

Jonah, A. David and Clifton Waller Barrett correspondence about a tribute to John Winterich

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1957

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Descriptive Summary

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English

Creator

Barrett, Clifton Waller, 1901-1991

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Repository

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

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MSS 6526, David A. Jonah and Clifton Waller Barrett correspondence about a tribute to John Winterich, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library.

Biographical / Historical

Clifton Waller Barrett (June 1, 1901 - November 6, 1991) was a shipping executive who donated one of the nation's premier collections of rare American books and manuscripts to the University of Virginia Library. He gave his alma mater 35,000 books and 112,000 manuscripts, including the handwritten originals of "The Red Badge of Courage" and "Leaves of Grass" and manuscripts of "Grapes of Wrath" and "The Glass Menagerie." He was a member of the Horace Walpole Society, elected in 1958, honorary member in 1990.

Barrett was a native of Alexandria, Virginia, the son of Robert South Barrett (1877-1959) and Viola A. Tupper (1877-1960). He graduated at Alexandria High School. Until 1906 he resided mainly in Mexico City, where his father had business interests. He then moved to Alexandria, Virginia to live with his grandmother Katherine Waller Barrett, while his father pursued a global business career.

Valedictorian of his senior class at Alexandria high school, Clifton attended the University of Virginia (1917-1920), where he worked on the staff of the University of Virginia Magazine, and declared a major in English literature. He interrupted his studies to serve during World War I with the Student Army Training Corps in Plattsburgh, N.Y. In 1920 he dropped out of school "for what may have been financial reasons involving a dispute with his father." Although he never graduated from college, he became a noted author and lecturer, eventually receiving honorary doctorates from Clarke University (Litt.D., 1966), Brown University (L.H.D., 1966), and the College of William and Mary, as well as honorary Phi Beta Kappa (1952).

Within a month of leaving the University of Virginia, he made his way to New York City and landed a job as a clerk in the New York headquarters of the Munson Steam Ship line. He rapidly absorbed the essentials of the shipping business in his new post as assistant to the vice-president. He did not hurt his career when he married (April 24, 1924) Cornelia Corinne Hughes (born in Birmingham, Ala., Sept. 27, 1902; died in Charlottesville, Va., Oct. 14, 1989). Her father was a prominent executive in the Steam Ship Line.

In 1932, during the Depression, he boldly quit his job at Munson in order to become co-founder and vice-president of his own shipping firm, the North Atlantic & Gulf Steam Ship Company, in New York City. During World War II, he served in the War Shipping Administration as director of sugar transportation. He meanwhile pursued numerous other successful business enterprises, serving as president and chairman of the Norgulf Corp. and on the board of directors of Eastern Broadcasting Corporation and Holt, Rinehart & Winston. Simultaneously, he used his skill in the stock market to develop a huge portfolio.

Devoted to the cause of learning, he was president of the Board of Education of Garden City, N.Y. (1945-1946), a member of the New York City Art Commission, and chairman of the Fellows of the Pierpont Morgan library. He also served as a trustee of the University of Virginia's McGregor Library, board member of the University of Virginia Board of Visitors, the New York Public Library, Sweet Briar College, Clark University, and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. He was also chairman of the board of regents of the James Monroe Memorial Library, and president of both the American Antiquarian Society and the Bibliographical Society of America (1962-1964). A prolific author, his books include *Bibliographical Adventures in America* (1950), *Henry Adams* (1951), and *American Fiction: The First Seventy-Five Years* (1954).

From his youth he was an avid bibliophile, and during the 1930s he spent his lunch hour roaming the bookstores near Wall Street in search of Depression-era bargains. Meanwhile, he used his long commutes from Manhattan to his home on Long Island to continue his study of American literary history. Over the course of many years, he gathered a famous collection of more than 40,000 manuscripts and 30,000 books, including many first editions and the handwritten originals of Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. When he donated his entire collection to the U. of Va. in 1960, it was

appraised then at \$25 million, the largest donation ever received by the university during the donor's lifetime. The dedication ceremony was attended by Barrett's aging friend Robert Frost and ca. 400 other distinguished guests. A new wing was built to accommodate it in the university's Alderman Library, where it now comprises the famed Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature. A chair in Comparative Literature at the University of Virginia is named in his honor. The Barretts resided in New York City and later near Charlottesville in Albemarle County, Virginia, where he died Nov. 6, 1991.

Source: Rolle, Elisa. "My Reviews and Ramblings" *Queer Places: Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature*, 170 McCormick Rd, Charlottesville, VA 22904 Aquia Episcopal Church Cemetery Aquia, Stafford County, Virginia, USA <http://www.elisarolle.com/queerplaces/ch-d-e/Clifton%20Waller%20Barrett.html>

<https://small.library.virginia.edu/collections/featured/the-clifton-waller-barrett-library-of-american-literature/>

Content Description

Correspondence between David A. Jonah and C. Waller Barrett about Barrett writing an article honoring John Winterich and including a typescript of the Winterich bibliography.

Related Materials

There are many Clifton Waller Barrett Collections MSS 6526 in our holdings. Please see the public VIRGO records in our catalog.

Keywords

American literature