

Collection #
M 1427

**MARJORIE MAIN
JOURNALS, CA.1928–1948**

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: One half-size manuscript box (2 journals)

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1928–1948

PROVENANCE: Eugene McGiffin, Phoenix, Arizona, August, 2018

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Marjorie Main Scrapbooks (M 1314)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2018.0286

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Famed for her “dry wit, frosty smile, sparkling eyes, and rasping voice,” Marjorie Main was a popular character actress who, unlike many women in Hollywood, gained the majority of her success after the age of 50.

Born in February 1890 in Acton, Indiana, Main was given the name Mary Tomlinson but changed it when she became an actress to avoid embarrassing her family, who did not approve of her chosen career. During her childhood, her family moved to Elkhart, Indiana, and she grew up as a rural farm girl. Despite her pastor father's disapproval of acting, Main was actually inspired to act from his family readings of Charles Dickens and would regularly put on performances for the family.

Main continued with her love of performing, first attending first Franklin College in Indiana and then Hamilton College's School of Dramatic Expression in Lexington, Kentucky. She graduated from Hamilton in 1909 at the age of 19 and soon after accepted a position as a dramatics instructor at Bourbon College in Paris, Kentucky. This job lasted just one year after which she was fired for demanding a raise in salary. Main spent the next several years continuing to study the dramatic arts in both Chicago and New York. Her first paid role as a stage actress was as Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

In 1921, Main married psychologist and lecturer Dr. Stanley LeFevre, who was twenty-six years her senior. The two met while Main was working with a Shakespearean company playing the Chautauqua circuit. It was during her marriage that Main first appeared in a Hollywood film, acting as a gossiping extra in *A House Divided* (1931).

Just over a decade after they married, LeFevre died in 1934. Using her grief as a widow to her advantage, Main achieved one of her best stage performances as the mother of gangster Joseph Downing in the stage production *Dead End*. She played the role in 460 out of 687 performances. In 1937, Samuel Goldwyn bought the rights to create the film version of the play and hired Main to reprise her role as the mother.

The year of 1937 was busy for Main. In addition to *Dead End*, Main had roles in 12 other films. The following few years were no different, and the public began to expect her face to show up on the screen in a variety of films. After starring alongside Wallace Beery in the 1940 film *Wyoming*, Main signed her first long term contract with MGM studios. It was this contract that led her to her best known role as Ma Kettle in the Ma and Pa Kettle film series. She starred in nine Ma and Pa Kettle films between the years of 1949 and 1957.

Marjorie Main died from lung cancer in April 1975.

Sources:

Collection Guide for Marjorie Main Scrapbooks (M 1314)

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection comprises two journals of writings of practical advice, humor, and stories kept by Marjorie Main from 1928 into the 1940s. Both journals are a conglomeration of various subjects. Topics includes jokes and stories, engagements, rules for health, Ethel Barrymore, acting, beauty, "sifil" (toning up of personality), poems, acting, compliments, radio, and odds and ends.

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Journal #1, ca.1928–1939

Loose Items found in Journal #1

Journal #2, ca.1933–1948

Loose Items found in Journal #2

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

Box 1, Folder 2

Box 1, Folder 3

Box 1, Folder 4