

Guide to the George Sylvester Viereck Papers

MS 661



compiled by N. X. Rizopoulos

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 661

CREATOR: Viereck, George Sylvester, 1884-1962

TITLE: George Sylvester Viereck papers

DATES: 1924-1938

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1 linear foot (5 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Correspondence and manuscripts dealing chiefly with Viereck's book about Colonel E. M. House and President Wilson, *The Strangest Friendship in History*. Also included are notes and manuscripts concerning "The Memoirs of Colonel House," and miscellaneous other papers.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0661>

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.0661>.

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

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased in 1947 from George S. Viereck.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright status for 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

George Sylvester Viereck Papers (MS 661). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

George Sylvester Viereck - poet, novelist, journalist, biographer, and pro-German publicist - was born in Munich in 1884. Today, Viereck is remembered chiefly as one of the most prolific and articulate advocates of *Deutschtum* in America during the first half of the 20th century. Viereck's pro-German writings and activities during World War I led to his verse being dropped from many anthologies and his name being dropped from *Who's Who*. But by the late 'twenties his work (particularly his political essays and 'psychobiographical' studies) was back in fashion, and he became a regular contributor to many nationally circulated magazines. A man of mercurial temperament, unbounded vanity and energy, Viereck loved to consort with celebrities of all kinds on both sides of the Atlantic. He conducted numerous interviews with the great and near-great which were first published as articles and then collected in book form.

In 1929 Viereck wrote a series of articles for the *Saturday Evening Post* based on his personal experiences during World War I, which Harold Laswell later described as "one of the truly basic contributions to the study of propaganda." It was, indeed a surprisingly fair and balanced account, later reprinted as a book under the title *Spreading Germs of Hate*; and - to quote at some length from the pertinent sections of the recent biography by Niel M. Johnson (*George Sylvester Viereck*, University of Illinois Press, 1972, pp. 153-163) - one of those deeply impressed by Viereck's articles on propaganda was Colonel House. After reading them in the *Saturday Evening Post*,...House wrote Viereck at once (August 18, 1929), thanking him for the pleasure this story had given him. He explained further, "I seldom read articles or books relating to the war, for I got a full measure of that greatest of human tragedies while it was in progress, but I am glad my attention was called to your brilliant, informing and valuable contribution to one of its most sinister features." He commented, too, on the quality of fairness toward both sides, and expressed his hope that they would be published in book form. This letter marked the beginning of a fruitful friendship. However, House's immediate fondness for Viereck is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that three years earlier Viereck had portrayed him as a bungler and hypocrite for his role in World War I.

...The two newfound friends first met on October 14, 1929, in New York. According to Viereck, Colonel House told him that he was the "last person in the world" whom he would have suspected of being the author of these articles. He was astonished that anyone so closely connected with the war could be so impartial.... With House's encouragement, Viereck proceeded to draft into book form his series of articles, and Horace Liveright agreed to publish it. Colonel House contributed a preface to the book, in which he complimented the author for his calm and fair treatment of the subject while at the same time refusing his concurrence in all of the author's opinions and conclusions.

While the foregoing project was underway, Viereck began to work with Colonel House on other plans. In January, 1930, he obtained House's consent to take part in a dialogue on freedom of the seas to be recorded by Fox-Hearst Movietone Corporation...Later that month, Viereck asked the Colonel for a letter of recommendation in preparation for a possible speaking tour of the country as proposed by the manager of

a New York lecture bureau. House obliged with a statement that Viereck's "knowledge of public men and events throughout the world will give what you say the stamp of authority, and will enlighten our people." He pointed further to Viereck's unique range of contacts with notable leaders and with the events of World War I and its aftermath...In February he proposed to House, who was planning a trip to Europe, that if he met Paderewski perhaps he would suggest to the Polish leader the possibility of Viereck collaborating with him on an autobiography, as had been done with Empress Hermine and as he proposed to do with House, "if you are willing."

Viereck's suggestion that he collaborate with House in writing the latter's memoirs remained dormant for several months. Finally, in October, 1930, House proposed that Viereck write an account of his association and friendship with Woodrow Wilson. Viereck readily agreed and asked House for access to unpublished information. He also told his subject that the project could occupy only part of his time, since he had "to keep the wolf from the door, which in the present state of business and the stock market, is no easy task."

...It must have occurred to him that his work on House's memoirs need not be a financial sacrifice, but might be a source of gain. More than that, as he confided to House in mid-October, 1930, "there is a certain poetic justice in this, that I, who had been one of the most bitter enemies of Woodrow Wilson, should be selected by you and by fate to tell the true story resting in the lines and between the lines of your correspondence."

