

Guide to the E. P. Conkle papers, 1928-1994

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1928-1994

A Collection in Special Collections and Archives C0157

George Mason University Libraries

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History

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Guide to the E. P. Conkle papers, 1928-1994

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Author: Eron Ackerman

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Descriptive Summary

Collection number

C0157

Date

1928-1994

Language

English

Abstract

Included in the E. P. Conkle papers are plays, poetry, short stories, and book manuscripts written by E. P. Conkle, mostly during Conkle's professorship at the University of Texas at Austin (1939-1973).

Creator

E. P. (Ellsworth Prouty) Conkle

Physical Characteristics

3.5 linear ft.; 7 boxes

Repository

George Mason University. Special Collections and Archives.

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no access restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions on personal use. Permission to publish material from the E. P. Conkle papers must be obtained from the Special Collections Research Center, George Mason University Libraries.

Acquisition Information

Donated by Virginia McNeal Conkle in 1994.

Processing Information

Processed by Special Collections and Archives staff. EAD markup completed by Eron Ackerman and Jordan Patty in April 2009.

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Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Special Collections and Archives also holds the [Jay Bradford Fowler, Jr. papers](#) as well as collections on the Federal Theatre Project.

Biographical Information

Ellsworth Prouty Conkle (1899-1994) was a prolific playwright and professor of playwriting. Born on July 10, 1899, Conkle grew up on a farm in the small town of Peru, Nebraska. His rural upbringing had an enduring influence on his writing as exemplified in his first published book, *Crick Bottom Plays* (1928), a collection of short plays which dramatize the wit and wisdom of folksy Nebraskans. After high school Conkle went to Peru State Teachers College and completed his undergraduate education in 1923 at the University of Nebraska. Conkle did graduate work at Yale University in 1926-1928 and earned his Ph.D in playwriting from the University of Iowa in 1936. From 1936-1939 Conkle worked as an assistant professor of speech at the University of Iowa. In 1939 he joined the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin as an associate professor where he became a full professor in 1945 and taught until his retirement in 1973. Conkle's former students include Tennessee Williams, Pat Hingle, Tommy Tune, and Fess Parker.

In addition to teaching classes and developing the Department of Drama at the University of Texas, Conkle wrote numerous published and unpublished plays, several short stories, and dozens of poems. Much of his work captures the humor and wisdom of a bygone era in American folk-life, including the short play "Sparkin'" (1928) and the long plays "Johnny Appleseed" (1940) and "No Time for Heaven" (1972). Abraham Lincoln became another favorite subject of Conkle's, and the play "Prologue to Glory" (1938), a fictionalized account of Lincoln's formative years in New Salem, was chosen for production by the Federal Theatre Project and performed across the United States in 1938-1939. Capitalizing on its success, Conkle wrote a radio script based on the play, entitled *Honest Abe*, which was produced by CBS and aired in thirty-six parts between 1940 and 1941. Conkle died in 1994.

Scope and Content

Included in the E. P. Conkle papers are plays, poetry, short stories, and book manuscripts written by E. P. Conkle, mostly during Conkle's professorship at the University of Texas at Austin (1939-1973). Most of the manuscripts in the collection are undated. Thus, specific dates on subsequently published materials typically refer to the date of publication, and date ranges on unpublished materials refer to letterheads indicating Conkle's employ at the University of Texas or the University of Iowa. The collection also contains playbills and director's notes from various productions of *Prologue to Glory*, the radio script to the CBS-produced series, *Honest Abe* (1940-1941), works and notes from former students, and correspondence between Conkle and his wife, Virginia McNeal Conkle.

Series 1: Correspondence and Biographical Material contains letters written to E. P. Conkle and various articles pertaining to Conkle's career as a playwright.

Series 2: Book Manuscripts contains typed and annotated manuscripts of E. P. Conkle's books *Grandpa's Little White Rent House*, *A Hornbook for Playwrights*, and *Wake Up, Tom Aycup*, or, *the Tale of a Great Guy*.

Series 3: Play Scripts contains typed and annotated play scripts written by Conkle, including "At the Depot," "Day's End," "Good Night, Dear Grandma," "With How Little Wisdom," and a three-volume weekly radio script entitled "Honest Abe." Also included is a play script by Patty Gideon Sloan entitled "Mementos."

