Federal Writers' Project of Oregon Soldiers of the Air! Radio Scripts, 1941

Overview of the Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creator</th>
<th>Federal Writers’ Project (Or.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Federal Writers' Project of Oregon <em>Soldiers of the Air!</em> Radio Scripts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>1941 (inclusive)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1941 1941</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>0.10 cubic feet, (1 box)</td>
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<td>Collection Number</td>
<td>MSS SoldiersAir</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>The Federal Writers Project of Oregon <em>Soldiers of the Air!</em> Radio Scripts comprises 24 scripts for the radio program, <em>Soldiers of the Air!</em> The Federal Writers Project was a program of the Works Progress Administration, an employment and infrastructure agency created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935 at the height of the Great Depression. Dating from April to November 1941, and written by Claire Churchill of the Oregon Writers' Project, the scripts aired an average of once per week and were broadcast on radio station KOIN out of Portland, Oregon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repository</td>
<td>Oregon State University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives Research Center</td>
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<td>Special Collections and Archives Research Center</td>
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<td>121 The Valley Library</td>
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<td>Oregon State University</td>
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<td>Corvallis OR</td>
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<td>97331-4501</td>
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<td>Telephone: 541-737-2075</td>
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<td>Fax: 541-737-8674</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:sarcast@oregonstate.edu">sarcast@oregonstate.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Restrictions</td>
<td>Collection is open for research.</td>
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<td>Languages</td>
<td>English</td>
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Historical Note

Established May 6, 1935 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s $5 billion New Deal, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was an agency established to provide work for the roughly 11 million Americans left unemployed by the Great Depression. In the eight years it operated, the WPA put over 8.5 million Americans to work, building more than 4,000 new school buildings, 130 new hospitals, 29,000 bridges, and 9,000 miles of storm drains and sewer lines.

The primary aim of the WPA – which in 1939 was renamed the Work Projects Administration – was to secure employment for “unskilled men” through public works and infrastructure projects. Yet President Roosevelt, believing that those “less suited” to the manual labor of other WPA projects – e.g. artists, musicians, actors, and writers – had an equal right to employment, initiated Federal Project Number One as part of the WPA in the summer of 1935. Colloquially referred to as Federal One, it included
the Federal Theater Project, the Federal Writers’ Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Art Project, and the Historical Records Survey. Of the WPA’s total budget, $27 million was set aside for these projects; at their height, arts programs employed as many as 40,000 artists, musicians, actors, and writers.

Federal funding for the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) specifically was approved in June 1935, and Henry Alsberg – lawyer, editorial writer, foreign correspondent, and playwright – was chosen as the program’s national director. From its establishment in 1935 to its closure in 1943, the FWP had between 4,000 and 6,500 writers on its payroll, including such luminaries as John Steinbeck, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Studs Terkel. Though FWP writers conducted projects in the field, gathering oral histories and collecting local folklore, the most well-known product of the Federal Writers’ Project was the American Guide Series. The series, which served as both guidebook and almanac, combined travel information with essays on geography, architecture, history and commerce. Guides were created for every U.S. state and territory (except Hawaii), as well as major cities, including Washington D.C., New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Philadelphia; for several major highways (U.S. 1 and the Oregon Trail); and for select towns, villages, and counties across the United States.

In Oregon, Harold L. Davis – a native of Douglas County, Oregon, and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Honey in the Horn* – was originally suggested as the state’s first Writers’ Project Director. Ultimately, however, Alfred Powers – Dean of the General Extension Division of Education for the University of Oregon, and author of the *History of Oregon Literature* – was selected. In Oregon, between 20 and 54 writers, administrators, and staff were employed by the Writers’ Project. In addition to the State Guide, writers in the Oregon program worked on city histories, historical biographies, and news articles. Information about historical records were gathered as part of the Historical Records Survey, and architectural drawings were drafted for historical structures as part of the Historical American Building Survey (HABS).

In October 1937 Powers resigned, and J.V. Edmonds, journalist and Oregon WPA Assistant for Women’s and Professional Projects, took over as Director, a position he held until 1942. Having readied the Oregon Guide for press by late 1939, the same year that federal funding for the program was cut, Edmonds urged for a shift in tone of the products of the Oregon Writers’ Project (OWP). Chambers of Commerce, he argued, should be left to “cover their own dunghills with rosewater”; his writers should “go to town where the sweat and smoke and strain is.” The shift in tone Edmonds had called for in 1939 came to fruition in the early 1940s, as the Oregon Writers’ Project focused its energy on supporting the war effort through thinly-veiled propaganda pieces.

Though done without official approval from the Writers’ Project national office at first, these wartime projects were eventually authorized for all state Writers’ Project offices by January 1942. In June 1940, the OWP published one of the first of these new projects, a brochure on the state’s wartime resources. The next year saw the publication of radio scripts and press releases for the Army and Navy. Among these was the popular *Soldiers of the Air!* series. Claire Churchill, who had served as Assistant Editor and Field Supervisor on the writing of the Oregon Guide, was the primary author of this radio series.

The broadcast of the first season of *Soldiers of the Air!* resulted in record enlistment numbers, according to the Army recruiting office in Portland. The program was so well received, in fact, that soon other states expressed interest in the program; this success lead to a second season of *Soldiers of the Air!* and to three subsequent series: *Keep ‘Em Flying* in August 1941, *The Dinners’ On You* in September 1941, and *Air Base Skits* in late 1941.

