

Boni & Liveright and Horace Liveright correspondence

Ms. Coll. 4

Finding aid prepared by Nicole Love.

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

2015 February 26

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Boni & Liveright.
Title	Boni & Liveright and Horace Liveright correspondence
Call number	Ms. Coll. 4
Date [inclusive]	1916-1934
Extent	5 linear feet (11 boxes)
Language	English
Abstract	Horace Liveright and Albert Boni owned the publishing company Boni & Liveright Inc., the first American publishing company to publish authors such as Faulkner, Freud, Cummings, and Hemingway. This collection consists of a series of letters between various parties and Horace Liveright. Most files contain correspondence written to and from Horace Liveright or his associates in the company (e.g. Donald Freide, Julian Messner, and Arthur Pell).

Cite as:

Boni & Liveright and Horace Liveright correspondence, 1918-1934, Ms. Coll. 4, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Horace Liveright and Albert Boni began the publishing company Boni & Liveright Inc., the first American publishing company to publish authors such as Faulkner, Freud, Cummings, and Hemingway. Horace Brisbin Liveright was born December 10, 1886 in Osceola Mills, Pennsylvania. With his parents, Henry and Henrietta Heisher, he moved to Philadelphia when he was in grammar school. Liveright left school at an early age: at fourteen he was working as an office boy with a Philadelphia stockbroker and eventually became a margin clerk. At seventeen, he composed the book and lyrics for a comic opera, but it never reached production. He then settled in New York where, after several years as a securities and bond salesman for Sutro Brothers, he became manager of the bond department of Day, Adams & Company. In 1911, he married Lucile Elsas, the daughter of a vice president of the International Paper Company, and, financed by his father-in-law, he left the bond business to organize his own company for the manufacture and sale of toilet paper.

After some limited adventures in publishing from 1913 through 1915, Albert Boni joined an advertising agency owned by Alfred Wallerstein. He stayed only six months but in that time met Liveright, who was using an office there as a temporary headquarters to explore devices that might be manufactured and marketed more successfully than toilet paper. Boni discussed with Liveright his publishing ventures and his idea for a series of reprints that would include only modern classics by European writers. Intrigued, Liveright offered himself as a partner and proposed to finance a publishing operation. In the spring of 1917, Boni & Liveright announced the first volumes of the Modern Library.

In 1917, Liveright acquired the rights to reissue Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. Thus began a sometimes strained but ultimately successful thirteen-year partnership between Dreiser and Liveright. Meanwhile, Thomas Seltzer, Boni's uncle, bought a one-third interest in the firm. Liveright served as president, Boni as treasurer, and Seltzer as vice-president and editor of the Modern Library; but the firm was constantly plagued by editorial disputes and financial disagreements. Liveright and Boni reached an impasse - neither being willing to sell out to the other - and decided to toss a coin. Liveright won the toss and in July 1918 he became the majority owner. About four months after Boni's departure, Seltzer left the company, too. Liveright then sold one vice presidency to Julian Messner, who was then the firm's sales manager, and another to Leon Fleischman, who took on the added responsibilities of secretary and treasurer.

In 1919, Liveright hired Edward Bernays, a young public relations counsel and the brother-in-law of Leon Fleischman. Together Liveright and Bernays created a show-business approach to book publishing and promotion: a series of circulars were sent to major bookstores each week; newspaper editors were offered free books and articles on the firm's books and authors; and Bernays wrote 1000-1500 word feature articles about authors the company was specially promoting. In 1921, T.R. Smith was hired as editor-in-chief and Arthur Pell was hired as a bookkeeper, although he gradually took charge of all accounting and company records.

After the departure of Leon Fleischman in 1920, Liveright sold a vice presidency to Bennett Cerf. In 1925, Cerf convinced Liveright to sell him the Modern Library. Liveright then sold a half interest in the firm (and vice presidency) to Donald Friede in 1925. In July 1924, Liveright had become partners with Frank Mandel and Laurence Schwab in a theatrical producing firm. Coupled with losses in the stock market, this venture proved financially disastrous for Liveright. During this period he and his wife Lucile separated. While Mrs. Liveright did not sue for divorce until March 22, 1928, a separation agreement

between the two had been in effect for a much longer period of time.

