Alexander L. Crosby papers, 1921-1980

Overview of the Collection

Creator  Crosby, Alexander L.
Title  Alexander L. Crosby papers
Dates  1921-1980 (inclusive)
1921 1980
Quantity  30.5 linear feet, (59 containers, 1 package)
Collection Number  Coll 013
Summary  Alexander L. Crosby (1906-1980) was a journalist, editor, author of children's books and a political activist. Crosby was involved in activist causes such as housing for the poor, human rights and the Vietnam War. He was involved with leftwing activism, and corresponded with other liberals such as Alger Hiss, Leonard Boudin, James Aronson and Scott Nearing. The collection contains correspondence, manuscripts, articles and files on subjects of interest to Crosby.

Repository  University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives.
Access Restrictions  Collection is open to the public. Collection must be used in Special Collections and University Archives Reading Room. Collection or parts of collection may be stored offsite. Please contact Special Collections and University Archives in advance of your visit to allow for transportation time.

Additional Reference  See the Current Collection Guide for detailed description and requesting options.
Languages  English
Sponsor  Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Historical Note

Alexander L. Crosby (1906-1980) divided his working life into three segments: newspaperman, 1929-1942; pamphlet writer and editor, 1942-1959; and author of children's books, 1959-1980. Tying his working life together was a common thread--an insatiable need to express himself. This is shown through his published writings and his multitudinous correspondence.

Crosby's energy also found an outlet in political activism. His activism led him to be fired from his first newspaper job for attempting to organize a unit of the Newspaper Guild, the journalists' labor union. Further activism took Crosby into fields as diverse as housing for the poor, human rights, and the Vietnam War. He often joined with other activists of the left, such as Alger Hiss, Leonard Boudin,
James Aronson, and Scott Nearing. The correspondence with these well-known "leftists" are a major strength of this collection.

Crosby became executive director of the National Housing Conference from 1942-1944, and was a free-lance writer of children's books and pamphlets from 1944-1980. His books include The Rio Grande and Steamboat Up the Colorado, which were included in Scientific American's list of best children's books of the year. Crosby died January 31, 1980, in Quakertown, Pennsylvania.

A fairly detailed biographical sketch of Alexander Crosby can be found in Box 19 of this collection, folder number 4, entitled "Biography and obituary."

Content Description

The Alexander L. Crosby Papers fill 55 boxes and consist largely of the series: correspondence, subject files, manuscripts, diaries, material relating to Scott Nearing's autobiography, and printed matter.

The first 16 boxes of the collection contain correspondence, which as been arranged alphabetically. Within each folder the letters are filed in reverse chronological order. Noted correspondents include artist Abe Ajay, James Aronson, Leonard Boudin, Alger Hiss, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and E.B. White (in "Irascible letter file in the subject files.). When Crosby started The Paterson Press in 1935, he solicited letters of approval fro this new journalistic venture. The Paterson Press was a cooperative newspaper owned by 3,000 individuals and 100 organizations. Letters of encouragement flooded Crosby's desk from such noted "Liberal-radicals" as Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, Malcolm Crowley, and Max Lerner.

The next series is 22 boxes of subject files consisting of 340 topics arranged alphabetically. The topics are as diverse as Federal Writers Project to Birds; Emergency Civil Liberties Union to Trains. Particularly interesting is the file title, "Editorials: Letters to the Editor," which reveals Crosby's wide range of opinions. Occasionally short manuscripts and small amounts of printed matter have been left in a subject file so that it will remain cohesive. If material has been removed to other parts of the collection (for example, printed matter or manuscripts) a note has been left indicating where this material can be found.

Four boxes of manuscripts follow the subject files. The manuscripts are of articles, pamphlets and books and have been arranged chronologically, ranging from miscellaneous writing before 1935 to 1979. The manuscript for Scott Nearing's autobiography is filed with the other Nearing material.

Crosby's diaries fill 3 boxes. The diaries are very detailed when entries exist. Unfortunately there are many gaps due to lost diaries and/or Crosby's inclination to set aside his journals for months or years at a time. Inclusive dates for the diaries are 1921-1980, with the largest gap being 1939-1955.

Of special interest are two boxes dealing with the Scott Nearing autobiography, which Crosby was asked to edit. This part of the collection was received prior to the bulk of the Crosby Papers. They have now bee incorporated, pulling together all the Nearing-related material in this section. It contains correspondence, Crosby's notes, and several drafts of the autobiography. Nearing could not put up with Crosby's radical editing and eventually would change publishers and publish a "rougher," if more Nearing-styled book.

Following are two boxes, which hold Crosby's work as a pamphlet and folder editor/writer/designer. The pamphlets are arranged in alphabetical groupings. Copies of The Paterson Press, which Crosby edited, have been separated from this section and put in an oversize package at the end of the collection. Crosby's books are in boxes 51 and 52 and are arranged bin chronological order.

The collection concludes with three boxes of collected articles by Crosby, grouped by subjects such as Arts and Letters, Education, Housing, Libraries, Nature and Science, Newspaper Guild, Politics, Railroads, and Travel.

Administrative Information

Detailed Description of the Collection

Description

Guide to the Alexander L. Crosby papers

Names and Subjects

**Subject Terms** :
Authors, American--20th century
Journalists--Labor unions
Journalists--United States
Political activists--United States
Radicalism--United States

**Personal Names** :
Ajay, Abe
Aronson, James
Boudin, Leonard, 1912-1989
Hiss, Alger
Nearing, Scott, 1883-1983
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945
White, E. B. (Elwyn Brooks), 1899-1985

**Form or Genre Terms** :
Autobiographies

Finding aid prepared by Scott Martell
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