

Mercedes McCambridge Papers,
1935-2004, n.d.

Creator: Mercedes McCambridge, 1916-2004

Extent: 3 ft.

Processor: Lisa Calahan, July, 2007; Updated by Kat Latham, April, 2009

Administration Information

Access Restrictions: None

Usage Restrictions: The copyright of materials created by Mercedes McCambridge was transferred to the WLA.

Preferred Citation: Loyola University Chicago. Women & Leadership Archives. Mercedes McCambridge Papers. Box #, Folder #.

Provenance: Mercedes McCambridge donated her papers to the Women and Leadership Archives in her will. The papers were sent to the archives by the executor of her estate, Mark Mandell, on March 14, 2005. (WLA 2006.87) Other materials were added to the collection from the Mundelein College Collection Alumnae files.

Separations: No documents were separated, compromising bindings were removed and the material preserved in a more appropriate manner.

See Also: The Mundelein College Records, photograph collection and Laetare Players scrapbook.

Biographical History

Mercedes McCambridge was born in March 16, 1916 in Joliet, Illinois to Irish Catholic immigrant parents. A theatre major at Mundelein College, was “discovered” while a member of the college’s verse-speaking choir; catapulting her career in radio and later film and television. While still in school, Mercedes embarked on her professional life with a five year contract with the National Broadcasting Company for radio-drama. She played parts in radio programs such as “I Love a Mystery” (1939-1953), “One Man’s Family” (1932-1950), “Lights Out” (1934-1947), and “Abie’s Irish Rose” (1942-1944). Her performances in radio led Orson Welles to credit her as the world’s greatest living radio actress.

After graduating from Mundelein College in 1937, McCambridge moved to New York to further her acting career in theatre. She starred in plays such as “The Mad Woman of Chaillot” (1948-1950), “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf” (1962), and, later in her career, the Award winning play by Neil Simon, “Lost in Yonkers” (1991). Her early stage work lead directly to Hollywood films.

McCambridge’s filmography includes her Oscar winning debut performance in “All the King’s Men” (1949), a leading role in the cult classic “Johnny Guitar” (1954), an Oscar nominated role in “Giant” (1956), an uncredited role in Orson Welles’ “Touch of Evil” (1958) among many others. Although she continued to regularly perform throughout the 1960s, McCambridge only again gained widespread notoriety when she portrayed the voice of the demon in “The Exorcist” (1973). This reclaim to fame once again led to countless roles in both film and television. Throughout her career in film and theatre, McCambridge won national recognition – including an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress and two Golden Globes for Best Actress and Most Promising Newcomer, Female all for her role in “All the King’s Men” (1949). She also has two stars on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame, one for film and the other for her work in television. McCambridge is

a published author, writing her autobiography in 1981 and is also an accomplished, although unpublished, poet.

When not acting, Mercedes devoted her time to educating the public about alcoholism and rehabilitation. In 1969 she testified before Senator Harold E. Hughes' Subcommittee on Alcohol and Narcotics, publicly confessing to her past problems with alcoholism. Although this confession is said to have hindered her career, it gave other alcoholics, especially celebrities, the courage to also come forward and seek help. In the 1970s, she became heavily involved with organizations such as The National Council of Alcoholism and The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. In January of 1970, Mercedes was announced the honorary chairman of Alcohol Information Week and in December of the same year was named honorary chairman of the National Council of Alcoholism. Starting in 1974, she served as the president of Livengrin Alcohol Rehabilitation Center in Philadelphia. Because of her dedication to the cause of eradicating alcoholism, she received numerous awards and was honored at the White House for her humanitarian work.

Although McCambridge suffered some major difficulties in her personal life, including a long struggle with alcoholism, two failed marriages, and the murder/suicide of her son and his family, she was a strong woman and always portrayed that strength in her acting roles as well. She was never shy to voice her opinion on the Hollywood film industry, politics, women's place in society, and she continued to be outspoken until her death in 2004.

Scope and Content

The Mercedes McCambridge Papers consists of 3 linear feet and spans the years 1935 to 2000. The papers are organized into five series and alphabetically within each series. The material within this collection consists of paper, objects, and photographs. The Oscar and Golden Globes are available for viewing by pre-approved request due to their fragile condition.

Series 1: Biographical, 1935-2004, Box 1

Contains material related to Mercedes McCambridge's education, resume, and personal friendship with Adlai Stevenson and include correspondence, Adlai Stevenson commemorative stamps, obituaries, photocopies from encyclopedias, grade cards, and a recording of a commencement speech.

Series 2: Professional, 1949-2000, Box 1

Contains material relating to Mercedes McCambridge's professional career as an actress and her community work against alcoholism. This series includes correspondence from various members of the White house commending her for her interest in abolishing alcoholism in the United States, original drafts of speeches that McCambridge presented at various events, press releases and news articles. Special items of note in this series include signed letters from Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. Photocopies are kept within the collection, and the originals are filed with the case file. The original letters can be viewed for research purposes with the approval of the archives director.

