

Manuscript Collections

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MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

THE HEARST PAPERS

GERALD L. PETERSON

THE HEARST PAPERS, held by the University of Northern Iowa Library Special Collections, include materials from both Charles Hearst, a prominent agriculturalist, and his son James, the Iowa poet. Charles Hearst's correspondence deals largely with agricultural and political matters, while James wrote to and received letters from a variety of correspondents in literary and publishing spheres. The entire collection spans a wide range of research topics and reflects the diverse interests and influences of this Iowa family.

The Hearst family has lived in Iowa since 1859 when James Hearst, grandfather of his poet namesake, began farming about three miles west of Cedar Falls. On this farm in 1869 Charles Ernest Hearst was born. Charles Hearst became a progressive farmer who was involved in community affairs as well as local and state agricultural organizations. From 1914 through 1923 he was president of the Black Hawk County chapter of the Iowa Farm Bureau. From 1923 until shortly before his death in 1936, Hearst was president of the Iowa Farm Bureau. Most of the five hundred pieces of correspondence to and from Charles Hearst in the University of Northern Iowa Library Special Collections were written during Hearst's term as Iowa Farm Bureau president.

The 1920s and 1930s were turbulent years for those involved in agriculture; most farmers felt that they did not share in the general prosperity of the 1920s and that their problems were compounded by the terrible economic and weather conditions of the 1930s. Hearst's correspondence reflects the broad range of problems which agriculture faced. For example, in answer to rural school specialist Macy Campbell's request for advice on textbooks, Hearst advises that material could be brought more in line with rural children's experiences: ". . . problems in mathematics could be built around the cooperative marketing field . . . instead of stocks and bonds. . . ." Hearst also helped to shepherd farm legislation through both the Iowa legislature and the United States Congress. There is an extensive correspondence dealing with the McNary-Haugen Bill and later with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration of the New Deal. Hearst dealt with most major farm organizations including the Central States Agricultural conference, the Corn Belt Committee, the national headquarters of the American Farm Bureau, and several cooperative marketing associations. There is even an intriguing report from a self-appointed watchdog concerning the activities of the left-wing Progressive Farmers of America.

Many sought Hearst's support for political offices ranging from county agricultural agent to president of the United States. Correspondence shows that Hearst supported former Illinois Governor Frank Lowden for president in 1928 before Herbert Hoover gained the nomination.

Even though the Iowa Farm Bureau work kept him in Des Moines or on the road six days a week while his sons ran his farm, Hearst retained an active interest in the practical aspects of farming. He worked hard to eradicate bovine tuberculosis and made sure that telephone lines and drainage tiling were constructed in the best locations. He even took time to tell his son Charles exactly how to load cattle for shipment to Chicago: "About loading . . . take it very moderate. Have someone ahead of them to keep them from running . . . do not jam them around too much, and insist on the biggest car they have, and be sure it is in good shape and well bedded with straw or hay."

Hearst resigned his office in the Iowa Farm Bureau in January 1936 because of poor health which had perhaps been aggravated by the years of hard work and travel. He died March 8, 1936. A large book of testimonials in the UNI Library bears witness to Charles Hearst's influence and achievement in agricultural affairs.

During the years that Charles Hearst was working in Des Moines, his sons Jim and Chuck ran the family farm. Chuck, who died in 1980, was active in community affairs and agricultural organizations. Many of his papers are in the manuscripts collection of the Iowa State University Library. Jim, born August 8, 1900, attended the elementary grades in a country school and high school at the Teachers College Training School in Cedar Falls. He was in the United States Army briefly during World War I and enrolled in the Teachers College after his discharge. On May 30, 1919, he fractured and dislocated his fifth cervical vertebra in a diving accident in the Cedar River. Despite long and intensive physical therapy, Jim Hearst remained partially paralyzed as a result of that accident.