Viereck designed a thorough plan of research for the first authorized account of House's relationship with President Wilson. Most important, of course, was his ready access to House and his ideas and materials which he hoped would shed a new and clearer light upon a most crucial period in American history. In the course of his research on this project he also consulted with former Central Power ambassadors, Dumba and Bernstorff, various members of Wilson's cabinet, Wilson's secretary Joseph Tumulty, Sydney E. Mezes (chief of the Inquiry, the body established by the President to prepare data and advice for the peace conference), Justice Charles Evans Hughes, Washington correspondent Louis Seibold, Professor Charles Seymour, and Frances Denton, the Colonel's secretary. Shaemas O'Sheel served as a research assistant. It is notable that Viereck did not obtain impressions from British or French political and diplomatic personnel - indicating his pro-German orientation, presumably.

In spite of his known inclinations, Viereck's account was not as biased as one might have expected. The restraining hand of Colonel House undoubtedly helped moderate his predispositions, but Viereck himself appeared to have become broader and more rational in his outlook. Working diligently on the manuscript in 1931, Viereck finished it in 1932. In that year it was published by Horace Liveright, titled *The Strangest Friendship in History: Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House*.

...In 1931 Viereck found a journalistic market for his House-Wilson account. Editor (Charles) Fulton Oursler, his friend of several years, agreed to serialize this work in abbreviated form in *Liberty* magazine. Accordingly, it was published in ten installments from February through April, 1932. Up to that time Viereck had authored less than a dozen articles in this magazine, but within the next six years he contributed more than fifty articles for this journal, which had a total circulation of more than 2,000,000 copies each week. It became his chief source of income, netting him \$8,000-10,000 per year.

With Viereck's encouragement and assistance, Colonel House also composed several articles on contemporary issues that were published in the magazine between 1933 and 1935. *Liberty* paid Colonel House \$500 for each article and in addition remunerated Viereck with about one-third of that amount.

... *Liberty* magazine agreed, apparently in 1934, to a similar financial arrangement for the projected publication of House's memoirs. Viereck had persuaded House to begin the autobiography, with his assistance. The first two installments of the draft were completed in 1934. It appears that in the first phases of the project Viereck suggested how the material should be arranged and then edited and revised the drafts prepared by House... Some of the subsequent installments, however, were prepared by Viereck and reviewed and, where necessary, reworked by Colonel House. For reasons not discernible in their correspondence, in 1935 House appeared to lose interest in the project. In July Viereck complained to him that he still had not seen his diary, and he regretted that House had elected not to amplify or revise the thirteenth installment which Viereck had based entirely upon Seymour's *Intimate Papers*. He still lacked information, too, on House's career since the war. Meanwhile, he confided to Frances Denton that Farrar

and Rinehart were no longer interested in publishing the book; he attributed this in part to the Colonel's keeping himself too anonymous and being too reticent. Under Viereck's prodding, House cooperated in the preparation of the final installments, but the manuscript was not completed until early 1936.

In the meantime, *Liberty* magazine postponed indefinitely its plans to publish the memoirs, although it had paid advances to both of them.

...Finally, in early 1937 Colonel House decided to repurchase publication rights from Liberty for his memoirs, for which he paid the journal \$10,000 - presumably the amount that had originally been paid him. Viereck, in turn, decided to reimburse the magazine for the "larger part" of what it had paid him on the projected series. At the same time he told House that he was under the impression that the North American Newspaper Alliance would be permitted to publish them, but nothing came of it. Viereck expressed his disappointment, but he said he would rather forfeit his monetary interest in the memoirs than lose "one particle" of House's friendship. The memoirs remained unpublished and were subsequently donated to Yale University. Charles Seymour later reviewed them and stated that they were based almost exclusively on *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, which he had prepared in the 1920's. He concluded that they did not add objective evidence, but reflected Colonel House's feelings after his memory had been refreshed, and that they also showed Viereck's influence as the ghost-writer. [Note by Charles Seymour, November 12, 1954, attached to MS of Memoirs of E. M. House MSS.]

The lack of publishers' interest in the memoirs and House's decision to repurchase his literary rights chilled their friendship, but in July, 1937, House responded willingly to Viereck's initiative in renewing their old amity. Viereck told House that he still looked upon him as "more or less a Father Confessor." At the former's request, House reviewed and praised the final manuscript of Viereck's book, *The Kaiser on Trial*. On October 5, the two met for the first time in a long while; it also turned out to be their last meeting. The next day Viereck wrote Colonel House that he was "deeply touched" by the latter's tribute to his book. Soon thereafter House's health began deteriorating; after a final attack of pleurisy he passed away in March, 1938.

The House-Viereck "connection" explains, in fact, the existence of this small collection of Viereck Papers in the Yale University Library, where until recently it formed part of the larger "House Collection" brought together by the late Charles Seymour. The bulk of Viereck's papers are to be found at the Special Collections Department of the University of Iowa Library and at the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress [Gertz MSS.]