Liveright bought out Donald Friede in 1928 and in the same year changed the name of the business from Boni & Liveright to Horace Liveright, Inc., but the business declined and Liveright was ousted as president and fled to Hollywood in the late summer of 1930. In Hollywood he hoped to sell to the film studios the movie rights to books in which he still had an interest. On July 18, 1930, he announced to the press that he was becoming an associate of the production department of Paramount Publix Corporation. Of the twenty-one hundred and fifty shares of stock in Horace Liveright, Inc., Liveright's holdings had dwindled to a mere fifty. Following Liveright's departure for the Coast, Arthur Pell became a partner in the company and soon head of business, since he owned the most stock.

In 1931, Liveright's contract with Paramount was not renewed, and he returned to New York jobless, broken in spirit, but nevertheless announcing grand new schemes, mostly involving Broadway plays. The removal of Liveright from his firm had little effect on the fortunes of the house. In 1933, it became Liveright, Inc., but it was never able to regain its former standing. Later that year on May 4, 1933, an involuntary petition in bankruptcy was filed against the company. In an effort to satisfy the firm's debts and prevent receivership, the owners at first agreed to turn over their holdings for assignment to creditors, but apparently as a consequence of Pell's decision the next month not to give up his stock to the creditors' committee, the final adjudication in bankruptcy was ordered on the house on June 12. The following July 25, the entire assets of Liveright, Inc, were sold to Victor Gold for \$18,000. Pell later took over the firm and called it the Liveright Publishing Corporation.

On December 8, 1931, Liveright married Elise Bartlett Porter, an actress who had appeared in several Broadway plays and movies and who had formerly been the wife of actor Joseph Schildkraut. The marriage was a brief, unhappy one that ended early in 1932. On September 24, 1933 at 7 A.M., Liveright died of pneumonia at his home in a hotel-apartment in Manhattan.

NOTE: This brief biography/history was drawn from Walker Gilmer's book, *Horace Liveright: Publisher of the Twenties*, published by David Lewis, New York, 1970. This book provides a thorough outline of the authors and their works which Liveright published.

Scope and Contents

This collection comprises a series of letters between various parties and Horace Liveright. Most files contain correspondence written to and from Horace Liveright or his associates in the company (e.g. Donald Freide, Julian Messner, and Arthur Pell). Notable correspondents include Theodore Dreiser, E.E. Cummings, the American Play Company, William Faulkner, Upton Sinclair, The Modern Library for Children, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. Some files, however, may contain no correspondence whatsoever either to or from the individual for whom the folder is titled: the contents may contain only an internal memorandum, or a copy of a contract, or a letter simply about the individual.

The material in this collection is arranged alphabetically by correspondent. For files containing correspondences of related persons, their names have been entered in together as a unit.

Administrative Information

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

2015 February 26

Finding aid prepared by Nicole Love.

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Custodial History note

Gift of Herman Liveright and Lucy Liveright Koch, 1962

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

At the University of Pennsylvania: Horace Liveright papers, 1902-1932 (bulk 1924-1931), Ms. Coll. 896

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Curtis Brown, Ltd. -- Correspondence
- Ernest Brown & Philips. -- Correspondence
- Library of Congress. Copyright Office. -- Correspondence
- Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. -- Correspondence
- Paget Literary Agency. -- Correspondence

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Dreiser, Theodore, 1871-1945 -- Correspondence
- Frank, Waldo David, 1889-1967 -- Correspondence
- Hackett, Frances, 1883-1962 -- Correspondence
- Hays, Arthur Garfield, 1881-1954 -- Correspondence
- Jastrow, Joseph, 1863-1944 -- Correspondence
- Kallen, Horace Meyer, 1882-1974 -- Correspondence
- Le Galliene, Richard, 1866-1947 -- Correspondence
- Wassermann, Jakob, 1873-1934 -- Correspondence
- Woodward, William E., 1874-1950 -- Correspondence

SUBJECT(S)

- Authors and publishers
- Book industries and trade
- Book industries and trade--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia
- Business
- Publishers and publishing
- Publishers and publishing--United States--History--20th century

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