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Guide to the H. L. Mencken Collection 1925-1933



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.MENCKENHL
Title	Mencken, H. L. Collection
Date	1925-1933
Size	0.25 linear feet (1 box)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	Henry Louis “H.L.” Mencken (1880 –1956) journalist, satirist, and scholar of American English. The collection contains eight letters written by Mencken from 1925 to 1933.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Mencken, H.L. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Biographical Note

H.L. Mencken was born on September 12, 1880 in Baltimore, Maryland, to August Mencken, Sr., a cigar factory owner, and Anna Margaret Abhau, both of whom were of German ancestry. Mencken describes his youth as “placid, secure, uneventful, and happy.” A great interest in literature and writing was fostered in Mencken from a young age which started with Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* and led him through the classics of the 18th century and beyond. Mencken began his education at Professor Knapp’s School. By the age of fifteen, he had graduated from the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, a public high school in Baltimore.

After this initial education, Mencken went to work at his father’s cigar factory for three years. Because of his dislike for the work, Mencken continued to pursue his other interests. In 1898, he took to writing class at the Cosmopolitan University. This was the extent of Mencken’s formal education beyond high school. Shortly after the death of his father late in 1898, Mencken applied to the *Morning Herald* newspaper and quickly became a full-time reporter in a manner of months. Mencken continued at the *Herald* for six years. After some corporate changes, Mencken ended up at *The Baltimore Sun* where he made a name for himself writing editorials

and opinion pieces. He continued there, and in its variations (The Evening Sun and The Sunday Sun until 1948 when a stroke left him unable to write.

Mencken married in 1930 to Sara Haardt, an English professor at Goucher College, despite his recorded opposition to the institution of marriage and to the cause suffragists. They remained together until her death in 1935 of meningitis. After his stroke, unable to read, write, or nearly even speak, Mencken lived quietly. He died in his sleep on January 29, 1956.

Scope Note

The collection contains eight autographed letters sent by Mencken to various recipients in the 1920s and 1930s. All items are arranged alphabetically by the name of the recipient. The first is addressed to Mr. Bickford, a professor of Latin at Phillips Exeter Academy, The second was sent to Mr. Carnovsky, a respected librarian and is on stationery of The American Mercury, a magazine founded by Mencken. The remaining six letters are addressed to “Mr. Hilken,” potentially the father of the infamous Paul Hilken, a German-American in Baltimore who operated as a German spy during World War I. These letters are mostly typed, though one letter in the collection is handwritten. The letters, where dated, are between 1930 and 1933, though the address in the heading of some undated letters (704 Cathedral St.) indicates that these letters were also written between 1930, when Mencken and his wife moved into the apartment there, and 1936, then Mencken left to return to his childhood home after his wife’s death. Of particular interest are Mencken’s comments on the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, and particularly of Hitler, who Mencken calls “an incurable damn fool.”

The collection was previously part of the Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection.

Subject Headings

- Mencken, H. L. (Henry Louis), 1880-1956
- Bickford, John D.
- Carnovsky, Leon, 1903-1975
-

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

Correspondence, 1925-1933

- Mr. Bickford from H.L. Mencken, August 28, 1931
- Mr. Carnovsky from H.L. Mencken, January 26, 1925
- Mr. Hilken from H. L. Mencken, August 4, 1930
- Mr. Hilken from H. L. Mencken, January 27, 1933
- Mr. Hilken from H. L. Mencken, December 22, 1933

- Mr. Hilken from H. L. Mencken, May 27, year unknown
- Mr. Hilken from H. L. Mencken, February 7, year unknown
- Mr. Hilken from H. L. Mencken, June 6, year unknown