In the late 'thirties Viereck once more emerged as a spokesman for the German (in this instance, Hitlerite) "cause" in America and fought vigorously on the side of the isolationist, anglophobe, and Nazi pressure groups in this country. This time his uncritical devotion to the Fatherland cost him dearly, and he emerged with his professional reputation totally ruined and his private and family life in tatters. In March 1942, Viereck was convicted of violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act; and despite a couple of mistrials and numerous appeals he was fined, sentenced to prison, and received a parole only in 1947. He died at Holyoke, Massachusetts in March 1962.

Scope and Contents

The Viereck Papers are divided into five series, as follows: I. General Correspondence (1 box) [arranged alphabetically by correspondent]; II. "The Strangest Friendship in History" (1 box) [preliminary draft and notes]; III. "The Memoirs of Colonel House" (1 box) [preliminary draft and notes]; IV. Conversations with Colonel House [1929-1931] (1 box); V. Miscellaneous Papers (1 box).

The correspondence is mainly the product of Viereck's inquiries to members of the Wilson administration in 1931 about the last eighteen months of Wilson's second term. Several times he put his questions in this form:

Did President Wilson preside over any meeting of his Cabinet after his breakdown?
Did he communicate with the Cabinet through Mrs. Wilson, and if not, through whom?
Was the question of Vice-President Marshall's assumption of the duties of the Presidency considered by the Cabinet, and if not, why not?

but on other occasions he expressed them more generally. He received informative replies from Newton D. Baker, Bainbridge Colby, Thomas Watt Gregory, David F. Houston, Sidney Mezes, and Frank L. Polk. There are also unsolicited responses to his articles from C. C. Dill, Constantine Dumba, and George W. Watt among others. The only correspondence related to Viereck's political activities in the 1930s and 1940s is an exchange of letters with George W. Watt in 1953 describing Viereck's break with Fulton Oursler, editor of *Liberty*, and his subsequent conviction under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Arrangement

The papers are arranged in five series: I. General Correspondence. II. "The Strangest Friendship in History". III. "The Memoirs of Colonel House". IV. Conversations with Colonel House. V. Miscellaneous Papers.

Collection Contents

Series I: CORRESPONDENCE

b. 1, f. 1	Baker, Newton D. (3)	June-July 1931
b. 1, f. 2	Benedict, Roswell A. (1)	undated
b. 1, f. 3	Bernstorff, Johann von (1)	November, 1930
b. 1, f. 4	Cohalan, D. F. (1)	June, 1931
b. 1, f. 5	Colby, Bainbridge (2)	June, 1931
b. 1, f. 6	Costain, T. B. (1)	January, 1932
b. 1, f. 7	Dill, C. C. (4)	March-April, 193[illegible]
b. 1, f. 8	Dumba, C. (1)	October, 1931
b. 1, f. 9	Gregory, T. W. (5)	June 1931
	House, E. M.	
b. 1, f. 10	Houston, D. (2)	July, 1931
b. 1, f. 11	Huebsh, B. W. (1)	January, 1930
b. 1, f. 12	Hughes, C. E. (1)	June, 1931
b. 1, f. 13	LaFollette, M. (1)	June, 1931
b. 1, f. 14	LaFollette, P. F. (3)	May-June, 1931
b. 1, f. 15	LaFollette, R. M., Jr. (1)	May, 1931
b. 1, f. 16	Lansing, R. Mrs. (1)	July, 1931
b. 1, f. 17	Lawrence, D. (4)	June-July, 1931
b. 1, f. 18	Lindsey, B. (1)	December, 1930
b. 1, f. 19	MacDonald, William (1)	May, 1932
b. 1, f. 20	Mezes, S. (5)	January - June, 1931
b. 1, f. 21	Miller, D. H. (1)	November, 1931
b. 1, f. 22	Munday, C. P. (1)	April, 1932
b. 1, f. 23	O'Sheel, S. (3)	June, 1931 - April, 1932
b. 1, f. 24	Oursler, Fulton (1)	May, 1938
b. 1, f. 25	Polk, F. (2)	June-July, 1931

b. 1, f. 26	Sell, Baron (1) Seymour, C.	January, 1932
b. 1, f. 27	Shaw, G. B. (1)	January, 1938
b. 1, f. 28	Tumulty, J. (4)	June - September, 19[illegible]
b. 1, f. 29	Waldron, Walter (1)	April, 1924
b. 1, f. 30	Watt, George (27)	1939-1940; 1953
b. 1, f. 31	Wilson, E. B. [Mrs. Woodrow] (1)	undated
b. 1, f. 32	[?] [illegible signature] (1) English	May, 1931

