

The Filson Historical Society

**Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, 1881-1941
Added Papers, 1888-2016**

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

Size of Collection:

1 cubic foot and 2 oversized folders

Locator number:

Mss. A R643b

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Biographical Note

Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881-1941) was born 30 October 1881 in Perryville, the second of eight children, to Mary Elizabeth Brent (1853-1951) and Simpson Roberts (1848-1933). Both her parents worked at one time as teachers in the Kentucky school system, and her father also worked as a civil engineer. When Roberts was young, the family moved to Springfield, where she attended Washington County public schools. She later attended Covington High School in Covington, where she lived with her maternal grandparents.

In 1900, Roberts enrolled in the University of Kentucky but dropped out after only one semester due to poor health. For the next 10 years, Roberts taught school in Springfield, and in 1910 she moved to Colorado for a time to live with her sister.

In 1917, at age 36, Roberts enrolled in the University of Chicago and joined the Chicago Poetry Club, in which she found a strong literary community and lifelong friendships with fellow writers and poets, including Yvor Winters, Glenway Wescott, Maurine Smith, and Janet Lewis. She graduated in 1921 and was awarded the Fiske Prize for a poetry collection that would become her first book, *Under the Tree*. Roberts would go on to write two more volumes of poetry, two collections of short stories, and seven novels, two of which – *The Time of Man* (1926) and *The Great Meadow* (1930) – were contenders for the Pulitzer Prize. She won many more awards, including the O. Henry Memorial Short Story Prize in 1930.

Most of Roberts's stories were set in Kentucky and drew inspiration from Kentucky life and culture. When not writing, Roberts enjoyed weaving on a hand loom. The walls of her family home in Springfield, located at 510 Walnut Street and known as "Elenores," were adorned with many of her own fabric designs. The Filson has a few examples of her weaving in its museum collection.

Roberts struggled with frail health most of her life. In many of her letters she tells of hospital stays and painful skin conditions. In 1936, Roberts was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. Roberts died in 1941 at the age of 60, shortly after publishing her last book, *Not by Strange Gods*. She died in Florida, where she spent her winters during the last years of her life, and she was buried in Springfield.

Roberts is often celebrated as one of Kentucky's great writers. Her work still receives scholarship and critical analysis in classrooms and at the annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference in Springfield, organized by the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. The first conference was held in 1981, at the centenary of Roberts's birth, at Saint Catharine College, which faithfully collected her papers in its library until its closure in 2016.

EMR's Siblings

- Clarence Brent Roberts (1879-1940)
- William Garvin "Will" Roberts (1883-1952)
- Richard Clifford "Dickie" Roberts (1883-1939)
- Charles Rankin Roberts (1886-1977)
- John Douglas "Johnny" Roberts (1888-1969)
- Lewellyn "Lel" Roberts Bernhardt (m. Carl L. Bernhardt of California) (1891-1970)
- Ivor "Kero" Simpson Roberts (1895-1976)

Resources:

<http://emrsociety.com/Biography>

<http://emrsociety.com/Geneology>

<https://carnegiecenterlex.org/kentucky-writers-hall-of-fame/kentucky-writers-hall-of-fame-inductees-2013/elizabeth-maddox-roberts/>

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Scope and Content Note

This collection contains material related to the life and writing of Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881-1941). Roughly half the collection (folders 1-21 and 42-48) is material created during Roberts's lifetime, including documents related to her family, correspondence, and contemporary publications. The rest of the collection is modern material dealing with Roberts's legacy, most having to do with the work of St. Catharine College in Saint Catharine, Kentucky and the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society (folders 22-41).

Folders 1-3 contain some of Roberts's personal papers, most having to do with her education and academic honors.

Folders 4-6 contain papers related to Roberts's family, including a deed of conveyance for land surveyed by Simpson Roberts, WWI letters from Ivor ("Kero") Roberts, and minute books for Springfield religious organizations kept by Mary Elizabeth Brent Roberts.

Folders 7-14 contain Roberts's personal and professional correspondence.

Folders 15-17 contain examples of Roberts's professional writing, including excerpts from magazines and books and sheet music based on Roberts's poems.

Folders 18-21 contain writings about Roberts by her contemporaries, including book reviews in newspapers and other publications, articles about members of her family, and obituaries.

Folders 22-24 contain material mostly related to the centenary of Roberts's birth, which was celebrated at the 1981 Elizabeth Madox Roberts Centenary Conference at St. Catharine College.

Folders 25-32 contain material related to Roberts's legacy through other scholarship and events. This includes newspaper clippings, newsletters, fliers, and correspondence between modern scholars and other devotees of Roberts's work.

Folders 33-35 contain material related to Roberts's estate and the donation of her papers and belongings to St. Catharine College.

Folders 36-41 contain writings about Roberts by modern writers, including biographical sketches, literary analyses, lectures, and teaching guides based on her life and work.

Folders 42-46 contain poetry and stories written by other writers, mostly Roberts's fellow members of The University of Chicago Poetry Club.

Folder 47 (oversized) contains official documents and certificates related to Roberts and her family, including a high school diploma, a certificate from the New York World's Fair, and a Kentucky teaching certificate belonging to Simpson Roberts.

Folder 48 (oversized) contains bound sheet music signed by various members of Roberts's family.

Related collections

- Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, 1881-1941. Papers, 1911-1941 (Ms. A R643a)
- Photograph collection (021PC22)
- A/V collection (uncatalogued)
- Museum collection (2021.14)
 - Includes two handmade pots/ashtrays, one signed "EMR."
 - Includes textiles that Roberts created by hand on her loom.

