

Decker Press Finding Guide

2 boxes, 31 folders

Contents List:

Box 1

Bibliography, catalogue

- List of titles held by the WIU special collections unit, with years of publication and some original prices noted
- Catalogue from 1942 of the items published by the Press of James A. Decker. Catalogue lists titles, authors, and prices of books along with blurbs from reviewers or other writers

Family biographical information

- Marriage, birth, and death certificates for members of the Decker family, beginning with the marriage of James Decker's grandfather E. E. James to Viola Singleton in 1889
- Announcements in the newspaper mentioning births, deaths, or other events involving members of the Decker family
- Brief biographical entry on James Decker from *Who's Who in the Midwest* publication, 1975
- James Decker's biography blurb from when he worked as an editor at Unity School in Lee's Summit, Missouri, 1975
- Bronze star certificate awarded to James Decker in 1945 for his military service in the Philippines

Correspondence with Sherry Swearngen (Decker's daughter)

- Letters and emails between Sherry Swearngen and Marla Vizdal (an employee at the WIU archives) discussing details of James Decker's life and the press, dated 2004-2007
- Letters and emails between Swearngen and John Hallwas regarding a list of her father's books she had discovered in his belongings and then donated to the archives, dated 2001-2002
- Emails between Sherry and Jim Ballowe discussing his article "Little Press on the Prairie," which was first published in the *Chicago Reader*, May 3, 1996 [see folder *James Ballowe: "Little Press on the Prairie"*]

Correspondence, miscellaneous

- Letters from Marla Vizdal to Celeste Benkendorf about titles she owned and about possibly donating them to WIU, dated 2005
- Correspondence between Marla Vizdal and people who have made donations to the collection
- Marla Vizdal discussing a talk she gave at the McDonough County Historical Society in November of 2004 [see folder *Historical: Talks*]
- Marla Vizdal's responses to various inquiries from scholars about the press

- Correspondence between Marla Vizdal and Jim Ballowe [see folder **James Ballowe: “Little Press on the Prairie”**]

Collection publicity

- Articles about the collection itself held at Malpass in the Archives Special Collections Unit, including:
 - [News release from WIU about donation from Eisner to the archives](#) [see folder **Eisner, Steve: Collection development**]
 - Article in the *Macomb Journal*, dated September 10, 2003
 - Article in the *Macomb Eagle*, dated October 31, 2003
 - Article in the *Western News*, winter 2003

Book publicity

- Newspaper clippings and reviews, primarily from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* via ProQuest, on books from various authors published by the Decker Press, dated from 1940-1948

Books, searches and prices

- Online searches for Decker Press titles with prices from various websites and databases including AbeBooks, ILAB-LILA, Alibris, WorldCat, BookFinder, etc.

Court documents

- Legal documents concerning the ownership of the Decker Press, the purchase of the press by Ervin Tax, and the ownership of the estate of Ervin Tax after his death, from the County Court of McDonough County, dated 1949-1950

Historical: Writings

- Newspaper clippings of articles on the history of the press, including:
 - “Our Regional Heritage – Poetry and Murder: Prairie City’s Decker Press” by John Hallwas
 - “Correspondence” by [Will Wharton, from Poetry magazine in October of 1950](#)
 - Numerous articles from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the *Macomb Daily Journal*, and other papers about the murder-suicide case, with information about the trial, description of the crime scene by witnesses, and photos of the scene, dated 1950
 - Articles about the publication of *Illinois Poems* (1941) and *Along the Illinois* (1942) by Edgar Lee Masters, and a few other articles about the press
 - Articles about the charges of embezzlement against Decker, dated 1949
 - Article from the *Prairie Citizen* [see folder **C.R. Crabb: Prairie Citizen**]

Historical: Talks given

- Copies of a talk about the history of the Decker Press, given by Marla Vizdal on several occasions:
 - September 19, 2005, for the McDonough County Genealogical Society
 - April 8, 2005, for the Retired Teachers of McDonough County
 - January 17, 2005, for the Industry Kiwanis Club
 - November 9, 2004, for the McDonough County Historical Society

Historical: Miscellaneous

- Interview with Zelma and Gilbert Dixon of Colchester (who had lived in the upstairs apartment of the Decker house in 1948) by Marla Vizdal
- Contract selling press from the Decker siblings to Harry Denman, dated 1946
- Employment contract between Ervin Tax and James Decker, dated 1948

Miscellaneous

- Materials about William Moon, possible binder for the press
- Miscellaneous papers

James Ballowe: “Little Press on the Prairie”

- Copies of Ballowe’s article [“Little Press on the Prairie”](#) which appeared in the *Chicago Reader* in 1996, and in the *Illinois Times* in 2003
- Autographed poem “Blue Heron” by Martha Graham for James Ballowe

C.R. Crabb: Prairie Citizen

- Materials related to the *Prairie Citizen*, Decker’s newspaper, which he started in May of 1941 and sold to Crabb in September of 1941
- Agreement selling the *Prairie Citizen* and its mailing list and subscribers to C.R. Crabb, dated September 6, 1941
- Subscriber list