As the United States moved ever closer to ending its ostensible neutrality in World War II, the country could ill-afford programs such as the Federal Writers Project, and many of the more skilled writers had already been drawn away in support of the war effort. In July 1941, Oregon Writers’ Project staff

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was cut from fifty to twenty-five. In December 1942, the records of the Oregon Writers' Project were delivered to the State Library at Salem, effectively ending the program. Three months later, the national writers' office was closed as well.

[Sources for this biographical note include the Library of Congress, the Oregon Secretary of State, the Oregon Encyclopedia, and Thomas Ptacek's The Federal Writers' Project in Oregon, 1935-1942: a case study.]

Content Description

The Federal Writers' Project of Oregon Soldiers of the Air! Radio Scripts are comprised of twenty-four radio scripts written by Claire Churchill of the Oregon Writers' Project, a branch of the Work Projects Administration-run Federal One project to provide economic relief to writers, artists, actors and musicians during the Great Depression (1929-1941).

Dating from April to November 1941, the scripts aired an average of once per week. The collection includes scripts from the following dates: April 22, 1942; April 29, 1941; May 6, 1941; May 13, 1941; May 20, 1941; June 10, 1941; June 17, 1941; June 24, 1941; July 1, 1941; July 9, 1941; July 16, 1941; July 23, 1941; July 30, 1941; August 6, 1941; September 1, 1941; September 8, 1941; September 15, 1941; September 22, 1941; September 29, 1941; October 6, 1941; October 27, 1941; November 10, 1941; November 17, 1941; November 24, 1941.

The first season features two enlisted men, Bill “Butch” Harris, an “old-timer of the foreign service,” and a “wet-behind-the-ears” new recruit, Larry Foster. The thirteen scripts that comprise the first season follow Foster as he navigates the “rituals” of enlisting, including: his physical examination at the barracks in Vancouver, Washington, and his experiences at the Reception Center at Fort Lewis; his time at the Air Corps Technological School at Chanute Field in Illinois; his promotion to Crew Chief and the additional, attendant duties; and finally becoming a pilot after training at the Palo Alto Training Field in California and at Randolph and Kelly Fields in Texas. In the first season, each program’s script concludes with a brief presentation by an enlisted Army or recruitment officer.

By the first episode of the second season, aired July 23, 1941, Larry had been promoted to sergeant and transferred to a U.S. Army Recruiting Service office. The format of the episodes changes with this new season. In each episode, a potential recruit visits Harris, and Harris spends the episode convincing them their interests align with specific positions in the Army.

While each episode approaches a different aspect of Army life, several recurrent themes act as through lines across the two seasons. First, in several instances Larry frames his enlistment as a civic service, stating he feels he has become part of something larger and greater than himself — “our great national protective service that’s going to keep our homes as we want them to be.” Yet, joining the Army is frequently represented as as much a benefit to the recruit as to the country; soldiers aren’t just “men with guns,” after all, but “trained technicians or specialists,” who have learned skills valuable in the “outside world.” Variations on this idea occur across both seasons of the series, as do mentions of the many “perks” of Army life, including paid room and board, medical attention, free clothing, and travel to foreign countries. With the unemployment and desperation of the Great Depression still fresh in their minds, this would have been a draw for many young men, and several of the characters in the second season of the series discuss this explicitly.

Use of the Collection

Federal Writers' Project of Oregon Soldiers of the Air! Radio Scripts, 1941
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv84329
Preferred Citation

Federal Writers' Project of Oregon *Soldiers of the Air!* Radio Scripts (MSS SoldiersAir), Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

The radio scripts in this collection are arranged chronologically by date.

Acquisition Information

Original acquisition source and date are unknown. These materials were transferred to the Special Collections and Archives Research Center from main Valley Library holdings in 2019.

Related Materials

SCARC holdings contain many collections related to World War II. Collections relating to recruiting, enlistment, and propaganda include the World War II Poster Collection (MSS WW2Posters) and the World War II Scrapbooks (MSS WW2Scrapbooks), and the World War II Newsmaps (MAPS Newsmap). Collections relating to soldiers' personal experiences during the war include the Doris Hageman Whalen Scrapbooks (MSS Whalen), the Rodney Waldron Papers (MSS Waldron), the Wesley Ross Memoir of World War II (MSS RossW), the Ben A. Newell Papers (MSS Newell), and the Oregon State Yank Collection (MSS Yank).

Additional collections documenting radio programs and/or stations include the KOAC Records (RG 015), the KOAC Photographs (P 207), the Inspiration Dissemination (Student Radio Show) Sound Recordings (MSS Inspiration), the Mildred and Frank Miles Scrapbook of the Santo Tomas Internment Camp (MSS Miles), the Arthur H. Sasser Collection (MSS Sasser), and the Barney Keep Papers (MSS Keep).

Additional materials created and/or collected by Alfred Powers of the Oregon Writers' Project can be found in the Alfred Powers Papers, held by the Oregon Historical Society. The Walter Nelson Morey Papers and the Randall V. Mills Papers at the Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Oregon contain correspondence between Powers and the record creators.

Additional materials relating to Claire Churchill's wartime work can be found in the Mason Y. Warner papers, held by the University of Oregon's Special Collections and University Archives.

Names and Subjects

**Subject Terms :**
- Recruiting and enlistment.
- World War, 1939-1945
- World War, 1939-1945--Propaganda.

**Corporate Names :**
- Federal Writers' Project (Or.)
- United States. Army