

**Collection #  
M 1090**

**REV. ROBERT E. SKELTON  
PAPERS, 1917-1951**

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Processed by

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## **COLLECTION INFORMATION**

**VOLUME OF COLLECTION:** 1 manuscript box, 1 folder OVA photograph, 5 folders of photographs, 2 artifacts

**COLLECTION DATES:** 1917 to 1951

**PROVENANCE:** Kenneth Skelton, Indianapolis, Indiana, August 2006

**RESTRICTIONS:** None

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**ALTERNATE FORMATS:**

**RELATED HOLDINGS:**

**ACCESSION NUMBER:** 2006.0375

**NOTES:**

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Reverend Robert Elmore Skelton (1891-1948) was born in Sharpsburg, Kentucky. His parents were Dr. David E. Skelton, a Methodist minister, and Georgia Skelton. Robert Skelton married Cleo Holland, from New Castle, Indiana, on 18 July 1917. They had four children: Mary; Robert. E. Skelton, Jr. "Tut"; Georgianne "Ann"; and John D. "Johnny" Skelton.

Robert Skelton attended Indiana University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy in 1917. He enlisted in the U.S. National Guard on 15 July 1917 as part of the Dayton Company of the 372nd infantry. He served in France during World War I.

Robert Skelton moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, at an unknown date. He served as a minister of Barnes United Methodist Church in northern Indianapolis from 1929 to 1941.

Robert Skelton is credited with being the founder of the Tillman H. Harpole Post 249 of the American Legion, which was organized on 9 July 1936 by 15 African-American World War I veterans. The post was named for 1st Lieutenant Tillman H. Harpole, a member of the 372 Infantry Regiment, who was killed in the Meuse Argonne offensive of World War I. Skelton was elected commander in 1939 and served until 1942, when he retired from the office.

By 1945, Skelton had accumulated an impressive number of degrees, including a Master of Arts from Ohio Wesleyan University, a Bachelor of Divinity from Garrett Biblical Institute (Northwestern University), and a Doctor of Divinity from Philander Smith College.

In June 1942, Skelton chose to reenlist in the U.S. Army and was appointed and commissioned as a Chaplain. He eventually attained the rank of Captain. His son, Robert E. Skelton, Jr. "Tut" also enlisted in the U.S. Army on 13 November 1942 at the age of twenty.

During World War II, Skelton was stationed in several places, including Fort Knox, Kentucky, and Camp Atterbury, Indiana. His health began failing in 1944. Due to the limited number of physically qualified colored chaplains, Skelton was ordered for foreign duty. However, his health problems and frequent hospitalizations resulted in him being listed from general duty to limited duty. When he could not serve overseas, he was sent before three separate Early Retirement Boards in 1945 and 1946. His official date of honorable discharge is considered to be 28 October 1945.

Robert Skelton briefly attended Butler University's School of Religion in spring 1947 under the G.I. bill. He then served a D.D. Minister for Camphor Memorial Methodist Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, from 1947 until his death on 30 May 1948. Both Robert and his wife Cleo are buried at Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Sources:

Material in the collection. 1900 U.S. Census; 1940 U.S. Census; Indiana Marriage Collection 1800-1941; and U.S. Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925-1963; all accessed through Ancestry.com. Tillman H. Harpole American Legion Post 249 75th Anniversary Souvenir Book 21 January 2013. [http://issuu.com/partygrapher/docs/75th\\_anniversary\\_souvenir\\_book1](http://issuu.com/partygrapher/docs/75th_anniversary_souvenir_book1) Accessed 19 May 2014.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Rev. Robert E. Skelton Collection is made up of one manuscript box and is organized into five series. Series one is made up of correspondence and other personal documents of Robert Skelton and his family. Series two is composed of materials pertaining to Robert Skelton's life as a minister and chaplain. Series three is composed of visual materials. Series four consists of correspondence and other documents relating to Robert Skelton's retirement from the U.S. Army. Series five contains two artifacts.

**Series 1.** Materials included in Series 1 are personal correspondence and other papers from 1917-1951. Early materials relating to World War I include two poems about colored soldiers, citations of the 372nd regiment, Skelton's letter of application for Candidate Training School, a request for leave to seek employment, and several letters written to Robert Skelton. There is a small photograph of Cleo glued to a letter from her dated 4 November 1918. Later materials include letters from Robert Skelton to his wife Cleo from 1942 to 1947, several letters of condolence to Cleo on the death of her husband, and one letter from son Johnny to Cleo in 1951. Of interest are letters of appeal concerning the treatment of Robert E. Skelton, Jr. "Tut" in the U.S. Army. Robert Skelton wrote a letter to Representative Louis Ludlow on 26 June 1943 and Cleo Skelton wrote a letter to Mrs. Roosevelt on 9 July 1943. Miscellaneous family papers include newspaper clippings, certificates, and various holiday cards, mostly for Mother's Day and Christmas, and two get well cards.