Series 4: Poetry contains typed and annotated poems written by Conkle, including the collections Eleven Various Ballads, A Gift of Small Inconsequential Verses, and Thirteen Sonnets Which Speak of Time, and One More.

Series 5: Short Stories contains typed and annotated copies of Conkle's stories "Little Angel of the Backward Look," "Traveller, and General Lee," and "Miss Lute."

Series 6: Miscellaneous contains various items including essays and term papers Conkle wrote as a student.

Index Terms

Persons:

Conkle, E. P. (Ellsworth Prouty)

Subjects:

American drama--20th century.

American poetry--20th century.

Short stories, American--20th century.

Arrangement

This collection is organized into six series by document type and genre with manuscripts arranged alphabetically by title and correspondence arranged chronologically.

- Series 1: Correspondence and Biographical Material, 1938-1939, 1977-1994 (Box 1)
- Series 2: Book Manuscripts, undated (Box 1)
- Series 3: Play Scripts, 1928-1973, bulk 1939-1973 (Boxes 2-6)
- Series 4: Poetry, 1939-1973 (Box 6)
- Series 5: Short Stories, 1939-1973 (Box 7)
- Series 6: Miscellaneous, 1931-1992 (Box 7)

Contents List

Series 1: Correspondence and Biographical Material,

Unit Date 1938-1939, 1977-1994

Scope and Content

This series contains letters written to E. P. Conkle and various articles pertaining to Conkle's career as a playwright.

Personal,

Unit Date circa 1977-1994

Container 1 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Letter from Patty Gideon Sloan to E. P. Conkle,

Unit ID 1.

Unit Date undated

Letter from Mrs. Virginia Conkle to Lorraine Brown,

Unit ID 2.

Unit Date September 18, 1994

Brief annotated biography of E. P. Conkle,

Unit ID 3.
Unit Date undated
Scope and Content
facsimile

Annotated biographical entry from "Contemporary Authors,"
Unit ID 4.
Unit Date 1982
Scope and Content
facsimile

Biographical write-up of Conkle for "Notable Names in American Theatre,"
Unit ID 5.
Unit Date 1977
Scope and Content
facsimile

George Mason University Federal Theatre Tribute Luncheon Guest List
Unit ID 6.
Scope and Content
facsimile

Prologue to Glory Playbills and Press,
Unit Date 1938-1939
Container 1 (Box)
Container 2 (Folder)

Playbill for "Prologue to Glory," Portland Production,
Unit ID 1.
Unit Date January 1939
Scope and Content
facsimile

Audience reaction sheet for "Prologue to Glory," Portland Production,
Unit ID 2.
Unit Date 1939
Scope and Content
facsimile

News article from the New Orleans States entitled "Lincoln drama well received,"
Unit ID 3.
Unit Date January 24, 1939
Scope and Content
facsimile

Playbill for "Prologue to Glory," Cincinnati Production,
Unit ID 4.
Unit Date undated
Scope and Content
facsimile

Playbill for "Prologue to Glory," Chicago-Based Road Company,

Unit ID 5.

Unit Date January 1939

Scope and Content

facsimile

Memorandum from the Federal Theatre's Publicity Department entitled "Prologue Tour Praised"

Unit ID 6.

Unit Date 1939

Scope and Content

facsimile; address of the Works Progress Administration in heading

Playbill for "Prologue to Glory," San Francisco Production,

Unit ID 7.

Unit Date May 1938

Scope and Content

facsimile

Director's Report for "Prologue to Glory,"

Unit ID 8.

Unit Date June 1938

Scope and Content

facsimile; note in margin indicates "Los Angeles Production,"

Series 2: Book Manuscripts,

Unit Date undated

Scope and Content

This series contains typed and annotated manuscripts of books written by E. P. Conkle.

