Harmon, Arlis Odell, 1905-1992 (MSS 153)

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BIOGRAPHY

Arlis Odell Harmon, son of Thomas M. (1870-1953) and Ivy (1880-1909) Harmon, was born on 1 April 1905, in Allen County, Kentucky. The death of his mother, which occurred when he was only four, later inspired him to write several songs pertaining to maternal love and the loss he experienced. In 1928, Harmon assumed the position of a private investigator in Birmingham, Alabama. Then for almost thirty years, he worked chiefly as a railroad/street railroad engineer inspector in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo. He also served as a checker for the Louisville Railway Company and was associated briefly with the Tennessee Electric Power Company in Nashville. Later, Harmon found time to write a column regularly for the Scottsville, Kentucky Citizen-Times, using the pseudonym, "The Lone Traveler."

In 1959 Harmon returned to Allen County, Kentucky, and began concentrating on gospel music, which he had loved since boyhood. After learning to read shape notes, he then learned to play the organ. Harmon wrote many poems, some of which he set to music.

Harmon's first song Coming Home on a Promise and a Prayer, was published by James D. Vaughan Publishing Company in 1961. Some of the other notable companies, which published his works, were Albert E. Brumley & Sons, Convention Music Company, Tennessee Music and Printing Company, and Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company. Harmon claimed that his success in the composition of gospel music was because of divine inspiration, that is, the Lord guided him through each song until it was completed.

Harmon describing his lifestyle, in a letter written to the readers of The Vaughan Family Visitor wrote, "I am a bachelor, do my own cooking, and believe it or not, my cooking hasn't killed me yet, but sometimes I almost chicken-out on eating my cooking. I live alone out on Dogwood Ridge in Allen County, Kentucky, where it is quiet and peaceful and have the best neighbors anyone could wish for."

Harmon died on May 30, 1992, leaving behind a varied collection of published
gospel music tunes, and a name that will remain in the hearts of those who know his music.

THE COLLECTION

The collection includes correspondence, obituaries, poems and songs written by Arlis Odell Harmon, as well as other music-related items. Harmon’s collection of 45, 78, and 33 1/3 rpm phonograph records, books, and approximately 700 gospel song books are housed in the Special Collections Library.

SHELF LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOX 1</th>
<th>HARMON, Arlis Odell</th>
<th>1866-1992</th>
<th>847 items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Folder 1</td>
<td>Descriptive Inventory and biographical data</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 2</td>
<td>Employment papers and address book</td>
<td>Aug. 24, 1928-June 2, 1958</td>
<td>32 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 3</td>
<td>Incoming letters</td>
<td>1924; 1969-1992</td>
<td>56 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 4</td>
<td>Correspondence about musical affairs</td>
<td>Feb. 2, 1960-Pre-Sept. 7, 1991</td>
<td>50 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 5</td>
<td>Huff, Margaret - Letters and sheet music</td>
<td>Oct. 28, 1975-May 8, 1979</td>
<td>7 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 6</td>
<td>Sturdevant, Bill - Letters, 1982 (2) and sheet music</td>
<td>1953 - June 11, 1982</td>
<td>22 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 7</td>
<td>Thompson, Reid - Letters from</td>
<td>June 8, 1972-Feb. 16, 1987</td>
<td>14 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 8</td>
<td>Family history</td>
<td>1866; 1892?;1976</td>
<td>14 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 9</td>
<td>Bills, notes, etc.</td>
<td>1942-1992</td>
<td>41 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 11</td>
<td>Poems written by Harmon: I-K</td>
<td>1933-1982</td>
<td>116 items</td>
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<td>Folder 12</td>
<td>Poems written by Harmon: L-S</td>
<td>1935-1991</td>
<td>145 items</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Folder 13  Poems written by Harmon:  T-Z  1934-1982  116 items
Folder 14  Composition book, containing holographic words of poems and songs  n.d.  1 item, 96p.
Folder 15  Obituaries written by Harmon  1964-1990  53 items
Folder 16  Photographs (photocopies)  1985-1990  30 sheets
Folder 17  Miscellaneous  1935; 1965-1987 or later  37 items

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS  HARMON, Arlis Odell, 1866-1992
153  1905-1992

Poems, 1934-1991 (515), obituaries, 1964-1990 (53), written by Harmon, a gospel song writer and enthusiast, of Allen County, Kentucky. Includes correspondence about gospel music, genealogical data, photos, etc.
1 ½ boxes. 17 folders. 874 items. Originals.
1992.149.1

SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Allen County – Relating to
Authors – Kentucky
Brumley, Albert E., & Sons, 1970-1977  B1,F4
Brumley, Albert Edward, 1905-1977  B1,F4
Christmas cards  B1,F3
Clergy – Methodist – Letters of, 1972-1987  B1,F7
Genealogy – Gilliam family  B1,F3&8
Genealogy – Harmon family  B1,F3&8
Genealogy – Meador family  B1,F3
Genealogy – Motley family  B1,F8
Genealogy – Simmons family  B1,F3
Gospel music
Gospel music – Publishers and publishing  B1,F4
Gospel musicians
Harmon, Arlis Odell, 1905-1992 – Photos B1,F16
Huff, Margaret B1,F5
Leap year, 1985 B1,F3
Lyricists – Allen County
Louisville – Churches – Methodist, 1972-1987 B1,F7
Methodist churches – Clergymen’s papers, 1972-1987 B1,F7
Montell, William Lynwood, b. 1931 B1,F3&4
Music – Publishing B1,F4
Obituaries B1,F15
Poetry B1,F9-13
Song writers
Sturdevant, Bill, b.1908 B1,F6
Thompson, Reid B1,F7
Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972 – Comments about, 1985 B1,F3
Vaughan, James D. – Music publisher, 1971-1980 B1,F4
Women – Attitudes toward, 1985 B1,F3

Jeffrey 09/23/2013