

Title: Jessamyn West Collection

Dates: 1920-1990

Creator/Collector: McPherson, Jessamyn West; Milhous Family

Extent: 570 linear feet

Repository: Wardman Library-Whittier College. Whittier, California 90602

Abstract: Mary Jessamyn West (1902-1984) was an American writer with Quaker roots. She was the cousin to the 37th President of the United States, Richard Milhouse Nixon. West lived in Whittier and Yorba Linda, attended Whittier College as a student, and after graduation taught as an English professor. The collection holds her personal book collection including works of authors mentioned in her stories and speeches. The collection also holds various photos, press releases, correspondence, novel drafts, and galley prints of her published works. The bulk of West's manuscript series contains original handwritten drafts that demonstrate her writing style and editing process.

Language of Material: English, Chinese, Italian, German.

Access: Open for research, with the exception of personal diaries and journals, which are restricted until 2050.

Publication Rights: Authorization to publish, quote, or reproduce must be obtained from Wardman Library, Whittier College.

Preferred Citation: Jessamyn West Collection, Wardman Library-Whittier College.

Acquisition Information: The collection was donated in its entirety by Jessamyn West and posthumously by her family.

Administrative and Biographical History: Mary Jessamyn West was born in 1909 into a Quaker family in North Vernon, Indiana, and when she was six years old, the family moved to Southern California. West's mother was cousins to Richard Nixon's mother, and West often babysat Richard when he was a child. Her passion for reading started when she was 12 years old when the first library opened in Whittier, CA. West graduated with an Associate Bachelor's degree from Whittier College in 1923 (having helped found the Palmer Literary Society while at school) and married Max McPherson on August 16, 1923. She then went onto the University of California at Berkeley to study her Ph.D. in English, including periods of study at Oxford University. It was during this time that West was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Over the years to come, she would spend hours on bed rest writing the stories she recalled from her mother's time in Indiana.

West's writing was published in several major magazines and Readers Digest in the 1940s. By the 1950s, her novel *The Friendly Persuasion* was adapted as a screenplay by director William Wyler. After

reaching literary success, West was invited to deliver speeches all across the nation, including commencement ceremonies at Whittier. She taught English at Whittier College for a time, and in 1956 the West-McPhersons adopted a child. In 1965 West pledged to donate her collection of books and writings to Wardman Library. Later in life the couple moved to Napa Valley, Calif., where West died in 1984 due to complications from a stroke. This finding aid was created by Thalia Lynn King, with later assistance by Paige Harris in 2023.

Scope and Content of Collection: The West Collection is composed of West's personal library as well as her own works, including manuscripts, notes, journals, photographs, newspaper clippings and literary reviews, and hand-written revisions of both her own work and that of others.

Container List:

Cataloged books are searchable via Wardman Library catalog:

[https://library.whittier.edu/search/X?SEARCH=\(*\)&SORT=D&b=swest](https://library.whittier.edu/search/X?SEARCH=(*)&SORT=D&b=swest)

- Box 1- Journal and magazine publications
 - The Tanager, December 1941
 - The Tanager, February 1943
 - Decade, November-December 1941
 - The New Mexico Quarterly, November 1940
 - Prairie Schooner, Summer 1940
 - Friends, the Chevy Owners Magazine, July 1978
 - West Coast Writer's Conspiracy, Fall 1978
 - Together, September 1960
 - Victoria, April 1993
 - Harper's Magazine, January 1949
 - The Rock, Winter 1968
 - Die Epische Welt Jessamyn Wests (anhand von mindestens zwei ihrer Werke), student paper
 - Self-Reliance by Ralph Waldo Emerson, student paper
 - Mademoiselle, February 1953
 - Redbook, October 1966
 - Yankee, January 1941
 - Foothills, Fall 1939
 - Foothills, Winter 1939
 - New Masses, January 21, 1941
 - The Associates of the Yorba Linda Heritage Museum and the Yorba Linda Forum (two copies)
 - Quakers and Friendly Persuasion, Yesterday and Today, prepared by members of the Whittier First Friends Church, circa 2002
 - Reviews of Jessamyn West, A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography
- Box 2
 - Liberty and Authority in the Modern World, Merttens lecture by Henry Carter, 1939

- The Colorado Quarterly, Summer 1952 (three copies)
- The Pacific Spectator, Summer 1949
- The New Mexico Quarterly Review, Spring 1943
- The New Mexico Quarterly Review, Summer 1944
- The New Mexico Quarterly Review, Spring 1947
- The New Mexico Quarterly Review, Winter 1947 (two copies)