



THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI RESEARCH CENTER-KANSAS CITY

K0280

Leon Milton Birkhead (1885-1954) Papers
1893-1980 [1908-1955]
5 cubic feet, oversize

Papers of Birkhead, popular, progressive figure in religious and civic affairs documenting his professional and public career. Birkhead was pastor of All Souls Unitarian Church in Kansas City from 1917 until 1939 when he resigned to begin the Friends of Democracy, an "anti-propaganda" organization.

BIOGRAPHY:

Leon Milton Birkhead was born on April 28, 1885, on a farm outside Winfield, Missouri, fifty miles northwest of St. Louis. His first job was in a St. Louis shoe factory, for which he later became a salesman. When, in 1904, he had saved enough money to pay for his education, he began his studies at McKendree College, a small Methodist institution in Lebanon, Illinois. He graduated from McKendree with an A.B. degree in 1910, and was ordained a Methodist minister in St. Louis in 1911. Birkhead also did graduate work in theology and philosophy at Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey, and Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University in New York, but did not complete another degree.

Reverend Birkhead held pastorates at the Maple Avenue and Wagoner Memorial Methodist Episcopal Churches in St. Louis, and the Ewing Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in Madison, Illinois. In 1913, he married Agnes Schiereck of St. Louis, who was the youngest Deputy Collector of the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, she was the first woman to hold a position of that rank. They had one child, Kenneth. In 1914, Reverend Birkhead resigned from the Methodist Church and took a ministerial post at the First Unitarian Church in Wichita, Kansas. He remained there until 1917, when he came to Kansas City, Missouri, and began more than twenty years of service to All Souls Unitarian Church.

Reverend Birkhead was a popular, progressive figure in religious and civic affairs. He advocated women's suffrage, the use of advertising for churches, companionate marriage, and the teaching of evolution in schools. He and his wife

were present at the Scopes trial in 1925, with Reverend Birkhead assisting Clarence Darrow with miscellaneous research tasks and Agnes Birkhead serving as defense stenographer. Reverend Birkhead served as technical advisor to his friend, Sinclair Lewis, during the writing of *Elmer Gantry*, the 1927 publication which caused great debate in religious circles.

In 1935, Birkhead traveled to Germany, where he became alarmed at the influence of Nazism there and in the United States. He resigned from All Souls in 1939 to begin the Friends of Democracy, an "anti-propoganda" organization whose purpose was to expose hate-based groups during World War II and the McCarthy Era. Birkhead moved the Friends of Democracy operation to New York City in 1939. He died there in December of 1954. He was survived by his wife, Agnes, and his son, Kenneth.

PROVENANCE:

This gift was received from Barbara Birkhead as accession KA0766 on August 24, 1993.

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PREFERRED CITATION:

Specific item; folder number; *Leon Milton Birkhead (1885-1954) Papers* (K0280); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-KC].

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DESCRIPTION:

The papers consist of a variety of materials documenting Reverend Birkhead's professional and public career. Much of the collection consists of printed materials from his churches, organizations of which he was a member, and his speaking engagements. A small amount of correspondence is also included. Records of All Souls Unitarian Church include postcards mailed to the congregation concerning upcoming sermon topics, guest speakers, and activities.

There is also a log book with clipped advertisements and weekly attendance and offering figures. The Liberal Center was also a function of All Souls, and the collection contains some programs and youth newsletters concerning its activities.

As head of the Friends of Democracy, Birkhead collected many publications from the groups he was fighting against. The publications are anti-Communist, anti-Socialist, anti-Fascist, anti-semitic, pro-McCarthy, and white supremacist in nature. Much printed material generated by the Friends of Democracy is also included.

Two folders of material contain information about Agnes Schiereck Birkhead, and one folder contains correspondence and ephemeral material related to Kenneth Birkhead.

The scrapbooks consist almost entirely of clippings and are generally in fair to poor condition. They contain many loose clippings which will require further weeding for duplicates. The volumes will be microfilmed at a later date.