Series II: "THE STRANGEST FRIENDSHIP IN HISTORY"

b. 2, f. 1	"Strangest Friendship"...Contents English
b. 2, f. 2	"Strangest Friendship"... MSS Part 1 [MSS Corrections by House] English
b. 2, f. 3	"Strangest Friendship"...MSS Part 2 [MSS Corrections by House] English
b. 2, f. 4	"Strangest Friendship"... MSS Part 3 [Photostat MSS corrections by House]
b. 2, f. 5	"Strangest Friendship"...MSS Part 4 [MSS Corrections by House] English
b. 2, f. 6	"Strangest Friendship"... MSS Part 5 [MSS Corrections by House] English
b. 2, f. 7	"Strangest Friendship"... MSS Part 6 [MSS Corrections by House] English
b. 2, f. 8	"Strangest Friendship"...MSS Part 7 [MSS Corrections by House] English
b. 2, f. 9	"Strangest Friendship"...MSS Part 8 [MSS Corrections by House] English
b. 2, f. 10	"Strangest Friendship"...Miscellaneous Carbons [early drafts?] English
b. 2, f. 11	"Strangest Friendship"...Rendezvous in Heaven" [MSS notes by Viereck][discarded chapter?] English

Series III: "THE MEMOIRS OF COLONEL HOUSE"

b. 3, f. 1	"Memoirs of Colonel House", Preface - Part III English
b. 3, f. 2	"Memoirs of Colonel House", Part IV - Part VI English
b. 3, f. 3	"Memoirs of Colonel House", Part VII - Part IX English
b. 3, f. 4	"Memoirs of Colonel House", Part X - Part XII English
b. 3, f. 5	"Memoirs of Colonel House", Part XIII - Part XVI English

Series IV: CONVERSATIONS WITH COLONEL HOUSE

b. 4, f. 1	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	October 14, 1929, undated
b. 4, f. 2	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	October 13, 1930
b. 4, f. 3	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	October 21, 1930
b. 4, f. 4	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	October 22, 1930
b. 4, f. 5	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	November 4, 1930
b. 4, f. 6	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	November 13, 1930
b. 4, f. 7	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	November 17, 1930
b. 4, f. 8	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	November 21, 1930
b. 4, f. 9	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	November 25, 1930
b. 4, f. 10	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	December 1, 1930
b. 4, f. 11	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	December 4, 1930
b. 4, f. 12	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	December 9, 1930
b. 4, f. 13	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	December 15, 1930
b. 4, f. 14	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	December 29, 1930
b. 4, f. 15	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	December 31, 1930
b. 4, f. 16	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	February 10, 1931
b. 4, f. 17	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English	May 28, 1931
b. 4, f. 18	"Memoirs of Colonel House" English Fragments [some in MS by House].	undated

Series V: MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS

b. 5, f. 1	Miscellaneous Reading Notes From Memoirs About Wilson	
b. 5, f. 2	Miscellaneous Reading Notes on Wilson and House	
b. 5, f. 3	Newspaper notes and photostats on Wilson's Illness	
b. 5, f. 4	Miscellaneous Printed Material, Clippings, Photo and Notes	
b. 5, f. 5	Article [Printed] <i>The True Story of the 14 Points and the League Covenant</i>	April 23, 1932
b. 5, f. 6	Draft of Article "Colonel House as a British Spy? [typescript]	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.

Geographic Names

United States -- Foreign relations
United States -- Politics and government

Occupations

Authors

Names

Baker, Newton Diehl, 1871-1937
Bernstorff, Johann Heinrich, Graf von,
1862-1939
Colby, Bainbridge, 1869-1950
Costain, Thomas B. (Thomas Bertram),
1885-1965
Dill, Clarence C. (Clarence Cleveland),
1884-1978
Gregory, Thomas Watt, 1861-1933
House, Edward Mandell, 1858-1938
Houston, David Franklin, 1866-1940
Huebsch, B. W. (Benjamin W.), 1876-1964
Hughes, Charles Evans, 1862-1948
La Follette, Philip Fox, 1897-1965
La Follette, Robert M. (Robert Marion),
1895-1953
Lawrence, David, 1888-1973
Lindsey, Ben B. (Ben Barr), 1869-1943
MacDonald, William, 1863-1938
Mezes, Sidney Edward, 1863-1931
O'Sheel, Shaemas, 1886-1954
Oursler, Fulton, 1893-1952
Polk, Frank Lyon, 1871-1943
Seymour, Charles, 1885-1963
Shaw, Bernard, 1856-1950
Tumulty, Joseph P. (Joseph Patrick), 1879-1954
Viereck, George Sylvester, 1884-1962
Wilson, Edith Bolling Galt, 1872-1961
Wilson, Woodrow, 1856-1924