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A Guide to the
Robert Ernest Spiller Papers
1936-1980 (bulk 1948-1964)

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UPT 50 S756

Prepared by Timothy H. Horning

June 2014

The University Archives and Records Center
3401 Market Street, Suite 210
Philadelphia, PA 19104-3358
215.898.7024
Fax: 215.573.2036
www.archives.upenn.edu
Mark Frazier Lloyd, Director

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PROVENANCE

The papers of Robert Ernest Spiller were donated to the University Archives by Robert Ernest Spiller in April 1978 (accession number 32-78) and by an unknown donor on an unknown date prior to or during 1977.

ARRANGEMENT

The Robert Ernest Spiller papers are organized into three series – Professional File, Correspondence, and Course Material – each of which is arranged alphabetically.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Robert Ernest Spiller was a Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania from 1945 to 1967, acting dean of the Annenberg School of Communications from 1963 to 1964, and pioneer in the study of American literature. He was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on November 13, 1896 to William Gibson Spiller and Helen Constance Newbold Spiller. After graduating from the

Phillips Brooks School in 1913 he entered the University of Pennsylvania where he earned a B.A. in 1917. After graduation he served with the University of Pennsylvania Medical Corps during World War I. Afterward, he returned to Penn to complete his graduate work, earning an M.A. in 1921 and Ph.D. in 1924. From 1920 to 1921 Spiller served as an Instructor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. He then joined the faculty at Swarthmore College as an Instructor of English and was promoted to Professor of English in 1934. He returned to the University of Pennsylvania in 1945 as the Felix E. Schelling Professor of English, a position he held until 1967 when he was named Professor Emeritus.

Spiller is credited with helping to earn scholarly respect for American literature, which had been considered the less-distinguished partner of English literature. As chair of the Modern Language Association's American Literature Group, he was one of the founders of the scholarly journal *American Literature* and was editor from 1932 to 1939. Spiller published many books and articles on American literature, most notable among them being *Literary History of the United States* (1948), which was considered the foremost text on American literature, and *The Cycle of American Literature* (1955), which was translated into fourteen languages.

Spiller was a leading figure in the development of American studies programs at both domestic and international colleges and universities. In 1955 he served as president of the American Studies Association, the oldest scholarly organization devoted to the interdisciplinary study of American culture and history, and helped found its scholarly journal *American Quarterly*. He was also chair of the Department of American Civilization at the University of Pennsylvania.

Robert Ernest Spiller married Mary Scott in 1922 and had three children: William Scott, Constance Newbold (Mrs. T. J. Johnston), and Mary Miles. He died on August 24, 1988, survived by his second wife, Anna Moss Wright Spiller, whom he married in 1975, and his eldest daughter.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Robert Ernest Spiller papers are all professional in nature and document his function as a Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania as well as his involvement with numerous other professional and academic organizations. This documentation includes syllabi and notes for courses he taught, reports and memoranda generated from his professional associations, and correspondence from students and colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania as well as with colleagues from the organizations he was involved with.

CONTROLLED ACCESS HEADINGS

Subject(s)

- American literature--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States
- University of Pennsylvania. Dept. of English

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INVENTORY

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Beveridge Committee 1946-1949	1	4
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Committee on General Literature 1955	1	6
Curriculum Committee 1948-1949	1	7
Educational Council 1947-1950	1	8
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Educational Survey of the University of Pennsylvania		
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English 125: 20th Century American Literature 1945-1953	3	6
English 682: American Colonial Literature 1951-1955	3	7
English 685: 20th Century American Literature 1947-1964	3	8
English 685: American Literature since 1915 1960-1964	3	9
English 781: Problems of Research II 1946-1947	3	10
English 785: Materials and Methods of Research 1946-1954	3	11
English 791: Major American Authors 1947-1952	3	12
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