Walter Willard "Spud" Johnson:
An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Johnson, Walter Willard, 1897-1968
Dates: 1896-1973
Extent 18 document boxes, 2 galley files (gf), 1 note card box, 1 oversize box (osb) (7.98 linear feet)
Abstract: Holograph and typescript works and correspondence from friends and associates make up the majority of the papers, supplemented by letters and diaries by Johnson and works and correspondence by other authors.
Language English
Access Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition Acquisition Purchase and gift, 1969-1995 (R4935, G10367)
Provenance Provenance The Ransom Center purchased the bulk of Walter Willard Johnson's estate, including art, books, and furniture, when it became available in 1969. A small number of items held by Milford Greer were donated to the Ransom Center in 1972.
Processed by Chelsea S. Dinsmore, 2000
Repository: Harry Ransom Center, the University of Texas at Austin
Walter Willard Johnson (1897-1968), nicknamed Spud by his family, was born in Illinois, but spent most of his childhood in Greeley, Colorado. Uninterested in his father's lumber business, Spud took every journalistic opportunity offered. He started and edited a newspaper at Greeley High School before entering Colorado State Teacher's College in 1916, where he wrote for the school paper and worked as a cub reporter for the Greeley newspaper.

After two years at the Teachers College and a shorter stint at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Johnson began to feel constrained by the “small-town” life in Colorado and transferred to the University of California at Berkeley. Shortly after arriving in the Bay area, he met Witter Bynner, a wealthy poet who taught a popular poetry course at UCLA. Bynner helped Johnson find a library job at the Bohemian Club and encouraged him to write poetry. The two men developed a close and lasting friendship.

For the next several years, Johnson juggled school with journalism. He found that he did not like being on the receiving end of the editorial process and in 1922, with three friends, founded his own small format magazine, Laughing Horse. Intended as an alternative to conventional campus publications, the four editors presented "...polemics, philippics, satire, burlesque and all around destructive criticism...." Even after leaving Berkeley, Johnson continued to contribute to Laughing Horse, eventually taking it over and publishing it intermittently over the next thirty years.

In the summer of 1922, Johnson visited New Mexico for the first time. Attracted by the beauty and charm of the area as well as the growing literary community, Johnson did not return to school, but remained in Santa Fe as Witter Bynner's secretary. Through Bynner, Johnson met almost everybody in the New Mexico literary scene including Mary Austin, Carl Sandburg, Mabel Dodge Luhan, D.H. and Frieda Lawrence, and Dorothy Brett. Motivated by the artistic climate and the available time, Johnson began to write poetry again and by 1926 his work had been published in Poetry, Pan, Echo, Palms, and the New Republic. He published a collection of his works in 1935, titled Horizontal Yellow.

Aside from poetry, Johnson maintained a steady stream of literary criticism, editorial comments, and other prose. In 1927 he moved to Taos to become Mabel Luhan's secretary and purchased a small hand press which he used to print Laughing Horse.

By the early 1930s Johnson had become a fixture in the New Mexico literary and social scenes. Dividing his time between Santa Fe and Taos he participated unflaggingly in community affairs and causes. He supported himself with his writing and his printing press and during World War II he ran a bookstall near the Taos central plaza. One of his most durable activities was an editorial column which ran under the title "The Horse Fly" and later as "The Gadfly." Sometimes he published his column as a free-standing small paper and at other times he published in local papers.
Johnson remained active until his death in 1968. In 1953 he took up painting and drawing and in 1954 he travelled to Europe with Earl Stroh. While in France he met Alice B. Toklas before travelling on to Italy and England. In 1960 he helped organize and lead a week long rafting trip through Glen Canyon before it was flooded by construction of the Glen Canyon Dam. In early 1968 he was cooperating with a group of friends to produce a show of his artwork for the following year. When he died, just months before the show was scheduled to take place, it became a memorial for an artist for whom life and art were never separated.

Source

Udall, Sharyn R. Spud Johnson & Laughing Horse. (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1994).