**Series 2.** Consists of materials that are religious in nature, including Robert E. Skelton's master's thesis, 27 typed sermons, sermon outlines, two handouts written by Skelton when he was a U.S. Army Chaplain in the 1940s, Christian sheet music and lyrics, church-related materials from 1948, and the 100th Anniversary pamphlet for Barnes United Methodist Church. According to the accession file, 26 of the typed sermons were read to an unknown radio audience. A few of the radio sermons are dated between 1935 and 1939. The radio sermons were processed in the order donated.

**Series 3.** Visual materials in the collection include several photographs of Robert E. Skelton. Identified family photographs include Robert E. Skelton, his wife Cleo, and their son Robert E. Skelton Jr. There are various photographs and postcards from World War I, (primarily group photographs of unidentified colored soldiers from the 372nd infantry), as well as photographs of several identified and unidentified white officers from Fort Knox, Kentucky (ca 1940s).

**Series 4.** Five folders of correspondence and other documents pertaining to Skelton's retirement from the U.S. Army and his claims for compensation as a veteran. The bulk of the papers concern Skelton's contested early retirement from the U.S. Army, which centered on Skelton's state of health prior to enlistment and whether active service had caused and exacerbated his health problems. Skelton was made to appear before a total of three Early Retirement Boards in 1945 and 1946. Papers include his 1942 Report of Physical Examination for enlistment and letter of appointment from the War Department. Of interest is a letter dated 3 December 1945 from Skelton to President Truman about his health.

**Series 5.** An artifact box containing 1 5-lire note (ca. 1918) and 1 Clergy Fare Certificate Booklet, (1947).

## **SERIES CONTENTS**

### **Series 1:**

#### CONTENTS

Papers and Correspondence 1917–1936

Papers and Correspondence 1942–1951

Tillman H. Harpole American Legion Post 249 Papers

Miscellaneous Family Papers

Greeting Cards

#### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

Box 1, Folder 2

Box 1 , Folder 3

Box 1, Folder 4

Box 1, Folder 5

### **Series 2: Religious Materials**

#### CONTENTS

Master of Arts Thesis (1922) *The Continuity of the Teachings of the Holy Scripture with Reference to the Nature of God and the Conditions of Salvation*

Sermon, "The Cross in Personal Life," n.d.

Radio Sermon #1 "Prayer in the Lives of Men"

Radio Sermon #2 "The Emancipator" (11 Feb 1939)

Radio Sermon #3 "A Challenge for Service"

Radio Sermon #4 "What is Your Life?" (6 Feb 1939)

Radio Sermon #5 "My Neighbor"

Radio Sermon #6 "The Lord Hath Need of Them?"

Radio Sermon #7 "A New Deal in Religion"

Radio Sermon #8 "What is Your Life? (II)"

Radio Sermon #9 "Will Christianity Continue to Live or Will it Die?" (8 Feb 1939)

Radio Sermon #10 ""Human Equality"

Radio Sermon #11 "Who is My Neighbor?"

