

Dorothy Gordon:

An Inventory of Her Correspondence at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Gordon, Dorothy, 1895- , collector
Title	Dorothy Gordon's collected letters and works
Dates:	1931-1950
Extent:	1 box (.42 linear feet)
Abstract:	This collection consists of primarily business and personal correspondence between book collector Dorothy Gordon and publisher and bookdealer Mitchell Kennerley.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-01663
Language:	English.
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchase, 1963-1964 (R1591, R2061), and gift, 1966 (G1591).
Processed by	Megan Ishler; Sarah R. Demb; Jennifer Peters, 1996
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketches

Dorothy Gordon

Dorothy Webster Gordon was born of American parents in Berlin in 1895. She studied in the United States and married John Gordon, a professor, with whom she spent two years in France and fourteen in England, eventually moving to New Haven, Connecticut. An avid book collector, poet (under her maiden name, Dorothy Webster), and children's author, she was unable to locate books that interested her in the New Haven bookshops and began corresponding with Manhattan book dealer Mitchell Kennerley.

Mitchell Kennerley

Mitchell Kennerley was born in 1878 in Burslem, England. He arrived in the United States in 1896 and quickly worked his way into publishing, becoming at age twenty-three the publisher of the successful journal *The Reader*. In 1906 launched his own imprint under which he published literary criticism, modern drama, fiction, and poetry. He was called by Christopher Morley "unquestionably the first Modern publisher in this country." His publishing house can be viewed as a prologue to the movement toward personal publishing that flourished in the United States in the 1920s; he produced elegant books in small print runs, emphasizing unusual and innovative authors of poetry, fiction, and criticism. *American Bookman* said of Kennerley, "his imprint is in itself guarantee of a book's worth."

Kennerley's publishing career was substantially complete before 1920; he took over operation of the Anderson Galleries in 1916 and thereafter committed himself to auctions and rare books. He opened the Lexington Avenue Book Shop in 1940 and operated the bookshop until his suicide in 1950.

Scope and Contents

Consisting of one document box, the Dorothy Gordon Collected Letters and Works contain holograph and typewritten correspondence, postcards, a telegram, unfinished typescript manuscripts, and printed material ranging in date from 1931 to 1950. The material is arranged into two series: I. Correspondence, 1938-1950, and II. Works, ca. 1931-1947. The bulk of the material consists of letters from book dealer Mitchell Kennerley to Gordon. These letters span from 1940 through 1950, covering the entire period of operation of the Lexington Avenue Bookshop and the period leading directly to Kennerley's death.

Series I, Correspondence, contains letters to Dorothy Gordon and letters to Mitchell Kennerley collected by Gordon. The letters to Dorothy Gordon are from Kennerley and poet Charles Erskine Scott Wood. The Wood correspondence dates from 1938 to 1940, and includes two printed poems and letters addressing the war in Europe as well as memories of serving in the Indian wars during his youth.

The letters from Kennerley reflect Gordon's business dealings with the Lexington Avenue Bookshop and the personal relationship that developed from their business correspondence. The letters are arranged chronologically, and document the literary tastes and interests of both correspondents. Prominent authors, popular titles, and important book dealers and presses are discussed. Kennerley reflects on his business dealings with and critical opinions of many of his contemporaries, including E. M. Forster, Katherine Mansfield, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Stanley Kunitz, and Augustus John. His letters are often accompanied by enclosures, such as press announcements of Edna St. Vincent Millay's first book *Renascence*, which Kennerley published. Also enclosed are price quotes offered from Manhattan book dealers in response to Ms. Gordon's "want list," and copies of poems written by Ms. Gordon published in various newspapers and magazines.

The letters to Mitchell Kennerley collected by Dorothy Gordon span 1941 to 1947, and all relate in some way to Gordon; many are answers to questions that the well-connected Kennerley passed on to various publishers and scholars for his friend. In one example, German scholar Benjamin Huebsch answers a question on German grammar for Ms. Gordon's translation of Rilke.

The second series, Works, contains essays by Dorothy Gordon and pamphlets and clippings she collected. The two unfinished essays are autobiographical accounts of the development of her interest in book collecting. One of these essays, marked "personal," gives insight into the development of Gordon's archive; she describes how she came to meet Mitchell Kennerley, and that a mutual friend instructed her to "keep everything he writes to you."

The collection of printed materials includes pamphlets by Mitchell Kennerley and Richard La Gallienne, the poem "Crossing the Bar" by Bliss Carman, materials relating to the publication of *Dragon's Teeth* by Upton Sinclair, and "Cézanne: What He Said to Me" by Joachim Gasquet, printed in *The Leaflet* (Number 3: October 1931).

Index Terms

Correspondents

- Huebsch, B.W. (Benjamin W.), 1876-1964.
- Kennerley, Mitchell, 1899-1950.
- Wood, Charles Erskin Scott, 1852-1944.

Subjects

- Book collecting.
- Booksellers and bookselling.

Document Types

- Broadsides.

Pamphlets.

Series I. Correspondence, 1938-1950

Letters to Dorothy Gordon, 1938-1950

Charles Erskine Scott Wood, 1938-1940

**box 1 folder
1**

Mitchell Kennerley

1941

box 1 folder 2

1942

folder 3

1943-1946

folder 4

1947-1948

folder 5

1949-1950, n.d.

folder 6

Letters to Mitchell Kennerley, collected by Dorothy Gordon, 1941-1947

folder 7

Series II. Works, ca. 1931-1947

Typescript by Dorothy Gordon, n.d.

box 1 folder 8

Printed materials collected by Dorothy Gordon, ca. 1931-1947

folder 9

Dorothy Gordon-Mitchell Kennerley Collection--Index of Correspondents

- Babb, James T. (James Tinkham), 1899-1968--1.7
- Field, Bradda, 1904- --1.4, 1.7
- Genthe, Arnold, 1869-1942--1.7
- Huebsch, B. W. (Benjamin W.), 1876-1964--1.4, 1.7
- Kennerley, Mitchell, 1878-1950--1.2-6
- Kennerley, Morley--1.7
- Knollenberg, Bernhard, 1892-1973--1.3
- MacIntyre, Carlyle Ferren, 1890-1967--1.7
- Rosenberg, Mary S.--1.2
- Wood, Charles Erskine Scott, 1852-1944--1.1