Scope and Contents

Holograph and typescript works and correspondence from friends and associates make up the majority of the Spud Johnson Papers, 1896-1973 (bulk 1920-1968), supplemented by letters and diaries by Johnson and works and correspondence by other authors. The papers are organized into four series, arranged alphabetically by author or title and chronologically where possible: Series I. Works, 1919-1968 (3 boxes); Series II. Correspondence, 1916-1969 (7.5 boxes); Series III. Personal Papers, 1914-1968 (5 boxes); and Series IV. Third-Party Works and Correspondence, 1896-1973 (bulk 1920-68) (2.5 boxes). These papers were previously accessible through a card catalog, but have been re-cataloged as part of a retrospective conversion project.

The Works Series contains poems, short stories, biographical sketches, essays, reviews, and other literary output by Walter Johnson. Of particular note are various drafts of an untitled novel about Don Grant, holograph and typescript versions of Horizontal Yellow (1935), and groups of essays published for the "The Horse Fly" and "The Gadfly" columns. Individual titles are listed in the Index of Works at the end of this guide.

The Correspondence Series is divided into two subseries: Subseries A. Outgoing Correspondence, 1930-1968 (.5 boxes) and Subseries B. Incoming Correspondence, 1915-1969 (7 boxes). While there are not a great number of letters from Johnson, his correspondence with William Goyen, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Lynn Riggs is moderately well represented. Better represented are friends, acquaintances, and business associates who wrote to Johnson, including Mary Austin, Dorothy Brett, Witter Bynner, Gladys Cannon, Alexander Fechin, Haniel Long, Daniel McCarthy, the New Yorker, Ruth Swaine, and others. There are also a large number of letters from unidentified writers. All identified correspondents are listed in the Index of Correspondence at the end of this guide.
The Personal Papers Series is composed of Johnson's diaries many of which are sequentially numbered and contain observations, notes, some day-to-day activities, and some creative work. Also present are a commonplace book, records dealing with the publication of *Horse Fly*, *Horizontal Yellow*, and *Laughing Horse*, and various notes and receipts. Of particular interest are nine etched plastic printing plates used for *Laughing Horse*.

The Third-Party Works and Correspondence Series is divided into two subseries: Subseries A. Works, 1896-1968 (bulk 1920-68) (2 boxes) and Subseries B. Correspondence, 1922-73 (.5 box). The Works subseries includes materials by Witter Bynner, Arthur Ficke, Robert Frost, Mabel Luhan, Lynn Riggs, and others. Many of the third-party works were sent to Johnson for inclusion in *Laughing Horse* and include notes and letters to Johnson from the authors. There are also a number of cover letters to Norman MacLeod, fellow poet and editor. This correspondence is not indexed. Included in this section are a number of limericks written by friends for Johnson. Third-party correspondents are generally friends and acquaintances writing to each other, often about Johnson or his affairs, and include Dorothy Brett, Arthur Ficke, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Carl Van Vechten, and others. Individual titles and identified correspondents are listed, by author, in the Index of Works by other Authors and the Index of Correspondence at the end of this guide.

**Related Material**

Elsewhere in the Ransom Center are nearly 1000 photographs of Johnson and his friends, as well as numerous snapshots from his travels in the Southwest, located in the Literary Files of the Photography Collection. Also present are a large number of sketches, paintings, etchings, and watercolors by Johnson and his friends, located in the Art Collection, and several horse statues, rugs, crosses, woodcuts, ceramic tiles and other personal items located in the Personal Effects Collection. There are six scrapbooks containing copies of *Laughing Horse* and thirty-five Vertical Files containing newspaper clippings with biographical information and literary criticism in addition to published articles by Johnson.

Other materials associated with Spud Johnson may be found in the following collections at the Ransom Center:

**Index Terms**

**Correspondents**

Austin, Mary Hunter, 1868-1934

Berg, Bobby

Berns, Walter, 1919-
Brett, Dorothy, 1883-1977
Brooks, Gina Knee
Bynner, Witter, 1881-1968
Cabot, Edward
Cannon, Gladys
Eisenstein, Samuel A. (Samuel Abraham)
Farran, Lee
Fechin, Alexander
Ficke, Arthur Davison, 1883-1945
Goldmark, John
Goyen, William, 1915-
Johnson, J. Smith, Mrs.
La Farge, Oliver, 1901-1963
Lawrence, Frieda von Richthofen, 1879-1965
Long, Haniel, 1888-1956
Lovejoy, Sue Cannon
Luhan, Mabel Dodge, 1879-1962
MacLeod, Norman
McCarthy, Daniel Clifford
*The New Yorker*
O'Keefe, Georgia, 1887-1986
Riggs, Lynn, 1899-1954
Rodakiewicz, Henwar
Stone, Idella Purnell, 1901-
Swaine, Ruth
Van Tijn, Gertrude
Van Vechten, Carl
Waters, Frank, 1902-
White, Partrick, 1912-

