

The Filson Historical Society

**Norman Kohlhepp, 1892-1986
Papers, 1908-1983**

For information regarding literary and copyright interest for these papers, see the Curator of Special Collections.

Size of Collection:

1 cubic foot

Locator Number:

Mss./A/K79

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Scope and Content Note

Kohlhepp's papers document the military and professional career of this Kentucky-born soldier, engineer, and artist. Includes correspondence from his parents while he attending the University of Cincinnati along with his senior thesis. Collection documents his service in the "Reserve Mallet" (a support unit of the French and American Armies) and as an automotive repair instructor in France with his war memorabilia, notebooks on automotive repair and maps of various sections of France. After his discharge in 1919, collection documents his professional career with financial papers, income tax returns, and work correspondence from the 1920s to the 1940s, regarding a sales job with the General Fireproofing Company and engineering positions with the Charles E. Bedaux Company and Reynolds Metal Company. A 1983 copy of *Beaux Arts* features an article about Kohlhepp and his artwork, but otherwise the collection does not document his work as an artist.

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Biographical Note

Norman Kohlhepp was born in Louisville, Kentucky and attended Manual High School, graduating as a member of the class of 1910. For college, he went to the University of Cincinnati and earned a five year degree in metallurgical engineering. Kohlhepp then entered the workforce, working in Boston as a salesman for the General Fireproofing Company, which sold metal office furniture.

In 1917, Kohlhepp traveled to France, enlisted in the French Army, and served in the “Reserve Mallet” in World War I – a transport unit that was created as part of the French Army but later became part of the United States Army’s Transport Service. In this unit, he delivered supplies to the front lines and was involved in several major campaigns. He was promoted to first lieutenant, and also trained other mechanics during his time in France. Kohlhepp remained in Europe until 1919 when he returned to Camp Taylor and was demobilized from the Army.

After the war, Kohlhepp returned to his former employer (now headquartered in Youngstown, Ohio) through 1923, and then became employed as an engineer for Hererle and Hay in Philadelphia in 1924. From 1925 through 1932, Kohlhepp worked as an engineer for the Charles E. Bedaux Company of Illinois (a scientific management consulting firm with multiple Companies and divisions throughout the world). In the late 1930s, Kohlhepp worked for the *Courier-Journal* and in the early 1940s, began working as an industrial engineer for Reynolds Metal Company, both in Louisville, KY. Kohlhepp may have been employed by the Bedaux Company internationally in the late 1930s to mid 1940s, but his correspondence does not make this clear.

Along with his engineering work in the 1930s, Kohlhepp began to seriously pursue the fine arts. During further visits to France, he founded the American Students and Artists Club in Paris, where he met his first wife, Dorothy. She encouraged his artistic inclinations and Kohlhepp began his studies at the *Académie Colarossi* and *Académie de la Grande Chaumière*. Kohlhepp and his wife also studied with Andre Lhote, the cubist painter. Kohlhepp whole-heartedly extended his support to the Louisville arts community and was active in the Art Center and the Louisville School of Art. His work resides in collections at the University of Louisville, The J. B. Speed Art Museum, The National Museum of American Art and the Smithsonian Institution. He later married Frances Howard, the granddaughter of shipyard founder James Howard. Kohlhepp died in 1986.

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Folder List

Folder 1: Correspondence and other material, 1908-1917.

Letters and post cards from his father and sometimes mother. Letters offer advice about health and encourage hard work in college. His father, William Kohlhepp, was a cigar merchant and was taking turpentine for bowel troubles. Photocopies from the 1910 Manual High School yearbook with Kohlhepp. 1908 report card from Manual High. 1910-1915 account book.

Folder 2: Thesis from the University of Cincinnati, 1915.

“The Effect of Surface Conditions Upon Corrosion” (1915). Includes some supporting articles, diagrams and photographs. The subject is corrosion of iron.

Folder 3: War Memorabilia, 1917-1919.

World War I memorabilia including a certificate of Kohlhepp’s promotion to 2nd lieutenant; a poem titled “The Black Hole of Decize;” a letter from a French girl, a book of stamps to pay French taxes on purchases, a violation of censorship rules, a menu for a company dinner, a theater program, newspaper clippings (one about an American combat ace) and other such material. German money (bills include 3 ein marks, 1 zwei marks, 3 funf marks, 1 zwanzig marks, 1 funfzig marks). Poem with a photograph of Kohlhepp in uniform. Newspaper articles from Boston paper about letters written to his former employer about his time in France, describing artillery attacks and captured German trenches.

Folder 4: Wartime Papers, 1917-1919.

Military papers: American Expeditionary Forces Identity Card (with photo) Passport with photograph, issued 1917; personal report, 1918; forms for pay vouchers, travel papers and receipts. Leave papers, officers’ record book and discharge certificate.

Folder 5: Notebooks on Vehicle Repair.

Two volumes of notes from the automotive class Kohlhepp taught in France during World War I. Includes drawings of various parts of the engine and transmissions for trucks. Notes from Lt. Oliveau’s class on mechanics.

Folder 6: Maps.

Maps of areas in France. Meaux. Montbeliard. Reims. Commercy. Soissons. Nancy (marked with division headquarters and other sites).

Folder 7: Correspondence 1919-1921.

Letters from the General Fireproofing Company. Gives monthly reports of the salesmen in the company and how they finished in the "bonus plan" competition each month.

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Folder List (con't)

Folder 8: Reports made on Manufacturing Plants.

Reports by Kohlhepp about tours of the National Cash Register Company (1916) and the Delco plant (1916) in Ohio. 1922 passport. Plates for printing business cards. Newspaper articles about Kohlhepp's travel to Europe in 1929.

Folder 9: Check book registers, 1919-1945.

Folder 10: Business Correspondence, 1919-1946.

Stock certificates (1919-1928) and correspondence/receipts regarding stock and investments (1920, 1923, 1928, 1945-1946). Correspondence for possible jobs with Charles E. Bedaux Company in US, Iran, and Greece (1932-1939). Empty notebook for "valuable papers" with some handwritten notes on it.

Folder 11: Income Tax Returns and Correspondence, 1920-1943.

Copies of Kohlhepp's tax returns, supporting documentation, and correspondence with the Internal Revenue Service.

Folder 12: Reserve Mallet Newsletters.

Two copies of a reserve Mallet newsletter from 1919. A "Group Robinson, Reserve Mallet" newsletter ca. 1919. Reunion booklets 1936 and 1943.

Folder 13: *Beaux Arts*, Spring 1983.

Article about Kohlhepp in Spring 1983 *Beaux Arts*, A Regional Cultural Arts Quarterly. Notice about Kohlhepp "Fall into Art Exhibit" November 2006.

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Subject Headings

American Field Service
Artists – Kentucky
Automobiles – Maintenance and repair
Bedaux, Charles Eugene, 1886-1944
General Fireproofing Co.
Manual High School (Louisville, Ky.)
Military Maps
Medical care – Kentucky
Metallurgy
Reynolds Metal Company
United States. Army – Handbooks, manuals, etc.
United States. Army –Supplies and stores
United States. Army Transport Service
World War, 1914-1918 – Campaigns – France
World War, 1914-1918 – Equipment and supplies