Subseries 2A: Scripts, 1948-1991, Boxes 1-2

This subseries contains four original scripts that McCambridge used to fulfill her roles in film and stage theatre. Of particular note is the “All the King’s Men” script which includes production stills within the bound script and newspaper reviews that McCambridge cut out and glued in the back of the script.

Subseries 2B: Writings, 1981, n.d., Box 2

This subseries includes McCambridge’s published autobiography, *The Quality of Mercy*, poems, and drafts of two unpublished writings. “A Collage of Hope, Healing, and Humor” is an unpublished autobiographical essay with Mercedes’ personal notes and edits on the draft. The second unpublished work is a portion of a biography about actress Sarah Siddons entitled, “The World’s Greatest Actress: A Profile of Mrs. Siddons” and includes several variations of the same section of writing, with different notes and subtle changes to each version.

Series 3: Photographs 1947-1973, n.d., Box 3

Contains photographs of Mercedes McCambridge at a poetry reading, with Adlai Stevenson II, involved in acting, and at other unidentified events.

Series 4: Awards, 1971-1995, Box 3

Contains honorary degrees, plaques, and certificates Mercedes McCambridge received throughout her life in recognition of her work as an actress and as an advocate for alcoholism awareness.

Series 5: 3-D Objects and Oversized Materials 1949-1965, Boxes 4-6

Contains Mercedes McCambridge’s Academy Award, two Golden Globe Awards, a scrapbook, a biography of Adlai Stevenson II, and Sarah Bernhardt’s autograph. Photocopies of Bernhardt’s autograph are available in the collection; originals are stored in the case file.

Subjects:

Adlai Stevenson

All the King’s Men

Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Giant

Mundelein College

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| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Dates</u> |
|--|---------------|---|-----------------|
| Series 1: Personal 1935-1999, n.d. | | | |
| 1 | 1 | Adlai Stevenson II | 1952-1965, n.d. |
| | 2 | Biographical Information | 1970-1984, n.d. |
| | 3 | Mundelein College | 1935-1999, n.d. |
| | 4 | Obituaries | 2004 |
| Series 2: Professional, 1949-2000, N.D. | | | |
| | 5 | Correspondence (Johnson and Nixon originals in case file) | 1963-1988 |
| | 6 | Monster's Inc., Roz Character Description | 2000 |
| | 7 | Newspaper Clippings | 1936-1994, n.d. |
| | 8 | Playbills | 1935, n.d. |
| | 9 | Press Releases | 1942-1984, n.d. |
| | 10 | Ray Apicalla Speech | 1994 |
| Subseries 2A: Scripts 1948-1991 | | | |
| | 11 | "All the King's Men" | 1948 |
| | 12 | "Giant" | 1956 |
| 2 | 1 | "Night Mother" | 1983 |
| | 2 | "Lost in Yonkers" | 1991 |
| Subseries 2B: Writings 1981, n.d. | | | |
| | 3 | "A Collage of Hope, Healing and Humor," draft | n.d. |
| | 4 | Poetry | n.d. |
| | 5 | "The Quality of Mercy" (2 copies) | 1981 |
| | 6 | "The World's Greatest Actress," draft | n.d. |
| | 7 | "The World's Greatest Actress," draft | n.d. |
| | 8 | "The World's Greatest Actress," draft | n.d. |
| | 9 | "The World's Greatest Actress," draft | n.d. |
| Series 3: Photographs 1947-1973, n.d. | | | |
| 3 | 1 | Photographs, Poetry Reading with U.S. Air Force Band | 1973 |
| | 2 | Photographs, Adlai Stevenson | n.d. |
| | 3 | Photographs, Theatre and Acting | 1947, n.d. |
| | 4 | Unidentified Photographs | n.d. |
| Series 4: Awards, 1971-1995 | | | |
| | 5 | American Ireland Fund Award | 1995 |

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| 6 | Antoinette Perry Award Nomination | 1971-1972 |
| 7 | Honoris Causa Degree, Mundelein College | 1984 |
| 8 | Honoris Causa Degree, St. Edwards University | 1974 |
| 9 | Honoris Causa Degree, St. Mary's University | 1994 |
| 10 | LOOK Film Achievement Award | 1949 |
| 11 | National Council on Alcoholism Award | 1973 |
| 12 | Neil Simon Letter Plaque | 1992 |
| 13 | White House Certificate of Appreciation | 1971 |

Series 5: 3-D and Oversized Materials, 1949-1965

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|---|---|------|
| 4 | Academy Award Oscar, "All the Kings Men" | 1949 |
| 5 | Golden Globes, "All the Kings Men" | 1949 |
| 6 | 1 Sarah Bernhardt Autograph (original in case file) | 1965 |
| | 2 Scrapbook | |
| | 3 Stevenson Biography, "Man of Honor Man of Peace" | 1965 |