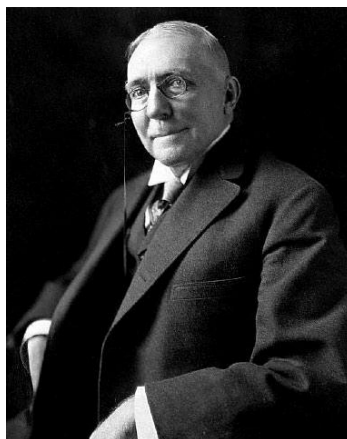


PURDUE

UNIVERSITY



http://www.crosswordbebop.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/james_whitcomb_riley.jpg

INVENTORY TO THE COLLECTION ON JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY, 1891-1951

**Purdue University Libraries
Virginia Kelly Karnes Archives and Special Collections
Research Center
504 West State Street
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-2058
(765) 494-2839**

<http://www.lib.purdue.edu/spcol>

© 2010 Purdue University Libraries. All rights reserved.

Revised: May 5, 2010

Compiled By: Mary A. Segó

Descriptive Summary

Creator Information	Riley, James Whitcomb, 1849-1916
Title	The Collection on James Whitcomb Riley
Collection Identifier	MSP 52
Date Span	1891-1951
Abstract	Three collections of letters relating to James Whitcomb Riley, along with six booklets and miscellaneous papers.
Extent	0.2 cubic (1 mss box)
Finding Aid Author	Mary A. Sego
Languages	English
Repository	Virginia Kelly Karnes Archives and Special Collections Research Center, Purdue University Libraries

Administrative Information

Location Information:	ASC
Access Restrictions:	Collection is open for research.
Acquisition Information:	Purchased from Charles Apfelbaum, Rare Manuscripts and Archives in 2006.
Accession Number:	20061218
Preferred Citation:	MSP 52, Collection on James Whitcomb Riley, Karnes Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries

Subjects and Genres

Persons

Riley, James Whitcomb, 1849-1916

Young, Marguerite, 1908-1995

Form and Genre Types

Letters (Correspondence)

Clippings (information artifacts)

Personal papers

Poetry

Biography of James Whitcomb Riley

James Whitcomb Riley was born in a log cabin on October 7, 1849 in the little village of Greenfield, fast in the lap of Indiana's farmland but then still hidden in primitive oak and poplar forest. The Main Street of the village was the planked National Road; a highway that lured American pioneers along its fennel rimmed way towards California and the West. Riley's father was a frontier lawyer and politician who named his second son after an Indiana governor, James Whitcomb. His mother wrote poetry as well as baked in a hearth oven and raised a growing nest of children. Riley grew up among simple living, kindly people.

As a boy Riley was slender and retiring noted mainly for his ingenuity and pranks. Early in his youth, his log cabin home was replaced by a large two-storied house with bright green shutters. This home is now the shrine operated by Greenfield's Riley Old Home Society open to visitors from throughout the world.

Riley's parents feared he was not going to amount to anything. He simply could not learn history or mathematics. Once when a childhood teacher asked him where Christopher Columbus sailed on his second voyage, Riley answered he didn't know where he went on the first one. A teacher once moaned, "He doesn't know which is more -twice ten or twice eternity."

Riley's best poems recollect his childhood and youth in Greenfield. He was a singer in words of these subjects...He was drawn to Hoosier characters such as "The Raggedy Man," a hired hand who told the boy of the "Squidgicum-Squees 'at swallows the'selves." He and his brother trailed the country dirt roads "Out to Old Aunt Mary's." The little village was a melting pot of American folks from many national homelands. Riley's own parents had Hoosier Deutsch blood and out of the depth of sorrow Riley could speak their dialect to mourn "Dot Leettle Boy of Mine." Riley was sometimes called a "dialect singer" because he mastered the most telling expressions of those he heard. "Orphant Annie" told him tales he remembered all his life about wunks who lived in the ground and came out at night to take on innumerable forms, goblins who could interchange their bodily limbs, and fairies who lived under the stairs and left to make snowflakes and such.

Riley attempted to study the law and become a lawyer as his father wished but he could not apply himself to law books. His mind was a-flutter with romance with Nellie Millikan and activities of the youth of his hometown. In his mind came the words of "An Old Sweetheart of Mine." Then he wandered the American Middle West as a sign painter.

He simply could not settle down. Sometimes he traveled with a "Miracle Medicine Show" and garnered crowds for a talk by a medicine hawker with songs played on violin, banjo or guitar. Drama was another of his interests. He often played roles of those he had seen in his travels and mimicked their speech.

Entertainment proved to be his forte. Riley's first published poems were written for newspapers. Although Riley's pieces were picked up from one newspaper to the next and were much copied around the country, Riley felt his reputation as a poet had no chance

because he came from the American "frontier" Midwest and not the East. To prove his point Riley wrote a hoax poem called "Leonanie" said to have been written by Edgar Allan Poe. The poem was immediately reproduced in newspapers with great fanfare. His point was made when James Whitcomb Riley was exposed as the author. Then Riley became very adept at presenting his poems on stage. In fact Riley's great popularity first arose from his performances on the Lyceum Circuit. Here he traveled around the country in every large metropolis reciting his increasingly popular poems reflecting his Hoosier youth.