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Folder List

- Folder 1: Receipts for payments by Roberts to the University of Chicago, 1920
- Folder 2: Items related to Roberts's education and academic honors, 1899-1937
- Folder 3: Bulletin for the 1939 World's Fair
- Folder 4: Papers related to Simpson Roberts, 1918 and n.d.
- Folder 5: WWI correspondence from Ivor Roberts, 1918
- Folder 6: Minute books from Springfield religious organizations, 1888, 1914-1916, and 1928-1931
- Folder 7: Letter from Roberts to her father, 18 May 1920
- Folder 8: Correspondence between Roberts and Wallace Kelly, March 1932-February 1939
- Folder 9: Correspondence between Roberts and Wallace Kelly, March 1939-March 1940
- Folder 10: Correspondence between Wallace Kelly and Marshall Best, February 1939-March 1940 and n.d.
- Folder 11: Miscellaneous correspondence from Roberts to others, 1922-1939
- Folder 12: Miscellaneous correspondence to Roberts from others, 1909-1930
- Folder 13: Miscellaneous correspondence to and from others, 1936 and n.d.
- Folder 14: Photocopies of some correspondence in the collection
- Folder 15: Published writing by Roberts, 1915-1981 and n.d.
- Folder 16: Sheet music by Arthur Allen, 1934
- Folder 17: Sheet music by Ray Green (n.d.) and Fred T. Llewellyn (1921)
- Folder 18: Contemporary newspaper clippings reviewing Roberts's work, 1923-1941
- Folder 19: Contemporary scholarship and reviews of Roberts's work from books and essays, 1930-1941 and n.d.
- Folder 20: Newspaper clippings concerning Roberts's family and personal life, 1921-1959 and n.d.
- Folder 21: Obituaries and death announcements for Roberts, 1941
- Folder 22: Material relating the 1981 Elizabeth Madox Roberts Centenary Conference
- Folder 23: Bound collection of sheet music composed by Douglas Starr, 1981-1984
- Folder 24: Proclamations creating "Elizabeth Madox Roberts Day" and "Elizabeth Madox Roberts Month," 1981, 2006
- Folder 25: Material related to the 1982 reprinting of Roberts's *The Time of Man* and the St. Catharine College conference "The Time of Man Revisited," 1982-1985
- Folder 26: Correspondence related to conferences and modern scholarship, 1981-1996 and n.d.
- Folder 27: Material related to miscellaneous conferences, lectures, and contests, 1984-2007 and n.d.
- Folder 28: Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society newsletters, 2000-2014

Folder 29: Newspaper clippings about Roberts after her lifetime, 1967 to 2013 and n.d.
Folder 30: Papers and correspondence to and from William Slavick, 1981-2013 and n.d.
Folder 31: Papers and correspondence to and from Terry Ward, 1999-2006
Folder 32: Material relating to H.R. Stoneback and his work, 1999-2006 and n.d.
Folder 33: Material related to donations of Roberts material to St. Catharine College, 1983-1994 and n.d.
Folder 34: Material relating to the Roberts estate, 1983-2012 and n.d.
Folder 35: Receipts and notes concerning the purchase books by Walter Ferguson, 1983-1990
Folder 36: Biographical material about Roberts, 1963-2012 and n.d.
Folder 37: Modern scholarship and literary criticism of Roberts's writing, 1981-2002 and n.d.
Folder 38: Teaching guides and school assignments based on Roberts's writing, 1985-1991 and n.d.
Folder 39: Material related to a 1982 lecture given by Sister Marie Francesca Cameron

O:\DIGITAL COLLECTIONS - Reference Room Access\Mss. A R643a - Elizabeth Madox Roberts added papers:

PowerPoint presentation with photographs by Sister Marie Francesca Cameron

Folder 40: Teaching guide for Roberts's *The Time of Man* written by Jane Massey Dionne for the 2014 EMR Society Conference
Folder 41: Teaching guide for Roberts's *Not by Strange Gods* written by Jane Massey Dionne for the 2016 EMR Society Conference
Folder 42: Publications by Roberts's fellow members of the University of Chicago Poetry Club
Folder 43: Unpublished writing by Glenway Wescott sent to Roberts for review, n.d.
Folder 44: Bound volume titled "The Love Story of Gracia and Manuel" by Kate Ray Hayes and Sue W. Ray, 1911
Folder 45: Poetry and stories written by other/unknown writers, n.d.
Folder 46: Church hymnals and sheet music catalogs collected by Roberts, 1896-1907 and n.d.

Oversized

Folder 47: Documents and certificates related to Roberts and her family, 1900, 1919, and 1939; poster advertising the EMR Centenary Conference, 1981
Folder 48: Sheet music belonging to members of Roberts's family, 1864-1916 and n.d.

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Subject Headings

Authors – Kentucky.
Eczema.
Film adaptations.
Kelly, Wallace, 1910-1988.
Literature – Kentucky.
Literature – Study and teaching.
Litsey, Sarah, 1903-
Lyric writing (Popular music)
Motion pictures and literature.
New York World's Fair (1939-1940 : New York, N.Y.)
Novelists, American.
Photography.
Poetry – Kentucky.
Protestant churches – Missions – History – 20th century.
Roberts, Harrison Simpson, 1848-1933.
Roberts, Ivor Simpson, 1895-1976.
Roberts, Mary Elizabeth Brent, 1853-1951.
St. Catharine College (Saint Catharine, Ky.)
Sheet music.
Skin – Diseases.
Slavick, William, 1921-
Springfield (Ky.)
Stoneback, Harry Robert, 1941-
University of Chicago.
Ward, Terry, 1944-2008.
Wescott, Glenway, 1901-1987.
Women in literature.
Women in missionary work – United States – History – 20th century.
World War, 1914-1918.