

The Harry and Alice Turner Papers

Descriptive Summary

Title: The Harry and Alice Turner Papers

Dates (Inclusive): 1902-1955

Creator(s): Turner, Harry Smith (1874-1931); Turner, Alice Martin

Language: English/French

Abstract: The collection contains the literary works of Harry and Alice Turner primarily in the form of monographs, periodicals, and typed manuscripts. Much of material contains significant information regarding their personal histories, their creative processes, and their lives in St. Louis in the first part of the twentieth century. In addition to their personal histories, many of the writings include significant information regarding St. Louis history and social life, the Colorado Midland Railroad, early automobile history, and the Lucas and Hunt family.

Collection Number: M-331

Size: 1 linear foot

Location: Special Collections

St. Louis Mercantile Library at UM-St. Louis

Thomas Jefferson Library Building

One University Boulevard

St. Louis, Missouri 63121

Biographical Note: **Harry Smith Turner** (1874-1931) was born at the Lucas and Hunt ancestral home in Normandy, Missouri. His grandfather, Major Harry Smith Turner, married Julia Hunt, the daughter of Wilson P. Hunt and Anne Lucas, both of whom were from eminent St. Louis families. His father, Thomas Theodore Turner, was the president of the Turner Real Estate Co., and according to Harry, he built the first fire-proof building containing elevators west of the Mississippi. Prone to dreaming and interested in poetry, Harry's father enrolled him in a manual-training school to make him more practical minded. While attending the training school, Harry often ditched to ride in front of the fireman on Engine No. 1076 of the Wabash Line that left about the time school started and pulled a train to St. Peter's. This was his introduction to the railroad business. After graduating, he went to Notre Dame, and after three months, he hitched his way back to St. Louis. Recognizing the futility of forcing Harry to get an education, his father asked him what he wanted to do: Harry wanted "to be a railroad man." At the age of sixteen, he moved to Colorado to be a clerk for the general manager of Colorado Midland Railroad. After the general manager was accused of robbing the company, Harry lost his job and moved back to St. Louis.

Upon his return, Harry became one of first men in St. Louis to own an automobile. Building from this interest, he started an auto agency and primarily sold the Pope-Toledo, a popular line of cars. In the area, he became so well-known for this car, that an orchestra coined a song after him called "Pope-Toledo Harry." Among his many clients, his most famous was Aldophus Busch. Quickly making a name for himself, he became a wealthy member of high society; joining the St. Louis Country Club, Racquet Club, and the West End Artist's Guild. Enjoying his success, he went to Europe, he went to Europe to race the Pope-Toledo automobile in the Gordon Bennett Cup held in Auvergne, France.

During this period of his life (the first decade of the twentieth century), Harry began to become painfully aware of what he described as the "diseases of life." Seeking a remedy, he spent the day at Brentano's Bookstore in New York discovering books that would alter the course of his life. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and Leonid Andreyev's *Anathema* caused Harry to ask himself the question: "What shall I do?" On April 27, 1911, he sat down and wrote his first article under the pseudonym M. Evelyn Bradley and titled it *What Shall I do?* At the urging of a friend, he submitted the manuscript to William Marion Reedy's popular literary publication, *The Mirror*. With this single publication Harry's life changed. He went from being a businessman to a writer. Becoming a confidant of Reedy's and continuing to publish, Harry began to make enemies among members of high society. His relationship with the elites came to a head on June, 6, 1911, when the St. Louis Country Club sent him a letter requesting his resignation. The series of letters that followed became the focus of Harry's first book, *The Autobiography of a Failure*, published in 1913. After its publication, he was black listed by high society, and in response, he became a dedicated proponent of the working class. In 1915, he started his own literary magazine, *Much Ado*, which followed in the footsteps of Reedy's *Mirror*.

In 1927, Harry and Alice were charged with publishing and distributing obscenity. They had republished an article from the July 29, 1926 edition of the *San Diego Herald*. A similar publication to *Much Ado*, the *Herald* published a satirical article containing lewd and indecent material describing the supposed sexual relations between Aimee McPherson, a controversial evangelist of the day, and certain gods. Harry, who had already published his own articles about McPherson, reprinted the *Herlad's* article. This brought him to the attention of local authorities, and in 1928, Harry and Alice were found guilty. During the appeals process, the decision was overturned, but eventually, the prosecution won their case. In 1929, Alice was fined a thousand dollar s, and Harry was sentenced to six months in the Leavenworth Penitentiary.

On December 27, 1931, Harry went for a swim in the Mississippi River, but he washed up on shore at Spruce Street. It was reported that he had a gash in his head, which indicated he had bumped it after leaping from the riverboat, *Erastus Wells*. In the articles that appeared in the papers concerning Harry's death, a local poet was quoted saying that Harry proposed that if one were to commit suicide, it would be more aesthetic to die at the hands of "Old Man River" than by a revolver.

