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Descriptive Summary

Identifier    ICU.SPCL.WILTN
Title          Wilt, Napier. Papers
Date           1899-1975
Size           9.25 linear feet (19 boxes)
Repository     Special Collections Research Center
               University of Chicago Library
               1100 East 57th Street
               Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract   Napier Wilt (1896-1975), theatre scholar, was an alumnus and faculty member of the University of Chicago’s Department of English. He was heavily involved in research into American literature and especially the history of theatrical performances in Chicago theaters during the late nineteenth century. He also served as the Dean of the Division of the Humanities at the University of Chicago. This collection consists of 9.25 linear feet of material from 1899-1975, documenting Wilt’s research, course materials, correspondence, and personal life. Dr. Wilt’s research notes and drafts of indexes make up the majority of this collection, including his type-written and hand-written notes from his personal research and newspaper consultation. The rest of the collection is primarily comprised of his course materials and copies of student papers.

Information on Use

Access
Series VI contains student grades and evaluations of student papers. This material is restricted for 80 years.

The rest of the collection is open for research, with no restrictions.

Citation
When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Wilt, Napier. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note
Born to John and Susie (Napier) Wilt on December 20, 1895 in Hillsboro, Indiana, Napier Wilt attended Indiana University, where he earned an A.B. in 1917. He then came to the University of Chicago, where he earned an M.A. in 1921 and completed a Ph.D. in 1923. His area of
interest was American literature, with a focus on American drama and humor. His dissertation for the University was a day-by-day history of the Chicago Theatre, entitled, "The History of the two Rice Theaters in Chicago from 1847 to 1857." After serving in World War II, he became a professor of English at University of Chicago. From 1951 until his retirement in 1962 he was Dean of the Humanities. During the 1950’s he helped fund a visiting writers program to bring in American's great writers to Chicago to inspire students in writing programs and offer critiques of student works. He wrote extensively on the history of Chicago theaters, compiling a massive index on the history of Chicago theatrical productions during the nineteenth century, as well as editing several books, including "Some American Humorists." Wilt was also involved in a controversial university takeover of the Chicago Review, and installed a faculty board to watch over the journal’s financial operations.

Scope Note
This collection documents Napier Wilt’s research into the history of Chicago theatrical productions, his teaching work, his associations with colleagues, and his personal life. It spans the years 1899-1975 and is arranged into six series.

Series I: Chicago Theater History, contains Wilt’s work on the history of Chicago theatrical productions during the nineteenth century. This includes a large amount of Wilt’s handwritten and typewritten notes on newspaper articles, books, and reviews. There are several drafts of different indexes that Wilt compiled, including a play index, theater index, star index, and author index. These indexes relate to a larger aggregation of performance data, known as the Chicago Drama Performances Index. This series has been arranged alphabetically and then chronologically.

Series II: Course Materials, contains Wilt’s course materials, including calendars, notebooks, class notes, and copies of student papers. The notebooks relate mainly to Wilt’s English classes in American literature in the early twentieth century. There are also extensive copies of student papers for his various classes in the Humanities. This series has been arranged alphabetically and then chronologically.

Series III: Publications, contains publications by Wilt and others. This includes articles, published versions of Wilt’s convocation addresses, and draft chapters of China’s Black Chamber by Herbert O. Yardley and Carl Grabo, and an article on Herman Melville. This series has been arranged alphabetically.

Series IV: Correspondence, contains incoming and outgoing material. The bulk of this series is made up of Wilt’s correspondence with Kenneth Faulkner, a close friend, during World War I. Also included is correspondence with Ambrose Bierce. his series has been arranged alphabetically and then chronologically.
Series V: Biographical and Personal, contains some personal materials related to Wilt's final will and death. This includes correspondence with a lawyer over Wilt's final will, as well as condolence letters to William McCollum after the death of Napier Wilt in 1975. This series has been arranged alphabetically and then chronologically.

Series VI: Restricted, contains graded student papers for Dr. Wilt's courses. This series has been arranged alphabetically.

**Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html

Chicago Drama Performances. Index

**Subject Headings**

- Wilt, Napier, b. 1896
- Drama -- History and criticism
- Theater -- Illinois -- Chicago

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