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Some Richards Manuscripts and Correspondence

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Through the magnanimity of Philo Calhoun, Colby is gradually acquiring first editions of each of Mrs. Richards’ hundred and three separately published titles. These are augmented by over one hundred letters and manuscripts in the files of the Edwin Arlington Robinson Room, largely contributed by Mrs. Ruth Nivison and Mr. Calhoun. Fifty-three are letters written by L.E.R. to various persons, twenty-six written to her, six photocopies of letters to her by E.A.R., and typed excerpts from some twenty others by the poet she befriended in Gardiner. The manuscripts fall into four categories: three are holographs, eight typescripts, one booklength work both typed and handwritten, and one page of corrected proof.

Following is a brief descriptive list of Colby’s holdings.

MANUSCRIPTS

“A Valentine,” holograph, 3 verses, signed, 1 p.
“Harold, Harold,” holograph, 2 verses, signed, 1 p.

To Harold T. Pulsifer. Second stanza starts:

“Harold, Harold,
So double-barreled
Is my affection, dear Poet, for you.”


“From Holy Writ,” typescript, 8 verses, 2 pp.

E.A.R., autograph and typescript, includes several versions of the text published by Harvard University Press in 1936.
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Profusely corrected, with insertions of additional holograph sheets and typewritten notes, 116 pp.  
“Alexander,” page proof, with corrections, 1 p.

CORRESPONDENCE

To: John Kendrick Bangs, January 19, 1912; 2 pp.  
Everyone is looking forward to hearing him. The Richards family claims the added pleasure of his spending the night at their house.  
“Perhaps — weather and roads permitting — you will like a sleighride; perhaps you share the views of B. Franklin.”

To: John Kendrick Bangs, February 1, 1912; 3 pp.  
Glad that this Good Guest enjoyed his visit, for they are now enjoying his delightful poems, “all very happyfying.”  
“Emerson says that as we grow older we should try to make one new friend each year; will you be ours for this year?”

From: Governor Louis J. Brann, May 18, 1935; 1 p.  
Considers it a privilege to have been present at the E.A.R. memorial ceremonies at Gardiner.  
Thought them very impressive.

To: Miss Brown, April 25, 1913; 2 pp.  
Apologizes for having misplaced her story.  
“A truly penitent sinner addresses you, and craves forgiveness.”  
Recommends In My Nursery, The Hurdy-Gurdy, and The Piccolo to her.

To: N. R. Campbell, August 2, 1928; postcard.  
Corrects a misimpression about her line of Ward ancestry.

From: Mabel Daniels, July 21, 1935; 3 pp.  
E.A.R. was one of her closest friends and often spoke to her of L.E.R.  She thinks L.E.R.’s tribute to E.A.R. is “about the best that has been written about him.”  
Refers to her letters to the New York Times and the Boston Herald about E.A.R.’s “attitude towards music in general.”
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From: Henry E. Dunnack, May 1, 1935; 1 p.
Accepts the invitation to E.A.R. memorial meeting but wishes to be excused from reading “The Master.” Prefers to come as “a mourner at the bier of one whom I loved and have lost awhile.”

To: John S. Dwight, December 5, n.y.; 2 pp.
Describes a little girl’s drowning by breaking through the ice in a pond. Asks him to get in touch with the girl’s mother.

To: John S. Dwight, December 19, n.y.; 2 pp.
Thanks him for his verses, “sweet and tender, and full of deep feeling; and withal cheerful and serene.”
The little girl’s mother was gratified to hear from him.

To: John S. Dwight, May 2, n.y.; 2 pp.
The father of the drowned child has died of inflammation of the spinal cord. The mother is now triply bereft: of child, of husband, and of father. She is left with small means and six children, three of which are having scarlet fever. “It seems almost wicked for us all to be so well and happy as we are.”

To: John S. Dwight, July 28, n.y.; 2 pp.
The widow and family are now in a cramped but pretty and comfortable house. His “beautiful letter” has given the mother much pleasure. He is urged to visit them.

Acknowledges her mistake about the identity of “Arvia,” a mistake which “originated many years ago” through E.A.R.’s penchant for “fictitious names in his portrait-poems (a few, though only a few, of which have a half or quarter foundation in some actual person).”