Alice Martin Turner, the second wife of Harry Turner, taught Classical Greek and "calisthenics" at the Mary Institute until 1907 when she opened a dance studio on the second floor of the Taylor-Olive building located at 4505 Olive Street. Becoming a well-known dancer, her most notable achievement

was the invention of the “Hesitation Waltz.” Garnering her much attention, she taught the dance in Paris in 1913 and was featured in the 1914 April/May Issue of *Revue de la Danse*. Alice met Harry at her studio, which by then was becoming a gathering place for local artists. Founding the “Players Club,” an association of local writers and actors, they began staging theatrical productions. When the “Players Club” had achieved some success, she allowed others to take the reins and joined Harry at *Much Ado* becoming the co-editor. When Harry died, she continued to publish *Much Ado*, but she quickly realized that the publication could not continue without Harry’s inspirational force. After an eighteen year run, she printed the last issue in 1933. In 1955, she published a biography of Harry titled *The Tempest Maker* in which she edited his autobiographical writings and incorporated them into a narration of his life. Alice dedicated the statue of St. Francis that stands in front of the Glass House in Forest Park to Harry Turner. In a draft of the epilogue to the *Tempest Maker*, Alice wrote that Harry resembled St. Francis in his love for humanity and simple natural things.

Scope and Content Note: The collection contains the writings of Harry and Alice Turner, thirty-three copies of their jointly published *Much Ado*, and additional related materials. In total, there are four series divided into eighteen folders.

Series 1 contains Harry Turner’s published monographs, manuscripts drafts and article drafts.

Series 2 contains Alice Martin’s published monographs, manuscript drafts and six copies of the French Dance magazine *Revue de la Danse*.

Series 3 contains two folders consisting of thirty-three copies of the Turner’s jointly published magazine *Much Ado*. The magazines are organized chronologically and are divided between the issues published before Harry Turner’s death, and the issues published after his death.

Series 4 contains four folders consisting of additional materials related to Harry and Alice Turner including: newspaper clippings, three pieces of correspondence between Alice and Harry’s sisters, and the file folders that originally contained these papers.

Provenance:

This collection was originally compiled by Alice Martin Turner. The only exceptions are the eighteen issues of *Much Ado* memorializing Harry Turner’s death; they were purchased at Amitini’s Bookstore in 1988.

Restrictions:

Access Restrictions: Some of the material in Special Collection M-331 may be photocopied, digitally scanned or photographed, subject to condition.

Copyright Information: The researcher assumes full responsibility for observing all copyright, property, and libel laws as they apply.

Citation: When citing material from this collection, the preferred citation is: From the Special Collections of the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Subject Headings:

Automobiles – Missouri – St. Louis - History

Colorado Midland Railroad Company

Country Clubs – Missouri – St. Louis

Railroads - Colorado

Reedy, William Marion

St. Louis (Mo.) – History

St. Louis (Mo.) – Periodicals

Theater – Missouri – St. Louis - History

Turner, Alice Martin

Turner, Harry Smith

Contents List:

Folder #	Description	Series Name	Series #
1	Promotional for "Autobiography of a Failure"	Harry Turner Papers	1
1	Monograph, "Autobiography of a Failure" by Harry Turner	Harry Turner Papers	1
1	Handwritten preface to "Autobiography of a Failure"	Harry Turner Papers	1
2	Monograph, "Casual Moments" by Harry Turner	Harry Turner Papers	1
3	Autobiography Drafts for "My Soul Laid Bare"	Harry Turner Papers	1
4	Short Story Drafts	Harry Turner Papers	1
5	Short Story Drafts written under the pseudonyms M. Evelyn Bradley and Phil Cook	Harry Turner Papers	1
6	Colorado Writings-Drafts and Inserts	Harry Turner Papers	1
7	Drafts of Articles Published in Much Ado	Harry Turner Papers	1
8	Draft of the Much Ado Article "Life of Alice	Harry Turner Papers	1

Martin"			
9	Additional Drafts - Play in three acts, "The Second Coming" - "Big Car" - "Introduction 1918" - "Unemployment"	Harry Turner Papers	1
10	Draft for a possible epilogue to "The Tempest Maker"	Alice Martin Turner Papers	2
10	Monograph- "The Tempest Maker: The Story of Harry Turner"	Alice Martin Turner Papers	2
11	"Ouija Board" manuscript	Alice Martin Turner Papers	2
11	Short Stories	Alice Martin Turner Papers	2
11	Manuscript by Alice containing the poem "If" by Harry Turner and the story "What is an Aristocrat" by Harry Turner--each is marked and referred to by Alice in her text	Alice Martin Turner Papers	2
12	6 Issues of "Revue de la Danse"	Alice Martin Turner Papers	2
13	22 Copies of "Much Ado" February 1922 to January 1932	Much Ado	3
14	11 Copies of "Much Ado" October 1932 to May/June 1933	Much Ado	3
15	Correspondence- three letters	Additional Materials	4
16	Photocopies of Newspaper Articles	Additional Materials	4
17	San Diego Herald, July 29, 1926	Additional Materials	4
18	Assorted materials related to the Turners	Additional Materials	4