**Subjects**

Authors, American--20th century
Poets, American--20th century
Johnson, Walter Willard, 1897-1968

West (U.S.)--Social life and customs

**Document Types**

Commonplace books
Diaries
Scrapbooks
Series I. Works, 1919-1968

Untitled works

Untitled novel about Don Grant

- Holograph with author revisions, 126pp
- Typescript with author revisions, 73pp
- Typescript, 81pp
- Typescript sections and chapters, 27pp

Untitled work about Donald Sydney, holograph and typescript drafts with author revisions, 101pp

A-B

"Boy with a Guitar," holograph and three typescript drafts, one with author revisions, 49pp

C-E

F-G

"The Gadfly," newspaper column holographs and typescripts, many with author revisions, 1961-1968, 274pp

H-L

*Horizontal Yellow,* holograph and typescript drafts with author revisions, 258pp

"The Horse Fly," vanewspaper column holographs, typescripts, and clippings, 157pp (clippings removed to galley folder)

M-N

"Mabel in Taos," holograph in a bound notebook, 1935, 6pp
Notebook of various prose sketches, typescript with author revisions, 54pp

"Now that the Leaves are Gone: Poems Written While Growing Old," holograph and typescripts, 52pp

O

P-R

"The Perambulator," newspaper column clippings, 1930-1938 (removed to galley folder)

"Pillars of Fire by Night," holograph notebook with author revisions, 17pp, nd

Poems, various holograph drafts in a spiral notebook, 20pp

S

"The Seven Years Between: An Autobiographical Fragment," holograph in bound notebook, 38pp

T-U

V-Z

Various poems and prose fragments in paper bound notebooks, nd
**Series II. Correspondence, 1916-1969**

Subseries A. Outgoing Correspondence, 1930-1968

Unidentified recipients, 1930-1968

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Subseries B. Incoming Correspondence, 1915-1969

Unidentified correspondents, 1922-1969

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<td>Brooks, Gina Knee, 1937-1968</td>
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Eakin, Boyce, 1936-1956

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Farran, Lee, 1951-1968

Fechin, Alexander, 1934-1946

G

Goldsmith, John, 1950-1958

Goyen, William, 1946-1952

H-Hi

Hj-Hz

I-J

Johnson, J. Smith, Mrs., 1923-1934

K

L

Long, Haniel, 1924-1956

Lovejoy, Sue Cannon, 1935-1967

Luhan, Mabel Dodge, 1929-1949

M

MacLeod, Norman, 1935-1939

McCarthy, Daniel Clifford, 1928-1956

N

O-P

O'Keeffe, Georgia, 1930-1965

Q-R

Johnson, Walter Willard, 1897-1968
Johnson, Walter Willard, 1897-1968

Riggs, Lynn, 1924-1954 folder 2
Rodakiewicz, Henwar, 1931-1968 folder 3
S-Sm folder 4
Sn-Sz folder 5
Swaine, Ruth, 1935-1961 folder 6

T box 11 folder 1

U-V folder 2

W folder 3

White, Patrick, 1936-1945 folder 4

X-Z folder 5
Series III. Personal Papers, 1914-1968

Books loaned from Johnson's library, 1931, holograph list kept in a notebook, 19pp

Card file of published materials, 173 cards in a wooden card box

Commonplace book, holograph in a string bound notebook, 5pp

Date books, employment application, diploma, lists, and various drawings and sketches, 1916-1960

Diaries, 1914-1968

Unnumbered

1914-1934

1933-1960

Numbered

1-10, 1933-1956

11-21, 1954-1965

22-23, 1966-1968

Horizontal Yellow, 1935-1938, accounts, records, and mailing lists, 47pp

Laughing Horse and Horse Fly, announcements, covers, 9 printing plates, and subscriber lists, 44pp (*printing plates removed to oversize box 20)