#### CONTAINER

Box1 , Folder 6

Box 1, Folder 7

Box 1, Folder 8

Box 1, Folder 9

Box 1, Folder 10

Box 1, Folder 11

Box 1, Folder 12

Box 1, Folder 13

Box 1, Folder 14

Box 1, Folder 15

Box 1, Folder 16

Box 1, Folder 17

Box 1, Folder 18

Radio Sermon #12 "Jesus Our Refuge"	Box 1, Folder 19
Radio Sermon #13 "Christianity's Challenge to the City" 9 Dec 1935)	Box 1, Folder 20
Radio Sermon #14 "The Emancipator (II)"	Box 1, Folder 21
Radio Sermon #15 "Lift Up Your Eyes"	Box 1, Folder 22
Radio Sermon #16 "Spiritual Power"	Box 1, Folder 23
Radio Sermon #17 "Rescue the Perishing"	Box 1, Folder 24
Radio Sermon #18 "Saving the Youth" (7 Feb 1939)	Box 1, Folder 25
Radio Sermon #19 "The Emancipated" (10 Feb 1939)	Box 1, Folder 26
Radio Sermon #20 "An Invitation and a Promise to Labor"	Box 1, Folder 27
Radio Sermon #21 "Internal and External Evidences of Christianity" (Aug 1937)	Box 1, Folder 28
Radio Sermon #22 "The Unprofitable Servant" (Last Program)	Box 1, Folder 29
Radio Sermon #23 "My Country, My Citizenship, My Flag"	Box 1, Folder 30
Radio Sermon #24 "Human Equality"	Box 1, Folder 31
Radio Sermon #25 "Give, Give, Give" [Incomplete]	Box 1, Folder 32
Radio Sermon #26 "The Perfect Man"	Box 1, Folder 33
Sermon Notes and Outlines, [n.d.]	Box 1, Folder 34
Handouts written by Chaplin (Capt) Skelton [ca.1940s] Handout featuring Poem "Don't Quit" Handout featuring Poem "It is all in the state of mind"	Box 1, Folder 35

Church-Related Materials (1948) Box 1, Folder 36

100th Anniversary Church Bulletin for Barnes United Methodist Church (ca. 1980) Box 1, Folder 37

Christian Sheet Music and Lyrics Box 1, Folder 38

### **Series 3: Visual Materials**

#### CONTENTS

Photograph of Robert E. Skelton in uniform

Photographs of Robert E. Skelton  
"My father" [in uniform with Indiana state insignia]

[Portrait in civilian clothes]

Giving speech at Fort Knox Field House on 22 Sep 1943. Seated behind are Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, Brig. Gen. Stephen G. Henry, Col. N. Butler Briscoe

Founder and First Commander of Tillman H. Harpole American Legion Post 249 [oval-cut group photograph, Skelton in center, holding plaque]

Portrait with inscription: "With best wishes and sincerest affection to the men of Harpole" [oval-cut, Skelton in uniform with Indiana insignia and white belt]

Skelton speaking with group of colored female armed forces at Fort Knox [standing, shaking hands]

#### CONTAINER

OVA Photographs:  
Folder 1

Photographs:  
Folder 1



Skelton Family Photographs  
"Baseball" [Cleo and Robert Skelton]  
"Cleo Holland Skelton" [standing in front of door]

Photographs:  
Folder 2

"Grandma Holland 21 April 1946" [standing in front  
of car carrying purse]

[Unidentified Boy Next to Flowers, Postcard]

[Unidentified Boy In Front of House, Postcard]

"Private Robert E. Skelton Jr." [in uniform]

[Unidentified Young Girl, Sitting]

"Cleo Home Mrs. Mary Holland; Mrs. Mary Jane Hill;  
Cleo, Goldie, Hazel, Bea Holland" [Two women and  
for girls in front of house. Two girls holding dolls]

World War I Photographs  
Unidentified Men, most likely members of the 372nd  
infantry [primarily group photographs of colored  
soldiers and military bands]

Photographs:  
Folder 3

World War I Postcards  
Primarily of unidentified colored soldiers and several  
monuments and buildings in France  
Admission Card for United States Civil Service  
Commission

Photographs:  
Folder 4

Fort Knox Photographs, ca.1940s  
Major Gen. C. L. Scott  
Col. N. B. Briscoe  
Brig. Gen. S.G. Henry  
Unidentified Men

Photographs:  
Folder 5

#### **Series 4: Retirement**

##### CONTENTS

Retirement, 1942–1945

Retirement, 1946

Retirement, 1947

Retirement, 1948

##### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 39

Box 1, Folder 40

Box 1, Folder 41

Box 1, Folder 42

Retirement Miscellaneous [n.d.]  
Pamphlet: Army Regulations No. 40-1025. Records  
and Reports of Sick and Wounded

Box 1, Folder 43

Pamphlet: Public Law 346. An Act to Provide Federal  
Government Aid for the Readjustment in Civilian Life  
of Returning WW II Veterans

Handbook for Servicemen and Servicewomen of  
World War II and Their Dependents, Including Rights  
and Benefits of Veterans of World War I and Their  
Dependents. 79th Congress, 1st Session, House  
Document No.134

Veteran's Legislation. 79th Congress, 1st Session,  
House Document No.136

Veteran's Administration Form P-9 [blank]  
Other Papers

### **Series 5: Artifacts**

#### CONTENTS

(1) 5-lire note (c.1918)

(1) Clergy Fare Certificate Booklet, 1947 Issued by  
Eastern Clergy Bureau. Contains blank Agent  
Coupons. Booklet in envelope addressed to Robert E.  
Skelton, with handwritten note on back.

#### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 44

Box 1, Folder 44