

SUSANAH TARKINGTON PAPERS, 1898-1932

Collection #
M 0411

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Processed by
Charles Latham
29 May 1991

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box (0.3 linear feet)

COLLECTION DATES: 1898-1932

PROVENANCE: Charles Apfelbaum, Rare Books & Collections, 39 Flower Road, Valley Stream, NY 11581; Mrs. Richard Cochran, Indianapolis IN, 7 March 1984

RESTRICTION: None

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RELATED HOLDINGS: M 0274, Booth Tarkington Papers; BV 1553, Booth Tarkington Scrapbook; F 0357-0358, Booth Tarkington; OMB 0024, Booth Tarkington-Susanah Jameson

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 1980.0505, 1984.0306

NOTES: Material from accession number 1980.0505 [M 0411, Box 1, Folder 1] was originally processed as SC 1438

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Susanah Tarkington (1870-1966) was born Susanah Kiefer in Dayton, Ohio. In the 1890s she was married for five

years to Temple A. Robinson of London, then divorced.

In 1912 she married Booth Tarkington, by then well-known as a playwright and novelist. He had previously married and been divorced from Louise Fletcher, daughter of banker Stoughton A. Fletcher. He had had some periods of heavy drinking.

During the years of their marriage, Susanah Tarkington concentrated on running a large household for a husband who worked at home, collected furniture and paintings, and loved company. The Tarkingtons had large homes at 4270 North Meridian Street in Indianapolis and at Kennebunkport in Maine. Both houses were run as semi-baronial establishments, with Mrs. Tarkington presiding graciously and quietly making sure that things ran smoothly. When Mr. Tarkington began to lose his sight, further exertions were required to keep him writing productively. The household usually included Mrs. Tarkington's sister, Louise Kiefer; Mr. Tarkington's secretary, Betty Trotter; and often Miss Trotter's mother. Numerous friends and relatives came and went.

Mrs. Tarkington was given credit for giving her husband a sense of direction and an education in business matters. In one passage in her 1932 diary she remarks that it has been fun handling his investments, which have not been adversely affected by the Depression. She was also an avid and hard-working gardener.

Sources: *Indiana Biographical Series*, Vol. 65 p. 62

Materials in collection

Personal knowledge of processor

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists of six diaries of Mrs. Tarkington, dated 1898, 1913, 1925, 1929, 1931, and 1932. The diaries are only partially completed, and often the entry for one day spreads over several pages. Places are not always given, but can often be supplied from context. There is one folder containing correspondence, notably a letter to Benjamin D. Hitz in 1932, describing (secondhand) the part played by John H. Holliday (Mr. Hitz's father-in-law) and Hautie Jameson in getting *Monsieur Beaucaire* read and published.

The 1898 diary (Box 1 Folder 2), written when she was married to Temple Robinson, is the most nearly complete. It gives details of a trip in the Caribbean, where the Robinsons seem to have had access to the highest circles of British officialdom, and of their return to England.

The diary for 1913 (Box 1 Folder 3) has only a few brief entries. One, for Easter, describes a trip to the cemetery and Booth Tarkington's feelings of guilt for trouble he may have caused his mother during his "terrible" period. There are also a series of entries about the flood which inundated Indianapolis and Dayton in that year.

The diary for 1925 (Box 1 Folder 4) describes travels in Africa and Europe.

The diaries for 1929, 1931, and 1932 (Box 2 Folders 1-3) deal mainly with visits to the Wilmer eye clinic at Johns Hopkins for a series of operations on Mr. Tarkington's eyes. One rather amusing 1932 entry gives Mrs. Tarkington's reactions to an exhibition of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings; she finds the Gauguin paintings sinister, and dreams that night of distorted bathers, crazy landscapes, and bow-legged gazelles; how much she prefers the quiet beauty of her husband's English portraits!

The collection includes a photograph of Miss Dresser's Indianapolis kindergarten, ca. 1895, stored in Visual Collections.

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's [online catalog](#)
2. Click on the "Local Catalog" icon.
3. Search for the collection by its call number, using the letter or letters designation and **four** digits (e.g., M 0715, SC 2234).
4. When you find the collection, go to the "Holdings" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.

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