INVENTORY:

BOX 001

PRINTED MATERIALS

- Folder 1. Miscellaneous material removed from scrapbooks, 1893-1933
- Folder 2. Publications:
The Results of an Inquiry into the Aims and Characteristics of Unitarian Preaching, 1902
Report of the War Work Council of the Unitarian Churches, 1917-1918
The Western Unitarian, November 1924
We Press Toward the Mark, 1936
- Folder 3. Programs, printed materials, announcements - LMB speaking engagements, events attended, 1908-1919
- Folder 4. Weekly programs - Maple Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church (St. Louis), 1911-1914
- Folder 5. Miscellaneous publications, printed material, ca. 1912-1937
- Folder 6. Speech notes, clippings - "Patriotism and Patriotic Celebration (Safe and Sane Fourth)," June 29, 1913
- Folder 7. Programs, postcards, yearbook, printed materials - Wagoner Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, Ewing Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, 1913-1914
- Folder 8. Programs, publications - other churches concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1914-1935

- Folder 9. Programs, postcards, printed materials, notes expressing LMB's dissatisfaction with position - First Unitarian Church, ca. 1915-1916
- Folder 10. "Fifty Years Ago," by Mary L. McCarty, 1916; clipping concerning 92nd birthday, 1926
- Folder 11. Programs, newsletters - Western Unitarian Conference, 1916-1939
- Folder 12. Programs, speech, clippings - Southwestern Federation of Religious Liberals, 1917, 1923-1932, 1938 (also includes Kansas Universalists and Kansas/Oklahoma Liberal Religious Conference)
- Folder 13. Monthly programs - All Souls Unitarian Church, February-May, December 1918; January 1919
- Folder 14. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1918-1920
- Folder 15. Correspondence, 1918-1922
- Folder 16. Publications, printed material - mentioning/written by LMB, 1918-1925
- Folder 17. *Citizens' League Bulletin*, 1918-1925 (incomplete)
- Folder 18. Pamphlet - "A University for the Kansas City Memorial to Our Soldiers," 1919; "A Notable Memorial" by Henry J. Haskell in *The Council Table* concerning Liberty Memorial, ca. 1921
- Folder 19. Program - memorial service for Unitarians who died in WWI, October 15, 1919
- Folder 20. Newsletters - The City Club, 1919-1921 (incomplete)
- Folder 21. Printed material - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1919-1929
- Folder 22. Newsletters - Kansas City Athenaeum, 1919-1935 (incomplete)
- Folder 23. Programs, publications, printed materials concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1920-1923
- Folder 24. *Advertising Club News*, 1920-1927 (incomplete)
- Folder 25. Postcards notifying LMB of events, ca. 1920-1928
- Folder 26. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1921-1923
- Folder 27. Programs, clippings - Missouri Federation of Music Clubs, 1923-1924
- Folder 28. Correspondence, 1923-1947, undated
- Folder 29. Program, speech notes - 25th anniversary of Dr. Harry H. Mayer's ministry at B'Nai Jehudah, May 2, 1924
- Folder 30. Correspondence - B.H. Smith, October 1924
- Folder 31. Program, speech notes - memorial to Mrs. Henry J. Haskell, March 28, 1924

- Folder 32. Programs, clippings - *Lilliom* - stage play in which LMB performed, week of October 13, 1924
- Folder 33. "Instructions to Judges and Clerks" - general voter registration, September 22-25, 1924
- Folder 34. Programs, publications, printed materials concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1924-1925
- Folder 35. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1924-1926
- Folder 36. *The Cooperator* - publication of the Cooperative Club, 1924-1926
- Folder 37. Publication - *The City Ice Man*, December 1925
- Folder 38. Publications, printed material - mentioning/written by LMB, 1926
- Folder 39. Programs, publications, printed materials concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1926-1944
- Folder 40. Publications, articles concerning Sinclair Lewis and *Elmer Gantry*, 1927
- Folder 41. *The Cooperator* - publication of the Cooperative Club, 1927
- Folder 42. Advertisements for *The Debunker* magazine, ca. 1927-1928; the *Commonwealth College Fortnightly* - mention of *The Debunker*, February 15, 1933
- Folder 43. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1927-1928, 1938
- Folder 44. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, undated
- Folder 45. Advertising cards - City Ice Cream, 1927, Westport Dairy, ca. 1933
- Folder 46. *Joy* - collection of poetry by John Milton Smither, including a handwritten poem to LMB, "The Liberal's Hope," 1928
- Folder 47. *The Cooperator* - publication of the Cooperative Club, 1928
- Folder 48. Publications, printed material - mentioning/written by LMB, 1928-1944, undated
- Folder 49. *The Liberal* - published by All Souls Unitarian Church, September 25, 1930, January 14, 1932, May 1, 1939
- Folder 50. Scrapbook - LMB lectures. Information includes ad clipping, weather, attendance, donations, September 1932-June 1935