Grandpa's Little White Rent House,

Unit Date undated

Container 1 (Box)

Container 3 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Austin, Texas; typed manuscript, 292 pages, includes cover with title

Grandpa's Little White Rent House copy,

Unit Date undated

Container 1 (Box)

Container 4 (Folder)

Scope and Content

typed manuscript, 292 pages, no cover

A Hornbook for Playwrights,

Unit Date before 1974

Container 1 (Box)

Container 5 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; typed manuscript with annotations, 135 pages

Wake Up, Tom Aycup, or, the Tale of a Great Guy,

Unit Date undated

Container 1 (Box)

Container 6 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Austin, Texas; typed manuscript with revisions, 266 pages

Series 3: Play Scripts,

Unit Date 1928-1973

Scope and Content

This is the largest series of the collection, and it contains typed and annotated play scripts written by E. P. Conkle and includes one play script written by Patty Gideon Sloan entitled "Mementos."

"At the Depot" and Four Other Short Plays; "A Long Journey" (tentative title),

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 2 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; includes the plays "Dusk, Dusk, Dusk," "Two Minds with but Two Single Thoughts," "Mr. Map and the Beautiful Hat," "Oak Leaves Burning," and an annotated play script tentatively titled "A Long Journey."

"Day's End" and "Oak Leaves Burning,"

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 2 (Box)

Container 2 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; includes an 18 page annotated manuscript of "Day's End: A Few Words Spoken by Mr. Lincoln, the President," an 11 page typed play script of "Day's End" with no revisions, and an 18 page annotated manuscript for "Oak Leaves Burning."

Five Short Plays for Twenty-Four Elderly Women and a Young Girl,

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 2 (Box)

Container 3 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; includes typed play scripts for "The Fancy One," "Four Old Ladies and Pansy Potter," "Oak Leaves Burning," "Gatie, or Eight Women on a Toot," and "The Jewel in Papa's Crown," 62 pages.

"Good Night, Dear Grandma,"

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 2 (Box)

Container 4 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; includes two 133 page typed play scripts for "Good Night, Dear Grandma," one of which contains manuscript revisions marked "final."

Honest Abe, vol. 1,

Unit Date broadcast aired on September 14 - December 20, 1940

Container 2 (Box)

Container 5 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS); a radio script divided into 12 parts for weekly broadcasting, volume 1 of 3

Honest Abe, vol. 2,

Unit Date broadcast aired on December 28, 1940 - March 22, 1941

Container 3 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS); a radio script divided into 12 parts for weekly broadcasting, volume 2 of 3

Honest Abe, vol. 3,

Unit Date broadcast aired on March 29 - June 18, 1941

Container 3 (Box)

Container 2 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS); a radio script divided into 12 parts for weekly broadcasting, volume 3 of 3

"Incident on Collander Hill,"

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 4 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; two copies of the play script, 121 pages each

Johnny Appleseed,

Unit Date circa 1940

Container 4 (Box)

Container 2 (Folder)

"Mementos" by Patty Gideon Sloan,

Unit Date undated

Container 4 (Box)

Container 3 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Texas; typed script of play in three acts by Patty Gideon Sloan; see Box 1, Folder 1 for correspondence with Sloan

"Mr. Lincoln, the President,"

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 4 (Box)

Container 4 (Folder)

Scope and Content

two annotated scripts with revisions, one titled simply "Mr. President," approximately 120 pages each

"A Murder of Convenience," "Muletail Prime," and "Sparkin',"

Unit Date circa 1928-1949

Container 4 (Box)

Container 5 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Austin, Texas

"A Murder of Convenience,"

Unit ID 1.

Unit Date undated

Scope and Content

Austin, Texas; facsimile of typescript

"Muletail Prime,"

Unit ID 2.

Unit Date circa 1949

Scope and Content

cast: Clyte Cedars and Arlie Askew; place: Clyte's place

"Sparkin',"

Unit ID 3.

Unit Date circa 1928

"No Time for Heaven,"

Unit Date circa 1972

Container 4 (Box)

Container 6 (Folder)

Scope and Content

123 pages

"Oxygenator,"

Unit Date 1936-1939

Container 5 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Iowa, Experimental Theatre Seminar; soft-bound copy, 91 pages

Papa Got Us into It, or, There's a New Woman in Town: A Play in Three Acts

Unit Date undated

Container 5 (Box)

Container 2 (Folder)

Scope and Content

two typed manuscripts

"Sam Smith's Oral History of His Times,"

Unit Date 1969

Container 5 (Box)

Container 3 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; two copies of the play script, one 65 pages and another with revisions at 69 pages