Various notes, receipts, note cards and envelopes, 152pp
Series IV. Third-Party Works and Correspondence, 1896-1973 (bulk 1920-1968)


Unidentified authors

Unidentified author, diary, 1931-1932, holograph fragment, 73pp

A-C

Burkhard, Paul, "Regression,"1952, typescript with author revisions, 36pp

Bynner, Witter, various works

D-G

Eisenstein, Samuel, various works


Frost, Robert, "A Masque of Reason," two typescripts, 44pp

H-K

L-M

Luhan, Mabel Dodge

Various works

"Una & Robin," holograph, 106pp

N-P

Riggs, Lynn, "Verdigris Primitive," typescript, 92pp

Slater, John R., various works

T-Z

Subseries B. Third-Party Correspondence, 1922-1973
Johnson, Walter Willard, 1897-1968

Unidentified authors; A-F folder 5
G-M folder 6
N-Z folder 7
Various envelopes folder 8
Diaries and works removed from other boxes box 17-18
Note card box box 19
Printing plates removed from box 14 box osb 20
Spud Johnson Papers--Index of Correspondents

Box and folder numbers are followed by a number in parentheses which indicates the number of items by that person. A single item is indicated where there is no number in parentheses following the box and folder number. Where there is correspondence from Walter Johnson, the number in parentheses is followed by the phrase "from Johnson." So in the example:

Brinig, Myron, 1897-1991--4.2 (2 from Johnson), 5.4 (5)

there are 2 letters from Johnson in box 4, folder 2, and 5 letters from Brinig in box 5, folder 4.

