

Joseph Hergesheimer photographs

Collection ID: DN161

Accession #: 2014.23

Finding Aid prepared by Kelin Baldrige



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SERVICES

Summary Information

Repository	Chester County History Center
Creator	unknown
Title	Joseph Hergesheimer photographs
Date [bulk]	1917-1945, undated
Date [inclusive]	1917-1945, undated
Extent	.2 linear feet
Location note	Chester County History Center Photo Archives
Language	eng
Language of Materials note	eng
Abstract	The Joseph Hergesheimer photographs date from the 1917-1955 and measure .2 linear feet. They include photographs of early 20 th century author, Joseph Hergesheimer, Dorothy Hergesheimer, their friends, and their home, the Dower House.

Preferred Citation note

[Identification of item], Joseph Hergesheimer photographs, DN161, Chester County History Center Photo Archives, West Chester, PA.

Historical Note

Joseph Hergesheimer (1880-1954) was an American author known for hyper-descriptive novels about the lives of the extremely wealthy.

Hergesheimer was born in Philadelphia, PA in 1880 to Joseph and Helen Janes McKellar Hergesheimer. He was often ill as a child and, as such, his only education was about three years of instruction at Germantown Friends School.

At 17, Hergesheimer decided to pursue a career as an artist. He attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts briefly, but was self-described as being lazy and not enjoying the work. At 21, his grandfather died and left him a significant inheritance. He used the money to travel to Italy, and quickly squandered the fortune while living an extravagant life as a painter in Venice. Out of money, Hergesheimer was forced to return to America. He did not have sufficient funds to purchase a train ticket from New York to Philadelphia, but was able to slip onto the train due to his nice luggage only to be kicked off in Philadelphia.

When he returned to the Philadelphia area, he met novelist Adeline King (Lucas Cleeve) who hired him to edit her galley proofs. Upon reading them, he decided he could write better, and thus decided to be a writer. He was not able to sell any of his work in the first ten years of his career. In 1913, he sold a short story to the Saturday Evening Post, kick starting the successful phase of his career.

He published his first novel, *The Lay Anthony*, in 1914. In 1917, his next novel, *Three Black Pennys*, became the first American novel published by Alfred A. Knopf publishing house. His novels *Java Head*, *Linda Condon*, and *Balisand* were all critically acclaimed. In 1922, a *Literary Digest* poll named Hergesheimer "America's best author." Furthermore, several of his novels, including *Java Head*, were turned into movies.

During this period of prolific success, Hergesheimer worked both at his home and in an office space at 13 N High Street in West Chester.

Hergesheimer and his novels reached peak acclaim and recognition in the 1920s, but had faded into obscurity by the end of his life due to a definitive change of public taste in the 1930s. Hergesheimer's descriptive style known as "aestheticism" and his focus on opulent lives of the extremely wealthy fell sharply out of favor.

In 1899, Hergesheimer moved to West Chester, PA, where he met his future wife, Dorothy Hemphill. They married in 1907. Hemphill was born in West Chester to William and Mary Sharpe Holloway Hemphill.

Together, they purchased the Dower House in West Chester, likely in the early 1920s. Restoring the house to its original 1712 state became a passion for the couple. Hergesheimer insisted on using hand-made nails, wooden pegs instead of screws, and hand drawn shingles in an effort to restore the home as accurately as possible. He also consulted Francis Brinton in order to find and purchase early Chester County furnishings for the home.

A *Daily Republican* article about Hergesheimer from January 29, 1945 describes the activity of the house during the peak of Hergesheimer's career: "Meanwhile other literary lights of the period came to

‘Dower House’, the charming early-American house that he and Mrs. Hergesheimer made a center of hospitality. Hugh Walpole and W.L. George, the British novelists, came to spend weekends; so did Henry Mencken, James Branch Cabell, Ellen Glasgow, and Carl Van Vechten. Stars of the motion pictures famous in pre-talkie days, came often, and we gave the same pop-eyed homages to Lillian Gish, Richard Barthelmess, and John Gilbert that young people of today would render to Greer Garson, Veronica Lake, and Frederick March.”

In 1945, after almost 20 years of declining success, he was forced to sell Dower House and the treasures in it. He and his wife then moved into a small home in Stone Harbor, NJ.

Scope and Contents and Arrangement note

This collection came to CCHC with no original order.

It is comprised of four folders (Joseph Hergesheimer, Dorothy Hergesheimer, friends, and the Dower House), one album with photographs of the Hergesheimers, their home (the Dower House), and their vacations.

There are also three vinyl records which are restricted, according to original documentation. They contain audio recordings produced by the Library of Congress of Joseph Hergesheimer reading from his book, *Balisand*.

Administrative Information

The Joseph Hergesheimer photographs were donated to the Chester County History Center by Mary Sproat in 2014.

Controlled Access Headings

Hergesheimer, Joseph, 1880-1954

Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964

Phyfe, Hal

Wyeth, Henriette, 1907-1997

Cairns, Huntington, 1904-1985

Conditions Governing Access

This collection contains audio recordings that are restricted (but is available via the [Library of Congress](#)). The remainder of the collection is open for use.

Collection Inventory

Box #	Folder #	Title	Date	# of items
1	1	Joseph Hergesheimer portraits	1917, 1941, undated	7
1	2	Dorothy Hergesheimer portraits	undated	5

1	3	Carl Van Vechten and Fania Marenoff signed portrait	1923	1
1	3	Joseph Hergesheimer and Huntington Cairns in Stone Harbor, NJ. A portrait of Dorothy Hergesheimer by Henriette Wyeth is in the background.	undated	1
1	4	The Dower House, West Chester, by Philip Wallace (owned by Joseph Hergesheimer)	undated	1
1	album	Photograph album with silver gelatin photographs of Joseph Hergesheimer at home and on vacation	undated	1
	A/V	<u>RESTRICTED</u> : Vinyl records of Joseph Hergesheimer reading from his novel, "Balisand," recorded by the Library of Congress .	1945	3