"Stormy Weather,"

Unit Date undated

Container 5 (Box)

Container 4 (Folder)

Scope and Content

84 pages

"Waiting for Henry Plummer,"

Unit Date 1971

Container 5 (Box)

Container 5 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; two typed copies, one marked "Final / 1971"

"Way Down in the Paw-Paw Patch: A Grand Guignol,"

Unit Date undated

Container 6 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Scope and Content

two copies, one 66 pages and the other 67 pages; the former bears a stamp of the author's agent, Frieda Fishbein

"With How Little Wisdom: A Play about War,"

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 6 (Box)

Container 2 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; two copies, 113 pages each

Series 4: Poetry,

Unit Date circa 1939-1973

Scope and Content

This collection contains typed and annotated poems written by E. P. Conkle.

"196 Disjointed Thoughts from a Demented Mind,"

Unit Date undated

Container 6 (Box)

Container 3 (Folder)

Scope and Content

several copies, including one 8 page typed copy with corrections

Eleven Various Ballads,

Unit Date undated

Container 6 (Box)

Container 4 (Folder)

Scope and Content

Austin, Texas; typed poems with revisions, including "Ballad of the Gay Cavalier," "The Ballad of Henry Plummer," "Ballad to a Wooden Leg," "The Ballad of the Youngster and His Dog," "Ballad of a Hallelujah Marriage," "Ballad of the Merry Miller-Man," "Ballad of the Prairies," "Ballad of Aunt Susan," "Ballad of Mad Beggars," "Ballad of the Happy Milkmaid," and "Ballad of the Cosset Lamb and the Crumpled Cow"

A Gift of Small Inconsequential Verses,

Unit Date undated

Container 6 (Box)

Container 5 (Folder)

Scope and Content

two typed 45 page manuscripts of poems including "Birds and Other Animals," "Weather and Scenery," "More and Less Personal," "Just People," and "Philosophy and Other Things"

Poems about My Farm; A Saga of St. Paul; A Gift of Small Verses,

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 6 (Box)

Container 6 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; these poetry collections are respectively 22 pages, 27 pages, and 41 pages long; folder includes a title page of "Verses for a Year"

Thirteen Sonnets Which Speak of Time, and One More,

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 6 (Box)

Container 7 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; typed manuscripts with revisions

Verses about My Grandpa; Inconsequential Quatrains for a Year,

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 6 (Box)

Container 8 (Folder)

Scope and Content

small format type scripts

Series 5: Short Stories,

Unit Date circa 1939-1973

Scope and Content

This collection contains typed and annotated short stories written by E. P. Conkle.

"Little Angel of the Backward Look,"

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 7 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; two copies of the manuscript, 14 pages each, the second alternately titled, "The Littlest Angel of the Backward Look, a Fantasy"

"Traveller, and General Lee"; "Miss Lute,"

Unit Date 1939-1973

Container 7 (Box)

Container 2 (Folder)

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; two copies of "Traveller, and General Lee," both 22 pages and one with annotations; one 43 page copy of "Miss Lute"

Series 6: Miscellaneous,

Unit Date 1931-1992

Scope and Content

This collection contains various items including essays and term papers Conkle wrote as a student.

Miscellaneous,

Unit Date 1931-1992

Container 7 (Box)

Container 3 (Folder)

"The Element of Comedy in the Towneley Cycle,"

Unit ID 1.

Unit Date December 28, 1931 - January 5, 1932

Scope and Content

35 pages including bibliography; described on title page as "a term-paper written for the class in "Chaucer" for Mr. Frantz"; annotated

The Department of Drama - The University of Texas, Austin - M.F.A. Theses and PhD. Dissertations,

Unit ID 2.

Unit Date circa 1979

Scope and Content

list of University of Texas graduate students and the titles of their theses and dissertations arranged by date

"Let Him Copy!",

Unit ID 3.

Unit Date undated

Scope and Content

University of Texas, Austin; revised three-page essay on education written by Conkle

News article from Sunday World Herald,"

Unit ID 4.

Unit Date October 4, 1992

Lists of play titles and a four-line untitled verse,

Unit ID 5.

Unit Date undated

Scope and Content

two pages listing titles of plays by Conkle and four lines of verse, untitled