
Ward Ritchie Collection

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Ward Ritchie Collection

Collection number: Consult repository

Special Collections Department
Occidental College Library
Los Angeles, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Ward Ritchie collection

Dates: 1922-1996

Bulk Dates: 1932-1974

Collection number: Consult repository

Creator: Ritchie, Ward, 1905-

Collector: Mary Norton Clapp Library

Collection Size: 10 linear ft. (2 manuscript boxes, 17 flat storage boxes).800 to 900 monographs

Repository: Mary Norton Clapp Library

Los Angeles, CA 90041-3314

Abstract: The collection contains over 800 of Ritchie monographs and approximately 200 pamphlets, college catalogs, and other printed matter from Anderson, Ritchie & Simon, the Ward Ritchie Press, and the Laguna Verde Imprenta. It also contains biographical information about Ward Ritchie and his presses in the form of newspaper clippings, chapters from books, and essays written by friends. Additionally, the collection contains galley proofs, material from a course Ritchie taught at Occidental in the early 1930s, and ephemera.

Physical location: Special Collections Department, Occidental College Library, 1600 Campus Road, Los Angeles, California 90041-3314

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Ward Ritchie collection, Consult repository, Special Collections Department, Occidental College Library, Occidental College.

Acquisition Information

The Occidental College Library actively collected monographs and samples of fine printing published by the Ward Ritchie Press starting in the 1930s until his death in 1996. Throughout his life Ritchie also donated many items to the collection. During the library's long association with Ritchie, it also began collecting supporting materials such as biographical articles, newspaper clippings, Ward Ritchie Press catalogs, and bibliographies.

Biography of Harry "Ward" Ritchie

Harry "Ward" Ritchie was born in 1905 in Los Angeles, California. His interest in literature and publishing developed at an early age; as an eighth-grader at the Marengo Avenue School in South Pasadena, he and a fellow student launched a printed paper called The Marengo Literary Leader. They printed student writings, including several of the early efforts of

classmate Lawrence Clark Powell, future University Librarian at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Ritchie's lifelong friend. In high school Ward Ritchie worked on the school paper and yearbook, and as an undergraduate at Occidental College, he took a keen interest in the poetry of Occidental alumnus Robinson Jeffers and that of Occidental English professor Carlyle MacIntyre. As a printer he would go on to publish editions of both their works. After graduating from Occidental College in 1928, he entered law school at the University of Southern California. He quickly realized, however, that law was not congenial to him. After discovering the journals of the great English printer Thomas J. Cobden-Sanderson, co-founder of the Doves Press, who was once himself a discontented lawyer, Ritchie decided to give up law and become a printer and book designer. He enrolled in a printing class at a nearby trade school and got a job at the Abby of San Encino Press in South Pasadena.

Soon thereafter, with limited printing experience but ample enthusiasm, he traveled to Paris to seek an apprenticeship with internationally renowned printer Francois-Louis Schmied. Upon his return in 1931, Ritchie resettled in Los Angeles, and in 1932 he started the Ward Ritchie Press. His exceptional talents as a book designer were evident from the beginning. The first piece he published was an eight-page insert for the Colophon entitled "First Book: Robinson Jeffers", which attracted national attention. In 1934, one of Ritchie's pieces, an edition of A Gil Blas in California by Alexandre Dumas, was selected by the American Institute of Graphic Arts as one of the "Fifty Books of the Year", the first of many of Ritchie's designs to be thus recognized.

During the 1920s and 1930s, fine printing in Southern California experienced something of a Golden Age. Many new private presses emerged during this unique and dynamic period, and printers collaborated not only with each other but with artists, publishers, booksellers, and authors. Bookseller Jake Zeitlin once aptly referred to this era as a "Small Renaissance: Southern California Style". Indeed, A Gil Blas in California is notable not only for its typographical excellence, but because it represents the synergy and zeitgeist of this Small Renaissance. It was designed by Ward Ritchie, published by Jake Zeitlin's Primavera Press, illustrated by artist Paul Landacre, and printed by Saul Marks at the Plantin Press.

Over the next few years the Ward Ritchie Press flourished, and soon became too big for Ward to operate alone. Printer Gregg Anderson joined the company in 1935. When he was killed in the Normandy invasion, his wife took over his interest in the firm. Joseph Simon became a partner in 1945, and the Ward Ritchie Press evolved into Anderson, Ritchie & Simon. This larger press handled mostly commercial printing work, while the Ward Ritchie Press published keepsakes, limited editions, cookbooks, and books about local history or Western Americana. In 1976, Ritchie retired as president of Anderson, Ritchie & Simon, and moved to Laguna Beach to pursue hand-press printing. He bought an Albion hand press, and called his press the Laguna Verde Imprenta. Some of his best and most interesting work comes from this period.

Throughout his life Ritchie remained closely connected with his alma mater, Occidental College. From 1936 to 1938 he taught a bookmaking course for the fine arts department. Also during the 1930s, Occidental's Mary Norton Clapp Library, then under the direction of Elizabeth McCloy, began collecting Ritchie's graphic work, an endeavor which continued until his death in the 1996. For his part, Ritchie contributed generously to that collection throughout his life to help make it complete. The library held several exhibits of his work over the years, most notably in 1937 and 1957. In 1960 Ritchie was awarded an honorary doctorate by the College, and from 1961 to 1973 he served as chairperson of the Library Patrons.