Authors: Sylvia Auxier materials copied from University of Kentucky

- Copies of materials from [the Sylvia Trent Auxier papers from University of Kentucky](#)
- Manuscripts and correspondence about books of poetry
- Auxier’s correspondence with James Decker and Ervin Tax, including inquiries about publication details for her book *Meadow Rue* (1948), dated 1946-1950
- Several notices to Decker authors with news and administrative updates, including:
 - Letters from James and Dorothy Decker, dated 1947
 - Letters from Ervin Tax explaining his own involvement in the press and discussing the financial and technical struggles of the press, dated 1947
 - Letter from Tax announcing Decker’s departure from the press, dated July 20, 1949
 - Notice from Lyle Robbins (administrator of Ervin Tax’s estate) announcing Tax’s death and discussing how the authors’ contracts and books would be handled, dated August 11, 1950

Authors: Edgar Lee Masters materials copied from Indiana University

- Copies of materials from [the Valentine-Masters Mss., 1915-1944, from Indiana University](#)
- Correspondence between Masters and Decker about publications

Authors: Ervin Tax materials copied from University of Chicago

- Copies of materials from [the Sol Tax Papers 1923-1989 from the University of Chicago](#)
- Letters and correspondence from Ervin Tax to his brother Sol Tax, who was a professor at University of Chicago, about the press, business, and finances, dated 1948-1950

- Letter from Burton Frye about his paper, dated May 23, 1950 [*see folder Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)*]
- Letters from Lyle Robbins about the late Ervin Tax's estate and press, dated 1950-1952
- Editorial report about Tax's manuscript *The Wraith of Gawain*, which was published by the Decker Press in 1948

Box 2

University of Buffalo: Correspondence

- Emails between Marla Vizdal and James Maynard from University of Buffalo regarding copies of materials from their collections, dated 2008

University of Buffalo: *Upward* vol. 1, no. 3

- Xerox copy of the issue: Winter 1938-39, volume 1, number 3

Eisner, Steve: Collection development

- Obituary of Steven Jack Eisner, dated 2003
- List of items and materials accompanying Decker Press books
- "History of the Decker Collection Items Assembled by Steven J. Eisner" – a narrative on how Eisner learned about the press, his investigation of its history, his visit to Prairie City, interviews he conducted with townspeople, and his correspondence with Decker

Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)

- "Poetry in the Field" by August Derleth
- "The Decker Press of Prairie City, Illinois" which was written by Burton Frye in 1950 for ENG 354 at WIU
- "The Poet's Publisher, 1937-1950: James A. Decker of Prairie City, Illinois" by Richard Leekley

Eisner, Steve: Correspondence re: Decker Press

- Handwritten authorization by William Everson for Steve Eisner to act as agent for materials related to *The Masculine Dead* held by Decker Press, dated April 21, 1959
- Letters from Sol Tax about Burton Frye's paper, dated December 14, 1961 [*see folder Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)*]
- Correspondence between Eisner and Richard Leekley discussing their research and writings on the press, dated 1975 [*see folder Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)*]

Eisner, Steve: Correspondence between Steve Eisner and James Decker

- Letter from Decker about details of the press, titles they published, and people involved, dated 1965
- Letter from Decker about the checklist of titles published. He also discusses the financial difficulties of the press, the sale of the press to Denman and then Ervin Tax's involvement, his own involvement in the legal trouble, the accusations made against him, and Dorothy and Tax's relationship. Also includes a brief autobiographical description from Decker, dated 1961

Eisner, Steve: Correspondence – Winfield Townley Scott

- Letters discussing the press and Scott's experience as an author
- Letters from Decker to Scott about publication details for his book and other titles

Eisner, Steve: Eisner's personal notes and checklist of book titles

- Lists compiled by Leekley and Eisner of Decker Press imprints, authors, titles, years
- Handwritten notes on titles with unknown years
- List of titles, with details on imprints, publication years, length, size, and binding color of various books

Eisner, Steve: *Upward*, vol. 1, no. 1

- Photocopy of the summer 1938 issue, which includes poems and books reviews. James Decker was the editor, Warren L. Van Dine was the associate editor

Eisner, Steve: *Upward*, vol. 1, no. 2

- Photocopy of the autumn 1938 issue, which includes poems and books reviews. James Decker was the editor, Warren L. Van Dine was the associate editor

Authors, miscellaneous

- Bibliographies of authors including Louis Zukofsky, Kenneth Patchen, Charles Henri Ford, and Kenneth Rexroth
- Register for the [David Ignatow papers](#) from Mandeville Special Collections at the University of California San Diego

Eisner, Steve: *Upward*, Decker's copy

- Physically bound book of the first two issues of *Upward*: volume 1, numbers 1 & 2.

Multi-volume binding of Decker items

- Bound volume of four Decker Press publications and one author-related publication, including *Calendar, An Anthology of 1940 Poetry* edited by Norman MacLeod, *The Exiles' Anthology of American and British Poets* edited by Helen Neville and Harry Roskolenko, *Towards a Personal Armageddon* by Henry Treece, *Paper Faces* by Nelson Del Bittner and *First Manifesto* by Thomas McGrath, published in 1940

Photographs

- Xerox copies of photos, original copies are in the Special Collections photo file under Prairie City: Businesses (Decker press)
- Pictures of the crime scene; Decker family photos and portraits of young James and Dorothy; military portrait of James; photo of Steve Eisner turning over collection to archives, dated 2003