselling, promotional material for books and lectures, and copies of pamphlets written by McDevitt.

**Cite as:**

William McDevitt Papers, 1905-1947, Ms. Coll. 1365, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

---

## Biography/History

---

William McDevitt was an author, bookseller, and Socialist political agitator who operated bookstores on Sutter and Fillmore streets in San Francisco for more than forty years in the first half of the twentieth century. He was an active public orator on Socialist issues and a pamphleteer on both literary and political subjects. In addition to his literary and bookselling activities, McDevitt was politically active both as a member of the Socialist Party and as an election commissioner while James Rolph was Mayor of San Francisco. He and Upton Sinclair became correspondents based upon McDevitt carrying Sinclair's works in his bookstore and their shared interests in Socialist politics.

Upton Sinclair, author, muckraking journalist, and Socialist political figure, was born 1878 in Baltimore, Maryland. He entered the City College of New York in 1892, publishing in boys' weeklies and pulp magazines to pay his tuition. Upon graduation, he briefly enrolled at Columbia University, majoring in law but pursuing an eclectic field of study. He later lived in New Jersey, where he founded a short-lived Socialist commune called the Helicon Home Colony, and then California, where he lived for nearly four decades.

After leaving Columbia, he wrote four books which were commercially unsuccessful though critically well-received: *King Midas* (1901), *Prince Hagen* (1902), *The Journal of Arthur Stirling* (1903), and a Civil War novel titled *Manassas* (1904)—but it was his politically oriented works *The Jungle* (1906) and *King Coal* (1917), as well as a series of novels featuring the main character Lanny Budd, which gave him popular success. The third book in the Lanny Budd series, *Dragon's Teeth* (1942) won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1943.

In addition to his literary work, Sinclair had an active political career as an agitator and a candidate for public office. During his time in California he ran for a seat on the U.S. House of Representatives, the Senate, and for Governor of California, all on the Socialist ticket, and was active in radical politics in Los Angeles, speaking at demonstrations and rallies. In 1934, he won the nomination for Governor of California on the Democratic ticket, but faced strong resistance from mainstream interest groups, including the major Hollywood studios, and lost to the incumbent Governor, Frank Merriam. Because of his nomination, Sinclair was expelled from the Socialist party of California, along with many of his supporters, effectively destroying the party. Late in life, Sinclair moved to Buckeye, Arizona and then to Bound Brook, New Jersey, where he died in a nursing home on November 25, 1968.

---

## Scope and Contents

---

This collection includes correspondence, promotional material for books and lectures (many, though not all, of them by McDevitt himself), and copies of pamphlets written by McDevitt.

The bulk of the correspondence in this collection is from Upton Sinclair to William McDevitt, mostly concerning sales of Sinclair's books but touching briefly on the Socialist issues which concerned both men. The collection also includes general correspondence between McDevitt and other booksellers and readers.

There is one folder of material promoting books which McDevitt offered for sale at his bookshop, as well as public lectures and debates by McDevitt himself. Much of the dating is approximate.

Finally, the collection contains pamphlets written and published by McDevitt in the 1940s, on both literary and political subjects. It is arranged chronologically. Two of the pamphlets relate to Jack London.

---

## Administrative Information

---

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

2018 August 20

Finding aid prepared by Sam Allingham.

### 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

Sold by Oak Knoll Books, 2017.

---

## Controlled Access Headings

---

### FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence
- Writings (documents)

### PERSONAL NAME(S)

- London, Jack, 1876-1916
- Sinclair, Upton, 1878-1968 -- Correspondence

**SUBJECT(S)**

- Authors
- Authors, American--20th century
- Booksellers and bookselling
- Socialism--United States--History--20th century

## Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Letters from Upton Sinclair to McDevitt, 1910 July 21-1947 December 22.	1	1
Letters concerning book orders between McDevitt and others, 1905 July 5-1947 December 22.	1	2
Promotional materials for lectures and publications, circa 1928.	1	3
Writings: <i>When Coxey's "Army" March on Washington, 1894</i> , 1944.	1	4
Writings: <i>Jack London's First</i> , 1946.	1	4
Writings: <i>Jack London as Poet and as Platform Man: did Jack London commit suicide?</i> , 1947.	1	4

Writings: *Ambrose Bierce on Richard Realf*, 1948.

1

4