- Aguilar, Lois S. de--4.8
- Albuquerque National Bank--4.8
- Alexander, Laura--4.8
- Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.--4.8 (2)
- Allen, Germaine F.--4.8
- American Federation of Arts--4.8
  - American Mercury--4.8
  - American News Company--4.2 (from Johnson), 4.8
  - American Penwomen--4.8
  - American Society for Technion, Israel Institute of Technology--4.2 (from Johnson)
- Amos Sudler and Co.--4.2 (from Johnson), 4.8 (2)
- Anderson, Claude--4.2 (6 from Johnson)
- Anderson, Clinton Presba, 1895- --4.8
- Anderson, Elizabeth, 1884- --16.5
- Anderson, Sherwood, 1876-1941--4.2 (from Johnson)
- Armitage, Merle, 1893-1975--4.8
- Armstrong, Edwin R., 1921- --4.8
- The Art Gallery--4.8
- Asham, Burnam--4.8
- Asher, Hanna--4.8 (9)
- Aswell, Mary Louise White, 1902- --4.8
- Atkinson, V.--4.8
  - Atlantic Monthly Press--4.8
- Austin, Mary Hunter, 1868-1934--4.8 (8)
- Bahr, -, Mr.--4.2 (from Johnson)
- Bankers Life and Casualty Company--4.2 (3 from Johnson)
- Barr, Barbara Weekley, 1904- --5.1 (3)
- Baschwitz, Ludwig--5.1
- Baskett, Bob--5.1
- Bauersfield, Erik--5.1 (2)
- Baum, Joseph--5.1
- Baumann, Gustave, 1881-1971--5.1 (3)
- Becker, Charlotte--5.1
- Berg, Bobby--5.2 (34)
- Bergmans, W., Mrs.--5.1 (2)
- Berkman, Jack N. (Jack Neville)--5.1
- Berninghaus, Win--5.1
- Berns, Walter, 1919- --5.3 (40)
- Birkett, Inez--5.1
- Blair, Marguerite--5.1 (3), 16.5
• Bloom, Carol--5.1 (7)
• Bloomfield, Susan--5.1
• Boettcher and Co.--4.2 (5 from Johnson)
• Boies, Jack J. (Jack Jay), 1926--5.1 (2)
• Bolen, Don E.--5.1
• Bolinger, Dwight Le Merton, 1907--5.1
• Book Press Reviews--5.1 (2)
• Boswell, Leslie A.--5.1
• Botkin, Benjamin Albert, 1901-1975--5.1 (2)
• Boyd, E. (Elizabeth), 1903-1974--5.1 (12)
• Boyer, Betty Kirk--5.1
• Boyer, Paul, fl. 1965--5.1
• Boyle, Elsie--5.1
• Bradford, Mary Rose--5.4
• Braille Transcription Project--5.4 (2)
• Brandenburg, Helen Z.--5.4
• Brandenburg, Jack, Mrs.--5.4
• Breed, Dorothy, 1883-1977--4.2 (from Johnson), 5.5 (35), 16.5 (4)
• Bright, Beatrice--5.4
• Bright, Robert, 1902--5.4 (3)
• Brinig, Myron, 1897-1991--4.2 (2 from Johnson), 5.4 (5)
• Brooks, G. K. (Gina Knee)--5.6 (63), 16.5 (3)
• Bryan, Mark--5.4
• Bucco, Martin--5.4
• Bullock, Alice, 1904--5.4
• Bumstead, Amy--5.4 (7)
• Bumstead, Frank--5.4 (2)
• Burden, W. Douglas (William Douglas), 1898-1978--5.4 (6)
• Burgess, Westcott--5.4
• Burkhead, Paul--5.4 (3)
• Burrows, John, fl. 1955--5.4 (2)
• Bynner, Witter, 1881-1968--4.2 (from Johnson), 5.7-8 (131), 16.5 (5)
• Byran, R.W.--5.4
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• Cabot, Greta C.--6.1
• Cabot, Harriet Ropes--6.1
• California Bank--6.1 (2)
• Campiglios, Lisa--6.1 (2)
• Cannon, Gladys--6.3-5 (276), 16.5
• Cannon, Trix--4.2 (2 from Johnson)
• Cannon, William A., 1919--6.1 (3)
• Carlson, Connie H.--6.1
• Cartwright, Evangeline--6.6
• Casey, Pearl R.--6.1
• Centaur Book Shop--6.1 (6)
• Chanock, Robert--6.1
• Chanslor, Roy, 1899-1964--4.2 (2 from Johnson), 6.1 (3)
• Chapman, Kenneth M.--6.1
• Chauvenet, William--6.1
• Chavez, Fray Angelico--6.1
• The Chieften--6.1
• Children's Magazine--6.1
• Chitten, Ron--4.2 (from Johnson)
• Church, Peggy Pond, 1903- --6.1 (9)
• Citizens for a Western By-Pass--16.5 (2)
• Clark, Tony--6.6
• Clarkson, Paul S. (Paul Stephen), 1905- --16.5
• Clifford, Daniel--6.6
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• Codman, Florence L.--6.6
• Colgrove, Jim--6.6
• Collier, Lucy W.--6.6 (2)
• Colt, Sylvia--6.6 (2)
• Columbia University--6.6
• Committee to Keep the “Perambulator” in Santa Fe, New Mexico--16.5 (2)
• Cooke, Regina--6.6
• Cordoba, Fidel--6.6
• Covici-McGee, Book Dealers--6.6
• Crawford, John F.--6.6
• El Crepusculo--4.2 (from Johnson)
• Crews, Judson--6.6
• Crews, Mildred Tolbert--6.6 (2)
• Cross, E.A. (Ethan Allen), b. 1875--6.6, 16.5
• Crouch, Alice--6.6
• Crow, Clarkson--6.6
• Crown Publishers--4.2 (from Johnson), 6.6
• Crume, Charles--4.2 (3 from Johnson)
• Crumly, Daryl, Mrs.--6.6
• Cruz, Patricio A.--6.6 (2)
• Cullen, Countie P.--6.6
• Curl, Elizabeth--6.6 (2)
• Current Books, Inc.--6.6
• Cutting, Bronson M., 1888-1935--4.2 (from Johnson), 6.6 (6), 16.5
• Dahlbert, Mary--6.7
• Dales, Harriett--6.7
• Dasburg, Marina--6.7
• Davis, Bette, 1908--6.7
• Davis, Katherine Murdoch, 1879-1956--16.5
• Day, Norma--6.7
• De Huffy, Elizabeth Willis--6.7
• De Lisio, Mike--6.7
• Degen, Mabel--6.7 (5)
