

Guide to the William Harrison Riley Papers

MS 417



compiled by Janet Elaine Gertz

November 1982

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Requesting Instructions	3
Administrative Information	3
Conditions Governing Access	3
Conditions Governing Use	4
Preferred Citation	4
Existence and Location of Copies	4
Biographical / Historical	4
Scope and Contents	5
Collection Contents	6
Selected Search Terms	7

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 417

CREATOR: Riley, William Harrison, 1835-1907

TITLE: William Harrison Riley papers

DATES: 1844-1899

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.75 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of correspondence and other papers relating to nineteenth century socialism in England and the United States. Included are two literary manuscripts by William Riley entitled Literary Cranks by One of Them and Radical Jack; copies of periodicals edited by Riley; and letters from Walter Besant, Edward Everett Hale, Rudyard Kipling, Justin McCarthy, Karl Marx, William Rossetti and John Ruskin.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0417>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0417>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research. The entire collection is available on microfilm. Patrons must use HM 112 instead of the originals

Conditions Governing Use

Unpublished materials authored or otherwise produced by the creator(s) of this collection are in the public domain. There are no restrictions on use. Copyright status for other collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

Preferred Citation

William Harrison Riley Papers (MS 417). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Existence and Location of Copies

Entire collection also available on microfilm (786 frames on 1 reel, 35mm.) from Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, at cost. Order no. HM112.

Biographical / Historical

The Library has recently received from Mr. Walter Beinecke, Jr., a collection of manuscripts and printed material relating to a minor figure of considerable tangential importance for the study of socialism in England and the United States in the latter half of the last century. William Harrison Riley seems to have received little attention but with this collection there is enough material to compile a considerable footnote to intellectual history.

A man who received and kept letters from people like Karl Marx, John Ruskin, Walt Whitman, William Rossetti, Walter Besant, Rudyard Kipling, Justin McCarthy, and Edward Everett Hale must have interest to more than the Yale Library – although this list may sound like a list of our special collections. Mr. Riley was editor of a large number of periodicals, many of which are present in the gift. In 1871 he was editing the *Leeds Critic*. He proceeded to London where he concerned himself with the *Herald and Helpmate*, the *Republican*, the *International Herald* under the auspices of the British Federal Council, becoming in 1873 the *Republican Herald*. This London period was followed by a half year spent editing the *Sheffield Socialist*. Two pamphlets were issued in London, *An Appeal to Reason to Reform Itself* (1872) and *Yankee Letters to British Workmen* (1871 [?]) in eleven parts. These are the comments of a Boston machinist traveling in England, written in the homespun tradition of Jack Downing continued by Will Rogers.

In 1880 Mr. Riley returned to America and from 1889 to 1896 was a resident of Lunenburg, Massachusetts. Two more substantial works are present in manuscript and I find no record of their publication: "Literary Cranks By One of Them," on 112 pages, and "Radical Jack" on 212 pages. During his later years in America Riley seems to have written under the name William Freeland. He retained his interest in cooperative colonies and workingmen's associations as is documented by nearly a hundred newspaper clippings – most of which need to be identified. Such a man was naturally the recipient of numerous "crack-pot" letters. George Francis Train writes from the Tombs in 1873 and signs himself "The Coming Dictator." One Peter Swenson writes from Caddo, Texas suggesting setting up an agricultural commune. F.G. Evans answers a request for information on the Shaker Community in Mount Lebanon. Ernest Jones, ringleader of the Chartists, sends a frantic appeal for funds (1854). One folder is inscribed "Feuds within Feuds" and contains letters to Riley from such radicals as John DeMorgan, Charles Bradlaugh, and John Hales.

From *Yale University Library Gazette*, Vol. 36, October 1961.

Scope and Contents

These papers of the socialist William Harrison Riley consist largely of correspondence. Many of the letters reveal dissent and disagreement within and among a variety of leftist organizations in England and the United States from the 1850s through the early 1900s. Letters to and from John Hales of the International Workingmen's Association (1871 - 1873 describe Riley's estrangement from the organization, culminating in a letter from Karl Marx (1872 Dec 23) refusing Riley further permission to publish in their journal, and Riley's protestations of loyalty to the International (1873 Mar 5, 6, Apr 13). Riley's association and eventual disillusionment with John Ruskin and his St. George's Guild is documented in several letters from Ruskin (1877 Oct 20, 1878 Feb 14, n.d.), one from Riley (1891 Feb 6), and in the letters of other Guild members (Thomas Allsop, 1877; William B. Graham, 1888-1891; Susanna Miller, 1891 Feb 8), who describe the mismanagement and personality clashes which drove them away from Ruskin. Riley was also interested in other cooperative societies and received letters from F.W. Evans of the Shakers (1880 Oct 26) and E.W. Hamilton of the Oneida Community (1880 Nov 11), as well as from members of other societies, in particular the Kaweah Cooperative in California (J.J. Martin, 1889-1893)