To: Dana Estes, June 14, 1892; 2 pp.
Is sending him When I Was Your Age, and will probably make some additions to the chapter on her father.

To: Dana Estes, May 10, 1900; 3 pp.
Thanks him for two souvenirs de voyage: a sumptuous oriental cushion and a photograph of himself with dromedary. “The depressed look of the Sphinx” seems to say,
"These people come from Boston! what will they say to my having no nose?"

To: Dr. G. M. Fernald, December 17, 1915; 1 p.

Thanks him for pamphlets and papers on prison reform. Thinks of him as "one of the light-bringers." Hopes his words "will bear some fruit in Maine."

From: Parker Fillmore, August 4, 1935; 1 p.

Detailed account of his participation in a Woman's Club meeting which consisted of an appreciation of the life and work of Wagner, followed by a reading of E.A.R.'s poems by "a little old woman, obviously a grandmother many times," and his own personal reminiscences of E.A.R. at Peterborough and New York. E.A.R. "didn't like Club women as such, but he would have liked these women."

From: Alice S. Gibson, August 21, 1936; 1 p.

Claims distant relationship to Edward [sic] Arlington Robinson and encloses a poem of twenty-one lines about an incident in the poet's childhood.

To: Mary D. Herrick, May 16, 1942; postcard.

Consents to write "something" for the July Bulletin of the Maine Library Association.


As one of E.A.R.'s executors, he is appalled by the desire of so many people to write about the recently deceased poet, publish his letters, etc. "I can see that it is a very complicated situation and requires much thought and tact! My chief job, I believe, will be, so far as possible to slow up all activities in that direction so that the matter is left safe for a dignified, definitive 'Life.'"


Is eager to see her "Robinson in Gardiner." Thinks the New York Times Book Review "would be a far better medium than the more respectful but very much limited Yale Review."


In respect to several plans to publish E.A.R. letters, he is "just a little sceptical" that the poet would have given
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"any ‘authorization’ to any one person or group of persons to speak for him."

The editor of the New York Herald-Tribune Books is interested in "Robinson in Gardiner" and would like to run it in about three weeks.


Refers to Mrs. August Belmont's readings of Tristram in a theatre and some of E.A.R.'s shorter poems over the radio.

From: Lewis M. Isaacs, May 9, 1935; 2 pp.

Withholds permission to say that her booklet on E.A.R. is printed "with the consent of the executors" in order to avoid the appearance of "unfair discrimination" against proposed publications of E.A.R.'s letters which the executors do not approve.

Refers to the memorial exhibit of E.A.R.'s books and manuscripts at Yale Library.

From: Lewis M. Isaacs, October 8, 1935; 1 p.

Has regretfully told Mr. Putnam of Macmillan's that her E.A.R. article would not sell as a book "on account of its lack of physical bulk." Suggests a privately printed monograph.

E.A.R. thought "a great deal of [Professor Cestre], and was well pleased with Cestre's volume on his poetry."

To: James Keddie, November 6, 1937; postcard.

Is sending "The Birds' Christmas," a children's poem of 32 lines. Had no idea he used material of this kind.

To: James Keddie, February 12, 1938; 1 p.

Encloses Chapter II of Children's Reading, dealing "with the age between ten and twelve."

An attached note informs him that Mrs. Richards "is not feeling very well today, but will write within a day or two."

To: James Keddie, July 21, 1938; 1 p.

Is recovering strength and enjoying herself in a quiet way by the sea at Roscahegan.

"I do not know what is meant by Capt. January's being in 'two states.'"
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To: James Keddie, November 3, 1939; 2 pp.

Commiserates him on some shabby treatment at the hands of publishers. "The minutiae of publishers' ethics are very dim in my mind."

Has "a truly delightful letter from Mr. Theodore Roosevelt, whose great and beloved father used to read my rhymes and stories to his children."

"I am nearly ninety, and doubt if I do more than pick up various threads, dropped during the last year of uncertain health. . . . The time goes only too quickly, and is full of good and lovely things."

To: James Keddie, November 18, 1940; 1 p.

Attached is a typescript of "The Jog-Trot Muse," dated November 1934. She wonders if it is "the kind of thing" he wants. Has no prose available just now.

