

# **Daniel Hoffman letters to Norman Kelvin**

**Ms. Coll. 1227**

**Finding aid prepared by Siduri Beckman.**

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

2016 July 26

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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>	Hoffman, Daniel, 1923-2013
<b>Title</b>	Daniel Hoffman letters to Norman Kelvin
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1227
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1950-2012
<b>Extent</b>	0.2 linear foot (1 box)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	This collection contains twenty-one letters from Professor Daniel Hoffman (1923-2013), former US Poet Laureate, to Professor Norman Kelvin (1924-2014), dating from 1950 to 2012. These letters document the friendship between Kelvin and Hoffman, their careers, and their personal lives.

**Cite as:**

Daniel Hoffman letters to Norman Kelvin, 1950-2012, Ms. Coll. 1227, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## Biography/History

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Daniel Hoffman (1923-2013) was an American poet and essayist. He received his B.A. (1947), M.A. (1949), and Ph.D. (1956) from Columbia University. He taught at Columbia as well as Swarthmore College prior to beginning his career at the University of Pennsylvania in 1966. From 1973 to 1974, he was named Poet Laureate of the United States. His poems vary greatly in structure, ranging from sonnets to an epic poem about the founding of Pennsylvania; but he is best known for his work, "Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe" (1972), which his *New York Times* obituary describes as "an unusual study melding biography, criticism and bits of his own autobiography in a highly personal analysis of the American writer whose literary reputation is wildly diffuse." Hoffman lived primarily in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania with his wife, poet and esteemed *Ladies' Home Journal* editor, Elizabeth McFarland. Hoffman and McFarland spent their summers in Cape Rosier, Maine, which Hoffman used as a setting for many of his poems.

Norman Kelvin (1924-2014) attended Columbia College on scholarship, but his academic career was interrupted in 1943 when he joined the United States Army during World War II in which he served in the Medical Corps as an X-ray technician at Schick General Hospital in Clinton, Iowa, and in the Philippines. After being discharged, he returned to Columbia; but his career plans had changed from medicine to literature. He earned his masters' degree in philosophy (M. Phil.) and his Ph.D. in English and comparative literature in 1950 and 1960, respectively and wrote his dissertation on English novelist and poet, George Meredith (1828-1929). He published his first book, *A Troubled Eden: Nature and Society in the Works of George Meredith* in 1961 with Stanford University Press. Kelvin then published *E.M. Forster* in 1967. In 1985, he published the first volume of *The Collected Letters of William Morris*. He began his teaching career as a graduate student, teaching at Rutgers and Columbia; and following his graduation, he began working at City College in 1961 and at the CUNY Graduate Center, where he remained until his retirement as Distinguished Professor in 2006. He was married to Phyllis Kelvin in 1956 and they were the parents of two daughters, Elizabeth and Jane.

**Resources:**

*Columbia College Today*. Obituary, Spring 2015

University of Pennsylvania Libraries. Daniel Hoffman letters to Judith Moffett, 1970-2012, Ms. Coll. 1026

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection contains twenty-one letters from Professor Daniel Hoffman (1923-2013), former US Poet Laureate, to Professor Norman Kelvin (1924-2014), dating from 1950 to 2012. These letters document the friendship between Kelvin and Hoffman that began during their educations at Columbia University and continued until just before Hoffman's death in 2013; and discuss their careers, poetry, and their personal lives.

The letters are all addressed to Norman Kelvin from Daniel Hoffman. Letters are familiar and newsy and generally address multiple topics. In the earliest letters, Hoffman mostly writes with guidance and advice as Kelvin began his career as a professor at the City College of New York. However, as time progressed, the two friends appear to have provided moral support for each other as they wrote, worked, and raised families. Hoffman writes about his own projects (especially his memoirs) and comments on Kelvin's projects (particularly his editing of the *Collected Letters of William Morris*). It is clear from the letters that they proof-read and reviewed each other's writings and greatly respected the comments they received. Researchers will find a few poems, in particular "Incubus" and "At 89" which Hoffman sent with his

letters or emails. Hoffman also wrote about American poets and poetry, books, and the writings of others, including the publication of "Howl," by Alan Ginsberg (particularly meaningful to Hoffman and Kelvin as Ginsberg was a classmate at Columbia). The letters occasionally mention current events, such as the Korean War, however, the letters largely focus on Hoffman and Kelvin's personal and professional lives. Family and health are discussed in the letters--Hoffman reporting on the birth of his daughter and her beginning her education at the University of Pennsylvania as well as congratulating Kelvin on the birth of his daughter. Hoffman mentions suffering from the flu and a heart attack and wishes Kelvin well after a minor surgery. He also reports on the death of his wife renowned editor of *Ladies Home Journal*, Elizabeth McFarland, who died in 2005 (her obituary is included with the letter). The collection also includes a book of poems *Over the Summer Water*, by Hoffman's wife, for which Hoffman wrote the preface and a clipping of Kelvin's published response to a review of his *Collected Letters of William Morris* in the *New York Review of Books* in 1985. It is possible that these two items were included in letters sent by Hoffman to Kelvin.

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## Administrative Information

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

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Finding aid prepared by Siduri Beckman.

### Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

### Use Restrictions

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### Source of Acquisition

Gift of Phyllis Kelvin, 2016

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## Related Materials

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## **Related Archival Materials note**

At the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts:  
Daniel Hoffman letters to Judith Moffett, 1970-2012, Ms. Coll. 1026

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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

- Correspondence

### **PERSONAL NAME(S)**

- Kelvin, Norman

### **SUBJECT(S)**

- Authors, American--20th century
- Education
- Education, Higher
- Families
- Literature--Study and teaching
- Poetry
- Poets
- Poets, American--20th century

## Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Letters, 1950-1960.	1	1
Letters, 1970-1981.	1	2
Letters, 2000-2012.	1	3
"Liking Mrs. Morris," printed response by Kelvin relating to a review of his <i>Collected Letters of William Morris</i> , published in the <i>New York Review of Books</i> , 1985 July 18.	1	4
<i>Over the Summer Waters</i> , book of poems by Elizabeth McFarland with preface by Daniel Hoffman, 2008.	1	4