Later in life Riley's poems were reproduced in beautifully illustrated books which attracted national and international readership. The royalties from these books enriched Riley to the point where he became the wealthiest writer of his time. Riley became not only "The Hoosier Poet" but also America's "Children's Poet." The child in us all was reflected in his work. In his fifties Riley suffered a stroke that paralyzed his left side and he kept mostly to his Indianapolis "Lockerbie Street" home. His life drew to a close a week after his last visit to his hometown of Greenfield. He had returned there for the funeral of a boyhood friend, Almond Keefer, and had commented, "It will not be long until the rest of the old crowd will be sleeping beside him." His own death of a stroke fell on July 22, 1916.

President Woodrow Wilson sent a note of sorrow to Riley's family upon his death which expressed the feeling of the whole country: "With his departure a notable figure passes out of the nation's life; a man who imparted joyful pleasure and a thoughtful view of many things that other men would have missed."

Source:

Retrieved May 5, 2010 from http://www.jameswhitcombriley.com/riley_links.htm

Collection Description

Scope

The Collection on James Whitcomb Riley (1891-1951; 0.2 cubic feet) consists of a group of four letters written by James Whitcomb Riley: one autographed, signed letter to fellow poet Henry Abbey; and a group of three autographed, signed letters, all to Mrs. Anna Smith Brown of Indianapolis, all in regards to “an old lisping jingle.” There are six letters written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne (Riley’s niece) in Indianapolis. These long letters are about her writings, a novel, and a biography of James Whitcomb Riley, which was to be published by William Sloane as a volume of the American Men of Letters Series. There is a four page letter written by Lora L. Luce to Mary R. Payne (Riley’s sister) asking about “The Passing of the Backhouse,” with a group of five booklets related to this poem. The collection is organized by letters’ author and grouped as received.

Descriptive Rules

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Processing Information

All materials have been housed in polyester sleeves, acid-free folders, and acid-free boxes. The letters are grouped, as they were received. Each folder is in chronological order.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

(1 manuscript box)

Folder 1 *Letters Written by James Whitcomb Riley, 1891-1901*

Item

1. Letter written by James Whitcomb Riley to fellow poet, Henry Abbey, January 19, 1891
2. Letter written by James Whitcomb Riley to Mrs. Anna S. Brown, November 20, 1892
3. Letter written by James Whitcomb Riley to Mrs. Anna Smith Brown, January 22, 1900
4. Letter written by James Whitcomb Riley to Mrs. Anna S. Brown, December 9, 1901
[All of the letters written to Mrs. Anna S. Brown pertain to “the old lisping jingle.”]

Folder 2 *Letters Written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne (Riley’s Niece), 1949-1951*

Item

1. Letter written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne, October 19, 1949
2. Letter written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne, December 26, 1949
3. Letter written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne, January 19, 1950
4. Letter written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne, June 12, 1950
5. Letter written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne, June 16, 1950
6. Letter written by Marguerite Young to Miss Lesley Payne, November 24, 1950
[These long letters are about her writings, a novel, and a biography of James Whitcomb Riley.]
7. Two short notes addressed to “Dear Lesley”, circa 1950
8. Two sheets of notations on Riley and miscellaneous subjects, 1950
9. Western Union Telegram sent to Lesley Payne, “Roses Received Ever So Lovely Hope Your James Books Arrived, Marguerite,” March 11. 1951
10. “Seeks Material On Hoosier Poet” *To the Editor of the Star*, no publication information available, undated
11. Two small sheets of notations, undated

Folder 3 *Letter Written by Nora L. Luce to Mary R. Payne (Riley’s Sister), “The Passing of the Backhouse,” and Related Booklets, 1929-1935*

Item

1. Sale, (Chic) Charles. (1929). *The Specialist*. St. Louis, Missouri: Specialist Publishing Company.
2. Sale, (Chic) Charles. (1930). *I’ll Tell You Why*. St. Louis, Missouri: Specialist Publishing Company.

3. Sale, (Chic) Charles. (1930). *At the Sign of the "Liberty Bell."* Oil City, Pennsylvania: The Penzoil Company.
4. Letter written by Nora L. Luce to Mary R. Payne (Riley's sister), January 20, 1931
[letter asks Payne if Riley wrote "The Passing of the Backhouse"]
5. Greer, William Royal. (1935). *Gems of American Architecture.* Indianapolis, Indiana: State Machinery Company, Incorporated.
6. Two copies of James Whitcomb Riley's, "The Passing of the Backhouse", undated
7. Potts, Phil. (no date). *The Country Plumber.* Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Country Press, Incorporated.
8. Envelope from The Outhouse Inn, undated
9. Card, "Here's Elmer! The Only Guy in the Place That Knows What He's Doin,'" undated
10. "Little Benny's Notebook," by Lee Pape, newspaper clipping, no publication information, undated