To: James Keddie, December 10, 1940; 1 p.

Attached is a typescript of "From Holy Writ." "It is rough and ready, like all my verses. I make, as you know, no pretense of being a poet."

From: Louis V. Ledoux, August 27, 1935; 1 p.

Discusses her E.A.R. book. "Although Robinson and I were quite closely in touch from 1906 until his death my knowledge of his earlier days in Gardiner is very limited."


Having read her E.A.R. manuscript, he feels that she should shorten it further. It would then make "a most interesting and useful article for the Atlantic or some other similar periodical."

He had hoped that Ridgely Torrence "might be prevailed on to write the biography," but Torrence feels that he could not do it properly "because he and E.A. were so closely together during all those early years in New York." Second choice is Bliss Perry, but he too does not feel qualified.

Percy MacKaye has suggested that he, Ledoux and Torrence form a committee to edit a volume of E.A.R.'s selected letters.

To: Robert W. Lull, February 22, 1913; 1 p.

She will be glad to look over and possibly purchase his material relating to the Howe and Gridley families.
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To: Robert W. Lull, March 10, 1913; 2 pp.

Of the Howe papers he sent she would like to keep only the old grant to Richard Gridley, the account of the Howe Family Gathering, and the slip of paper bearing the names of her parents. These are interesting rather than valuable.

To: Robert W. Lull, April 14, 1913; 2 pp.

Is returning all the Howe material. It is about another branch of the Howe family, with little or no value save the genealogy, of which she already has a copy.

To: Robert W. Lull, December 4, 1933; 1 p.

Thanks him for sending a letter written by her husband’s eldest brother.


Before his death, E.A.R. had authorized MacKaye “to attend to some of his literary affairs.” He is doing this in conjunction with Louis V. Ledoux and Ridgely Torrence. Is writing to all of E.A.R.’s friends to find out “if they would like to send us some personal recollections of him, or letters from him, for use in a volume.” Thought of her immediately in connection with E.A.R.’s childhood and early youth.


Is delighted about her having written “Robinson in Gardiner,” and is eager to read of E.A.R.’s early friends.


Points out that in her article on E.A.R. in the New York Herald-Tribune she errs about his sonnet on “Arvia.” It was written for his daughter’s fifth birthday, who was also subject of poetic tributes from Ridgely Torrence, Anna Hempstead Branch, Josephine Peabody, William Vaughn Moody, Witter Bynner, Bliss Carman, and others.


Explains that her error about “Arvia” came about through a whimsical change of title of a poem E.A.R. had written for his five-year-old niece and revised later.

To: Mrs. Marble, March 1, 1918; 2 pp.

She would like to meet Mrs. Marble’s young friends and do
a reading. Asks about a timetable of trains between Boston and Worcester.

To: Mr. Niles, September 1888; 1 p.
  Thanks him for a check and information about the Birthday Book.

To: Mr. Niles, September 20, n.y.; 2 pp.
  Her sister suggests that he send a copy of *Toto* to the New York *Times*, "as she knows the literary critic very well, and thinks he will give us a good notice." Mrs. Richards herself hopes that "we may have good words from some of those 'terrible newspapers.'"

To: Ruth Nivison, February 8, 1931; 1 p.
  Thanks her for some lovely pink and white snapdragons.

To: Ruth Nivison, May 12, 1935; 1 p.
  "I seem to hear Uncle Win saying, 'Stay at home, and don't make your dear people anxious!' So I am good, and will."

To: Ruth Nivison, June 26, 1935; 1 p.
  Has received delightful letters from Ridgely Torrence and Louis Ledoux about the E.A.R. memorial project.

  Sends carbon copy of Chapter III of *E.A.R.*, "very badly" typed by herself.
  Can she remember any of the tunes E.A.R. played for her? "Any details of that lovely period would be most welcome."
  Wouldn't Ruth like to write an article about E.A.R.?

  She does not remember any other pieces E.A.R. used to play, except "Fair Harvard." "He loved Harvard."
  "Uncle Win exacted a promise from me after he asked to read my Bradford prize essay that I would not attempt to write for publication until I was 45. . . . Of course at the age of 20, that sounded to me like a request to abandon it altogether — which is what I've done."