BOX 002*PRINTED MATERIALS/CORRESPONDENCE/REPORTS*

- Folder 51. Programs, printed materials - The Liberal Center and Students' Social League, 1932-1939
- Folder 52. Religious publications:
The Moralist, October 1936

*1936 and Conflicts**The Converted Catholic Magazine*, June 1953

“Why Should the Christians Be Kind to the Jews?” undated

- Folder 53. Publications, printed materials - Friends of Democracy, 1937-1954
- Folder 54. Publications, printed materials - collected by LMB for Friends of Democracy, 1937-1954
- Folder 55. Correspondence - organization of Friends of Democracy board, 1938-1939
- Folder 56. Publications, printed materials - Friends of Democracy (removed from scrapbook), 1939-1945
- Folder 57. Correspondence, printed material - Flatbush Council to Promote Racial Tolerance; Flatbush Council for Religious Good-Will, 1939-1942
- Folder 58. Miscellaneous publications, printed material, 1939-1954, 1980
- Folder 59. Typed manuscripts - tax speech; pro-Truman/anti-Communist; “Walter Steele and the National Republic,” ca. 1940s
- Folder 60. Religious publications - International Council of Christian Churches, ca. 1940s-1950s
- Folder 61. Bound booklet - “A Letter by John Steinbeck to the Friends of Democracy,” 1940
- Folder 62. Little Blue Books - catalog, “America’s Little Hitlers,” 1940’s
- Folder 63. *City Reporter*, April 1941-February 1942
- Folder 64. *City Reporter*, March-May 1942
- Folder 65. *City Reporter*, June-September 1942
- Folder 66. *The Party of Betrayal*, 1942
- Folder 67. Report - Friends of Democracy Expansion Fund, ca. 1944
- Folder 68. *Black Mail*, by Henry Hoke, 1944
- Folder 69. Friends of Democracy publications - *Joe Kamp: Peddler of Propaganda and Hero of the Pro-Fascists*, ca. 1944; *The Case of McCormick-Patterson Press*, 1945
- Folder 70. Friends of Democracy newsletters - *The Propaganda Battlefield*, May 1944-October 1946 (incomplete); *Friends of Democracy’s Battle*, December 15, 1949, October 1951
- Folder 71. Stenographer’s minutes, complaints memorandum, clippings - libel case against LMB, 1947
- Folder 72. *The Smear Terror*, by John T. Flynn; response in newsletter of Federation to Fight Fascism, 1947