Ward Ritchie died in Los Angeles in 1996 at the age of 90. He is internationally recognized as one of the finest American printers of the 20th century.

- June 15,
1905 Ward Ritchie is born in Los Angeles, California.
- 1924 Ritchie graduates from South Pasadena High School, along with Lawrence Clark Powell. The two friends both enrolled at Occidental College.
- 1928 Ritchie graduates from Occidental College.
- 1930-1931 Ritchie travels to Paris to apprentice with internationally renown French printer Francois-Louis Schmied.
- 1931 Ritchie and other young Los Angeles printers and book enthusiasts found the Rounce & Coffin Club, a book collector's society.
- 1932 Ritchie opens the Ward Ritchie Press in South Pasadena.
- 1934 Ritchie is invited to become a member of the Zamorano Club.
- 1934 Ritchie publishes XV Poems for the Heath Broom, a collection of his own poetry published under the pseudonym Peter Lum Quince. The piece is selected as one of the "Fifty Books of the Year" by the American Institute of Graphic Arts.
- 1932-1974 Ritchie is president of the commercial press Anderson, Ritchie & Simon as well as the Ward Ritchie Press.
- 1960 Ritchie is awarded an honorary doctorate degree by Occidental College.
- 1974-1995 Ritchie continues to design and publish fine-press books on a hand press at his Laguna Beach home, under the name of Laguna Verde Imprenta.

June 15, 1980 Ritchie and his friends celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday and honor his work as a printer with a party at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library.
1996 Ritchie dies in Los Angeles, California at the age of 90.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Ward Ritchie Collection is primarily composed of Ward Ritchie's printed work as well as biographical information about Ward Ritchie and his presses. The collection contains over 800 cataloged monographs; 7 shelves of uncatalogued or duplicate monographs, pamphlets, technical manuals, bulletins and other unbound printed matter, and 4 boxes of printed cards, notes, announcements, and other ephemera. It also includes 2 boxes of Ward Ritchie Press catalogs from 1932 to 1974.

Occidentals Ward Ritchie Press Collection complements that of the William Andrews Clark Library, where the bulk of Ritchie's personal papers and an extensive collection of his printed work are deposited. Occidentals collection contains several notable and unique items, including copies of *The Tiger*, his high school newspaper, which he worked on, from 1922 to 1924, and his senior year high school yearbook, *Copa de Oro*, 1924 which he also worked on.

Other notable materials include student examinations and papers from a bookmaking course Ritchie taught at Occidental from 1936 to 1938, 5 boxes of galley proofs, and 12 original woodcut prints by David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Related collections include The Correspondence of Ward Ritchie and Lawrence Clark Powell, as well as the Christmas Collection, which contains several Christmas books printed by Ward Ritchie. Researchers who are interested in the history of fine-press printing in California should be aware that Occidental College houses the archives of the Zamorano Club, as well as those of the Rounce & Coffin Club, including every book from the Western Book Exhibition dating back to 1938. (Because they are not owned by the Library, access to the Zamorano Club and Rounce & Coffin Club archives is restricted. For more information, contact the Special Collections Librarian.)

Major topics covered by the collection include Ward Ritchie, the Ward Ritchie Press, Anderson, Ritchie & Simon, and fine-press printing in Southern California.

Organization

The collection is organized in 5 record series:

1. Series: Biographical material
2. Series: Ward Ritchie Press
3. Series: Occidental College-related material
4. Series: Bibliography
5. Series: Monographs

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Ritchie, Ward, 1905 -

Printing -- California -- Los Angeles -- History -- 20th century

Los Angeles (Calif.) -- Imprint -- History

Book design -- History

Bibliography -- Fine editions

Other Finding Aids

General inventory list available in the Special Collections office.

Box: 1, 4, 5

Series 1: **Biographical material**

Scope and Content Summary

Includes pamphlets, articles, and manuscripts by and about Ward Ritchie. Also contains materials relating to "Ward Ritchie, Printer: A Seventy-Fifth Birthday Salute" and to Ritchie's seventy-fifth birthday celebration.

Box: 2, 3, 6, 7, 10,
11, 12, 14, 15, 16,
17, 18

Series 2: **Ward Ritchie Press**

Scope and Content Summary

Includes galley proofs, invoices, edited manuscripts, pamphlets, ephemeral materials, and articles written about Ward Ritchie Press.

Box: 8, 13

Series 3: **Occidental College-related material**

Scope and Content Summary

Includes materials relating to a bookmaking class Ritchie taught at Occidental in mid-1930s. Also includes samples of various printing jobs done for Occidental College by Ward Ritchie Press.

Box: 9

Series 4: **Bibliography**

Scope and Content Summary

Includes bibliographies and other materials relating to Occidental College Library's collection of Ward Ritchie Press books.

Series 5: **Monographs**

Scope and Content Summary

Includes books and other printed materials (pamphlets, college catalogs, newsletters, etc.) from Ward Ritchie Press. Approximately 800 monographs are catalogued and represented in the library's online catalog.