Throughout the correspondence Riley's efforts to edit socialist journals and to publish articles, pamphlets, and books form a major topic. Riley corresponded with editors of many socialist publications on both sides of the Atlantic, and was constantly seeking financial aid from them, as well as receiving appeals for money from others (Ernest Jones of the Chartists, 1838-1859). Riley was also looking for jobs with publishers and literary figures. Included is a letter from Rudyard Kipling declining Riley's services as secretary (1895 Nov 4) and from J.J. Callahan concerning a job as editor of a labor paper in Colorado (1899).

Two side issues of some interest appear in Riley's correspondence. Robert Newsham writes of the conditions among the troops before the battle of Sebastopol in 1854-1855, and Edward Drury describes his incarceration in an asylum and asks Riley's help in attaining his release (1880).

In addition to William Riley's correspondence, there are several letters addressed to George H. Riley, all of a routine nature, from Norman Thomas, Max Eastman, and others (folder 20). There is also a small collection of signatures cut from letters, mostly of correspondents represented in the correspondence, but including an envelop addressed by Walt Whitman (folder 28). Among the remaining items in the papers are manuscript drafts of two works by Riley which are mentioned in the correspondence but apparently were never published, and a variety of newspaper articles by Riley. There are also photographs of Riley, Karl Marx, Brigham Young, and others, membership cards for several socialist organizations, memorial cards, a sample of "equitable money," and the marriage certificate of George H. Riley.

These papers were the gift to Yale University of Walter Beinecke, Jr. in 1961.

Collection Contents

Correspondence

b. 1, f. 1 - 20reel
1U 1838-1946

b. 1, f. 21 - 23reel
1U n.d.

Writings

b. 1, f. 24reel 1U "Radical Jack, or, The Book of the wanderers"
English undated

b. 1, f. 25reel 1U "Literary Cranks, by One of Them"
English undated

b. 2, f. 26reel 1U Newspaper clippings [1870-95]

b. 2, f. 27reel 1U Photographs undated

b. 2, f. 28reel 1U Memorial cards 1855-1860

b. 2, f. 28reel 1U Membership cards 1871, undated

b. 2, f. 28reel 1U Sample of "Equitable Money" 1871

b. 2, f. 28reel 1U Marriage certificate of George H. Riley and Nellie J. Smith 1886

b. 2, f. 28reel 1U Signatures undated

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Editors
Labor
Labor movement
Radicalism
Socialism -- England
Socialism -- United States
Working class

Corporate Bodies

Guild of St. George
International Workingmen's Association
(1864-1876)
Oneida Community
Shakers

Geographic Names

Europe
Great Britain

Names

Allsop, Thomas, 1795-1880
Aveling, Eleanor Marx, 1855-1898
Besant, Walter, 1836-1901
Bliss, William Dwight Porter, 1856-1926
Bradlaugh, Charles, 1833-1891
Buchanan, Joseph Ray, 1851-
Dilke, Charles Wentworth, Sir, 1843-1911
Edwards, Alfred Shenstone, 1849-
Eliot, Charles William, 1834-1926
Evans, F. W. (Frederick William), 1808-1893
Fawcett, Henry, 1833-1884
Hale, Edward Everett, 1822-1909
Hales, John
Jerrold, Blanchard, 1826-1884
Jones, Samuel Milton, 1846-1904
Kipling, Rudyard, 1865-1936
Litchman, Charles Henry, 1849-1902
Lucas, Auberon Thomas Herbert, baron,
1876-1916
Marx, Karl, 1818-1883
Massey, Gerald, 1828-1907
Maxse, Frederick Augustus, 1833-1900
McCarthy, Justin, 1830-1912
Orme, John
Riley, William Harrison, 1835-1907
Rossetti, William Michael, 1829-1919
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900
Train, George Francis, 1829-1904