• Denver and Rio Grande Railroad Co.--4.2 (from Johnson)
• Dewey, John, 1859-1952--6.7
• Dewing, Peg--6.7 (2)
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• De Young Memorial Museum--see M.H. De Young Memorial Museum
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• Dodds, Jim--6.7 (3)
• Dodds, Torrence--6.7 (15), 16.5
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• Duncan, Thomas W. (Thomas William), 1905-1987--6.7
• Dunivent, Buck--6.7
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• Egri, Ted--4.2 (2 from Johnson)
• Eisenstein, Samuel A. (Samuel Abraham)--7.1 (6)
• Encyclopedia Britannica--4.2 (from Johnson), 7.1
• Estergreen, Marion--7.1 (2)
• Evans, John, 1902---7.1 (16)
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• Fechin, Eva--7.3 (8)
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  - Sometimes we walked the hills together...--14.6
  - "Song"--14.6
  - "Sticky Issue"--14.6
  - There was a young writer named Spud...--14.6
  - "The turn of the century..."--14.6
  - You said/ your love has touched me and...--14.6
  - "Wasted Youth"--14.6
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  - Alvarez, A.
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  - Arnold, Matthew
    - "The Buried Life"--14.8
  - Austin, Mary Hunter
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  - Beaudoin, Kenneth Lawrence
    - "For a Guy Is a Guy Wherever He May Be"--14.8
  - Becker, Charlotte
    - "Review of Horizontal Yellow"--14.8
  - Beye, Holly
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- Blackwell, Lee
  - "Papa Gander"--14.8
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  - On June the third in ninety-seven...--14.8
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  - "Regression"--15.1
- Bynner, Witter
  - At night it comes, accustomed on the fog...--15.2
  - "Blackbirds"--15.2
  - "A Dance for Rain at Chochita"--15.2
  - "Epithalamium and Elegy"--15.2
  - I ride in the 'Perambulator',...--15.2
  - "A Mexican Vase"--15.2
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  - Oh Heidleberg! I love thee...--15.2
  - "A Piece of Cake"--15.2
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  - "W.W.J."--15.2
  - "A Word to the Wise"--15.2
- Cabot, Edward C.
  - Short story--14.8
- Church, Peggy Pond
  - "Psalm 1947"--14.8
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  - Press release re "The Horsefly"--14.8
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  - "Every Now and Then"--14.8
- Crews, Judson
  - "Deception of Eve"--14.8
- Curtain, Leonard F.
  - "The Antelope Are Fat in Summer"--14.8
- Dixon, Maynard
  - "Navajo Love"--15.3
- Doyle, Phyllis
  - "D.H. Lawrence's French Tombstone"--15.3
- Drummond, N.L.
  - "Death Watch on ATTU"--15.3
- Eckman, Frederick
  - "Professor"--15.3
  - "Pure Moment"--15.3
  - "Winter's Tale"--15.3
- Eisenstein, Samuel A.
  - "D.H. Lawrence's Aaron's Rod: Witches, Serpents, and Women"--5.4
  - "Lawrence's 'Ship of Death' Poems: The Creative Unknown"--15.4
  - "The Trespasser"--15.4
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- Emerson, Richard Wirtz

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- "Sonnet to the Moon"--15.3
- "Pointillisme, 1949"--15.3
- Evans, Dylan Thomas
  - When you wrestle with signboards and trees...--15.3
- Evans, John Ganson
  - "A Cocktail with Satan"--15.3
- Ficke, Arthur Davison
  - "Three Valentines"--15.5
  - "The Hell of the Good: A Theological Epic in 6 Books"--15.5
- Field, Betty
  - Magic lure of cold, dreary Taos...--15.3
- Field, Eugene
  - "Bangin' on the Rhine"--15.3
- Fisher, Vardis
  - "Who Is the Greatest"--15.3
- Florence, P. Sargant
  - Article on American jukeboxes and billboards--15.3
- Frost, Robert
  - "A Masque of Reason"--15.6
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  - "The Horsefly Has a Soul"--15.7
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- Herrick, Robert
  - "Discovered-An American Gentleman"--15.7
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  - "Those Mud Houses"--15.7
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  - "Sight to See in Mexico City"--15.7
- Hunt, Robert Nichols
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- Hunt, Stephen
  - "Laughter"--15.7
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  • Honor thy,...--15.8
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