- Folder 73. Interview of LMB in *The New Yorker*, 1947
- Folder 74. Reports - George Armstrong Foundation, 1947-1948
- Folder 75. Report - "The Pattern of McCarthyism," 1950
- Folder 76. Reports - Alvin O'Konski and Ralph Gamble, 1950
- Folder 77. *Closer Ups* - Upton Close's personal newsletter, April 6, 1950, June 26, 1950
- Folder 78. Radio scripts - Upton Close broadcasts, April 30, 1950, May 28, 1950
- Folder 79. Report - George S. Benson, 1950
- Folder 80. Religious printed materials, ca. 1950-1951
- Folder 81. *The Defender Magazine*, printed materials, December 1951, June 1953
- Folder 82. *The Cross and the Flag* - publication of the Christian Nationalist Crusade, 1951-1952
- Folder 83. *Economic Council Letter, Economic Council Book Review of Books*, 1952
- Folder 84. Newsletter - *Headlines*, 1952
- Folder 85. Correspondence, reports, clipping - Henry Darlington and John Beaty book "The Iron Curtain over America," 1952
- Folder 86. Radio broadcast transcript - "The Author Meets the Critic," March 20, 1952
- Folder 87. *McCarthyism: The Fight for America*, 1952
- Folder 88. *Man, God and the Soviets: 52 Religious Liberals Speak Up* - articles and editorials from *The Christian Register* (Unitarian), 1947-1952
- Folder 89. *Women's Voice* (anti-Semitic), November 27, 1952
- Folder 90. Report - National Patrick Henry Organization, 1952; "action outline" for the Green Mountain Rifleman, 1954
- Folder 91. Printed material, handbook - National Renaissance Party (anti-Semitic), ca. 1953
- Folder 92. Report, program, guest list - Dr. J.B. Matthews Dinner, February 13, 1953
- Folder 93. Newsletter - The Political Reporter (anti-Communist, anti-Semitic), November 1953
- Folder 94. Newsletters - Elizabeth Dilling (anti-Communist, anti-Semitic), November-December 1953

- Folder 95. Correspondence, printed materials - Christian Anti-Jewish Party, 1953
- Folder 96. Newsletters of the Citizens' Protective Association - "The White Sentinel" and "The Kiss of Death," 1953
- Folder 97. *National Republic*, March, April, September 1953
- Folder 98. *Independence Magazine* - pro-McCarthy, February 1954
- Folder 99. Report - "Patriots for McCarthy" rally, August 27, 1954
- Folder 100. Seating list - Roy M. Cohn Testimonial Dinner, July 28, 1954
- Folder 101. Correspondence - condolences and notification of memorials to Agnes and Kenneth Birkhead after the death of LMB, 1954-1955
- Folder 102. Obituaries - LMB, 1954-1955
- Folder 103. Program - service honoring deceased Unitarian ministers, May 20, 1955
- Folder 104. Summaries of anti groups, ca. 1955
- Folder 105. Sheet music - "Nobody's for McCarthy but the People," undated
- Folder 106. Constitution, printed materials - American Council of Christian Churches, undated
- Folder 107. Printed materials - American Protestant League, undated
- Folder 108. Grade card (1894), business cards, biography, commencement announcements (1910) - LMB, undated
- Folder 109. Postcards
- Folder 110. Handwritten notes, undated
- Folder 111. Photographs, slides
- Folder 112. Clippings about Agnes Schiereck, 1907
- Folder 113. Oral history transcript - "My Memories Are Many and Precious to Me" - Agnes Schiereck Birkhead, 1981
- Folder 114. Correspondence; commencement programs from Border Star, Southwest High School, University of Missouri; *The Herald* of Longan School; handwritten note; Chemical Weekly Sentinel (Army base newsletter) - Kenneth Birkhead, 1927-1950
- Folder 115. Newsletters - *The Hornet*, published by the Students' Social League of the Liberal Center, October 1932-May 1933
- Folder 116. Advertising proof sheets - *Kansas City Star*, 1927-1938

BOX 003*SCRAPBOOKS*

- Volume 1. August 1932-June 1933

- Volume 2. Loose clippings, ca. 1923-1924
- Volume 3. May-December 1935
- Volume 4. September 1917-March 1918
- Volume 5. March 1918-June 1919 (also includes some from 1913+)
- Volume 6. September 1919-February 1921
- Volume 7. March 1921-March 1922
- Volume 8. May 1915-July 1917
- Volume 9. ca. 1910-ca. 1915
- Volume 10. January 1943-January 1946

BOX 004*SCRAPBOOKS*

- Volume 11. Correspondence, printed material, 1939
- Volume 12. January-December 1947
- Volume 13. September 1925-December 1926
- Volume 14. 1927
- Volume 15. December 1923-May 1924/December 1924-June 1925
- Volume 16. November 1927-December 1928 (includes some 1924)
- Volume 17. March 1922-March 1923
- Volume 18. January-July 1939

BOX 005*UNPROCESSED CLIPPINGS***FLATBOX**

- Folder 1. Printed materials, posters, publications, photographs