Prior to the accident Hearst had considered a medical career, but he had also shown an interest in writing. After the accident he found that he had time in the hospital and later at home to read extensively and to write poetry and short stories. In 1924, *Good Housekeeping* accepted one of his poems; other pieces of work appeared mostly in local or little magazines. The UNI Library has copies of nearly every publication of Hearst's work including the early material. If frequency of publication were the only measure, Hearst had limited success with his literary work during the 1920s and the early 1930s. He used these early years, however, to practice and perfect his poetic technique. Poetry that he wrote in 1935 compared with work he did ten years earlier is so greatly changed that it could have been written by another poet. Prosiness gives way to concise, apt metaphor; a studied lyricism yields to natural, unstrained language. Part of this change came as a result of sheer, hard work. But because Hearst had difficulty judging the quality of his own work, he eagerly sought others' advice and soon developed

a valuable correspondence with many well known writers, editors, and critics. A collection of approximately one thousand pieces of this correspondence is now in the UNI Library. Initially people such as Ferner Nuhn, John T. Frederick, and Bess Streater Aldrich were among the most helpful. Nuhn broke down Hearst's work word by word to explain how he thought the work could be made stronger; he also gave Hearst tantalizing news of the New York literary scene. John T. Frederick offered sound advice as well as publication possibilities in his magazine *The Midland*. Aldrich told of her early experience in the business of writing and gave Hearst this friendly advice: ". . . above all keep at it, —eternally,—the whole business is the queerest business on the face of the earth. You'll sell where you least expect and get turned down where you least expect."

Hearst's correspondence expanded over the years so that it eventually included Louis Bromfield, Carroll Coleman, Norman Cousins, August Derleth, Frank Dobie, Paul Engel, Robert Frost, MacKinlay Kantor, Donald Murphy, Carl Sandburg, Jesse Stuart, Ruth Suckow, and Henry A. Wallace. Some writers are represented by only a letter or two; other correspondences, such as those with Paul Engel and John T. Frederick, last for forty or fifty years. In general, letters from magazine editors are the most substantial correspondence that Hearst received. Of special note are letters from John Moffitt of *America*; this correspondence spans only about fifteen years but it delineates nicely the fine balance necessary to be both editor and friend.

Hearst's first collection of poetry, *County Men*, was published by Carroll Coleman at the Prairie Press in 1937. As Hearst continued to farm and then later to teach creative writing at the University of Northern Iowa, his work was published in nine more collections, many anthologies, and scores of magazines. Because Hearst composes his work on a typewriter, his worksheets and manuscripts are clear and legible. The University of Northern Iowa Library has manuscripts for *Snake in the Strawberries*, *Bonesetters' Brawl*, several short stories, and worksheets for individual poems. Also, the manuscripts for Hearst's autobiography, *My Shadow*

Hearst Papers

Below Me, show several interesting states of revision: to achieve distance from his subject, Hearst wrote the first two drafts of his account in the third person. The UNI Library anticipates further additions to its Hearst collections.

Getting to know the Hearsts by studying their manuscripts and correspondence as well as the photographs, video and sound recordings, and other memorabilia available in the UNI Library can be a delightful experience. In few other collections of correspondence will researchers find letters which discuss both hog prices and a visit from Robert Frost or Grant Wood in a knowledgeable and unaffected manner. Correspondents range from national political figures to an anonymous yet eloquent "Farm Bureau Member." What these people have in common is a deep respect for the wide-ranging interests and abilities which have made the Hearsts leaders in agriculture and the arts in Iowa for over sixty years.

The Hearst Papers are available at the Library in the center of the UNI campus from 8 to 12 and 1 to 4, Monday through Friday. For further information, write to Gerald L. Peterson, Special Collections Librarian, Library, UNI, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 50613, or call (319) 273-6307.

Editor's note: Two prose volumes by James Hearst have recently been released by Iowa presses. *My Shadow Below Me* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981, \$12.95 cloth) is an autobiography, covering the years from 1920 to the present. *Time Like a Furrow: Essays by James Hearst* (Iowa City: Iowa State Historical Society, 1981, \$15.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper) is a collection of twenty-four reminiscent essays focusing on the changes that occurred in Iowa rural life in the first half of the twentieth century.

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