To: Ruth Nivison, August 4, 1935; postcard.
  Expects to be at the Yellow House in Gardiner with the fourth chapter of *E.A.R.*. Wishes she would come in late afternoon or evening.
To: Ruth Nivison, August 11, 1936; 2 pp.
In the E.A.R. memorial project they “are caught up, dealing in a movement that we cannot control, that — I begin to feel — we ought not to wish to control. Suppose Wordsworth’s family had shut their doors, locked up his letters, said ‘He is ours; go away, we don’t want you!’”
She believes that “your Great One [E.A.R.] is no longer yours; no longer ours . . . he belongs to the ages.”

To: Ruth Nivison, August 17, 1936; 2 pp.
Gives her some very precise and “practical” advice and consolation in the matter of E.A.R.’s affairs, his executors, and their choice of biographer.

To: Ruth Nivison, June 25, 1938; 2 pp.
Delighted with the Bridal Party. The Richardses miss her but are glad she is at Squirrel Island.

To: Ruth Nivison, August 14, 1938; 2 pp.
Asks if she has any material for Mr. Sagendorph, whose magazine has type apparently too small.

To: Ruth Nivison, April 13, 1939; 2 pp.
Thanks her for some lovely and pleasurable hydrangeas.

To: Ruth Nivison, July 11, 1939; 1 p.
Note of sympathy on the death of her brother-in-law, Dr. Legge.

To: Ruth Nivison, n.d.; 1 p.
Invites her to a special performance of Captain January at the Opera House.

To: Ruth Nivison, n.d.; 1 p.
Suggests disposal of some E.A.R. mementoes to old friends. “But the other ladies — away with them!”

To: Mrs. Perkins, June 15, 1914; 2 pp.
Thanks her for a beautiful book. “It is a treasure indeed; one book-lover marvels that another could bear to part with it; marvels gratefully.”

To: Lilla Cabot Perry, November 3, 1931; 2 pp.
Apologizes for not having written to her directly for negatives of her portrait of E.A.R. which was used in Stepping Westward. “Habakkuk est capable de tout — but I
have out-Habakked him.” She is upset at the result after looking through her first copy.

From: Harold T. Pulsifer, April 15, 1936; 1 p.
   Discusses an article about E.A.R. by Hermann Hagedorn. Suggests sources Mrs. Nivison might consult about preservation of pencil manuscripts.

To: Harold T. Pulsifer, December 10, 1936; 1 p.
   She asks about two books by Lizette Woodworth Reese. “I love everything she wrote.”
   Encloses a rollicking two-stanza poem about “Harold, Harold,” which she signs “The Doggerel Bard.” “But perhaps you, like E.A. cannot abide Doggerel!”

To: Harold T. Pulsifer, March 2, 1941; 1 p.
   Thanks him for “the little precious photograph . . . a very lovely thought.”
   “You and Susan are gifts of my later life . . . Autumn anemones? No! ‘hyacinths to feed my soul.’”

To: Harold T. Pulsifer, September 22, n.y.; postcard.
   A comic verse about being ill and recovering. On reverse side is a humorous freehand sketch of a woman in wide skirt waving two flags.

   Gives Macmillan’s opinion on “Robinson in Gardiner.” “The material which it contains seems fresh and new and it does give a side of Robinson’s life which, I think, was fundamental and at the same time one which his New York associates know little of.” But the decision is that it is “a little too slender for book publication.” Advises shortening it and trying a magazine.

From: Carty Ranck, May 7, 1935; 1 p.
   He is interested in what she wrote about E.A.R. asking her to refrain from calling him “shy.” He often told Ranck that “he did not think any one liked to be called shy, and I know that he was rather irritated when any newspaper article called him that.”
   Considers Stepping Westward “one of the most fragrant books ever written. . . . The book has sentiment without sentimentality and possesses, for me, the same charm that I always find in the work of Goldsmith and Lamb.”
From: Carty Ranck, May 22, 1935; 1 p.
Tells her that E.A.R.'s poem "Exit" was "inspired by the death of Robinson's brother, Dean." Also that she erred in not identifying "Arvia" as Percy MacKay's daughter.

Explains how the mistake about "Arvia" occurred, then points out that E.A.R. stated "Exit" was written about his brother Herman, not Dean.

Is sending her a picture, "probably the only one in existence," which includes Robinson, Seth Pope in the middle, and Robbins at right.
Commends her for ensuring E.A.R.'s early years, "so that future generations will not be obliged to talk about 'a little Latin and less Greek.'"

To: Messrs. Roberts Bros., August 26, 1892; 2 pp.
Requests some advertisement of her books, "especially of In My Nursery," about which she gets high praise from both parents and children.
Estes & Lauriat are now printing the 29,000th of Captain January, "a little story which I once submitted to you."

He is happy "to get away from people and from going about . . . if any Literary Lady tries to get hold of me, I shall send her a poisoned chocolate mouse by registered mail."

Discusses usages of words and the "dressing down" she gave him for using "enormity."
Speaks of Wagner and Die Meistersinger.

From: Edwin Arlington Robinson.
Six photocopies of holograph letters dated from 1921 to 1929; twenty typewritten excerpts dated from 1901 to 1933, with this headnote: "During the first years of E.A.R.'s correspondence with L.E.R., it was agreed that the letters should be destroyed on both sides. This was faithfully observed by L.E.R. until 1901, when she realized that she had no right to destroy things of permanent value. She therefore made extracts from the letters . . ."
Since the originals of these letters are not in Colby College Library, no note of their contents is made.

To: Emma Robinson, August 16, 1935; 1 p.
Thanks her for an extremely interesting letter. Understands that “the writing was an effort, and that many sorrowful echoes of past times were awakened.” This is in reference to E.A.R.’s death.

To: Emma Robinson, October 28, 1936; 1 p.
Expresses her “great and lasting joy” in having some share in the tribute to E.A.R.

To: Dear Sir, January 4, 1910; 2 pp.
Asks dealer to send following books: Passion Flowers, Words for the Hour, Later Lyrics, Trip to Cuba, Oak to the Olive. Discovers after three weeks that she has failed to post this letter. Hopes the books are still available.

To: Dear Sirs, October 15, 1892; 1 p.
Sends serial story called “Milady” to Youth’s Companion editors. Although heroine is a blind child, it is not a child’s story. It “is rather meant as a companion to Captain January, a story which has met with some success.” Would $500 be a fair price for it?

To: Dear Sirs, November 25, 1892; 2 pp.
Asks Companion editors what changes they propose for “Milady.” Might perhaps leave out the entire chapter called “Waiting,” but doubts she can recast the other chapters.

To: Dear Sirs, August 25, n.y.; 1 p.
Requests following for Camp Merryweather: Selected Poems of Wordsworth, Golden Treasury, Pocket R.L.S., Shelley’s Poems, Keats, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Oppenheim’s Up a Ladder of Gold, Buchan’s The Blanket of the Dark, “or some such name.”

From: Harry de Forest Smith, April 30, 1935; 1 p.
Is glad to hear that “you Gardiner people” are having a meeting in honor of E.A.R. and wishes he might be there, but he has nothing “of general interest to add to the known facts of his career.”

From: John L. B. Williams, October 8, 1935; 1 p.
Will be delighted to read her E.A.R. material, but bro-
chures are difficult to promote and he must agree with Macmillan that a magazine is more appropriate.

A final item, not in manuscript form, is an unpublished poem written by Mrs. Richards in her eighty-sixth year, "to tuck into family letters." It is appended here because of its value in demonstrating the irrepressible vivacity of spirit which remained with her until the end of her days.

RISING EIGHTY-SIX
My house goes creaking to its fall
    Hey trol lollie lollie.
Soon it will be no house at all,
    Hey trol lollie lee.
The cellar is a-squeak with rats,
The belfry is a-whirr with bats,
The walls are little more than slats,
    Hey trol lollie lee.

But 'twixt the slats my Self slips out,
    Hey trol lollie lollie;
And frisks and capers all about,
    Hey trol lollie lee;
My spirit spreads a frolic wing,
And flutters round like anything;
Hark! listen, and you'll hear it sing,
    "Hey trol lollie lee!"