

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Playwright Austin Strong was born in San Francisco, California in 1881. His step grandfather was Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), author of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Treasure Island*. Stevenson married Strong's grandmother Fanny Vandegrift Osbourne in 1880 after her divorce. Osbourne had two children from her previous marriage, a son, Lloyd, and a daughter, Belle, the mother of Austin Strong. Austin and Lloyd together wrote *Little Father of the Wilderness*, a one act play. Strong made his home in Nantucket, Massachusetts, with his wife Mary. He died there on September 17, 1952.

Strong was a successful playwright in the early 20th century with many of his productions performed on Broadway. Some of these pieces included *The Little Father of the Wilderness* (1906), *The Toymaker of Nuremberg* (1907), *The Pied Piper* (1908), *A Good Little Devil* (1913), *The Dragon's Claw* (1914), *Bunny* (1916), *Three Wise Fools* (1918), *Seventh Heaven* (1922), *Drums of Oude* (1927), and *A Play Without a Name* (1928).

Several of Strong's plays also became films, some with more than one version. These films included *A Good Little Devil* (1914), *The Fall of the Romanoffs* (1917), *Three Wise Fools* (1923 and 1946), *Seventh Heaven* (1927 and 1937), and *Along Came Love* (1936). The 1927 silent film version of *Seventh Heaven* had notable success, receiving three Academy Awards in 1929 including Best Actress, Best Adapted Screenplay, and Best Director. The film was also nominated for Best Art Direction and Best Picture. In 1995 *Seventh Heaven* (1927) was inducted into the National Film Registry by the National Film Preservation Board. The 1937 version of the film, which received recognition at the Venice Film Festival, starred American Hollywood legend James "Jimmy" Stewart (1908-1997).

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Austin Strong collection documents the development of a play by Strong entitled "Liberty: Being the Biography of Lafayette Told in Dramatic Form," written about the Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834). The play takes place primarily during the American Revolution but also depicts the French Revolution and its aftermath in France. Main characters include historical figures such as the Marquis de Lafayette, his wife Adrienne, General George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Marie Antoinette, Maximilien Robespierre, and Napoleon. The collection consists of drafts of the play "Liberty," background sources related to the composition of the play, set designs, and correspondence.

The collection is housed in two boxes. Box 1 contains drafts of "Liberty" (folders 1-11), correspondence (folders 12-13), source materials (folders 14-25), and miscellaneous materials (folder 26). The drafts of "Liberty" are arranged in chronological order, from the earliest draft to the final version. When a date of revision is unavailable, the order of chronology has been determined by a comparison of drafts. Correspondence is arranged

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chronologically as well with undated letters at the end. Source materials include scrapbooks (folders 14-16), historical notes (folders 17-21), narratives (folders 22-24), and miscellaneous materials (folder 25). Box 2 contains set designs and oversized source materials.

The earliest manuscript of “Liberty” was written circa 1930 and was originally titled “Lafayette -- Cur Non?” In this state, the entire play is handwritten in three acts with proofreading notes in between the lines and margins, as well as pasted typewritten insertions. Each draft of the play, including the final one, has these kinds of corrections throughout. Other titles given to the play during its development include “Where Liberty Dwells” and “Lafayette: Being the Biography of the Patriot.”

The play begins with comedy but turns serious as Lafayette defies his family and secretly leaves his home to join General George Washington in the American fight for independence. The play progresses through the American victory in the Revolutionary War, the revolution that later takes place in France, Lafayette’s exile and imprisonment, and his return from exile during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte. The end is set in 1824 with an emotional salute to Lafayette as he travels through America on his farewell tour.

The majority of the correspondence is related to the production of “Liberty.” The collection includes handwritten and typewritten letters as well as telegrams to and from Strong. One notable correspondent is Arthur Hopkins (1878-1950), a successful writer and producer of plays and movies.

Much of the correspondence concerns financial problems with the production of “Liberty.” The letters reveal that producing “Liberty” would require an abnormally large sum. In 1934 the estimate for production costs was \$100,000 to \$125,000. In 1938 detailed production estimates by the University of California Alumni production council totaled \$139,580. This total dropped in 1939 to \$91,414. Conferences were also took place with Paramount for the possibility of making a film of “Liberty.” Another difficulty in the production of “Liberty” was casting. Often the desired actor was occupied with another project, so it was difficult to find suitable actors for the numerous roles in the play. By 1939 it is clear from letters in this collection that the project was considered too costly and would be shortly abandoned.

The correspondence shows that the attempts to get “Liberty” produced were frustrating for Strong. In addition to communications between Strong and various producers, the collection includes long letters that are addressed to Strong’s mother. These resemble journals in which Strong describes events taking place in his life. His frustration arises from being uninformed about the progress of “Liberty” as well as the progress of his play “Blind Man’s Buff,” which like “Liberty” appears never to have been produced. In a letter from September 6, 1934 he identified the situation as “a world of plots and counter-plots. Nothing straightforward and simple.” He continued to revise “Liberty” expecting eventual production. Remaining correspondence from 1945 concerns the publishing of Strong’s essay on Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-1799).

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A large portion of the collection is made up of related source materials. This background material primarily concerns to the American Revolution and the French Revolution. There are scrapbooks (bound and unbound loose-leaf journals) created by the author, which include handwritten notes, pasted images, and notes collected from outside sources. There are also narratives consisting of short stories that relate to the American Revolution and the French Revolution.

The oversize portion (Box 2) of this collection includes set designs hand painted by Strong. Most of the illustrations are watercolors, but some also incorporate pencil as well as crayon. Each of the illustrations is individually matted, usually with the title of the intended scene pasted on one corner of the image under the matting. Also in Box 2 are two bound journals similar to the smaller scrapbooks in Box 1 (folders 14-16). Full page newspaper articles are also housed in this box.

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder	
1	“Liberty” (handwritten)
2	“Liberty”: Prologue (2 copies typewritten)
3	“Liberty”: Draft of Act II (typewritten and handwritten)
4	“Liberty”: Draft of Act I 1931 (typewritten)
5	“Liberty”: Draft of Act II 1931 (typewritten)
6	“Liberty”: Draft of Act I 1932 (typewritten)
7	“Liberty”: Draft of Act II 1932 (typewritten)
8	“Liberty”: Draft of Act II 1932 (typewritten)
9	“Liberty” in Two Acts (typewritten)
10	“Liberty”: final bound version 1934 (2 copies)
11	“Liberty”: Production Pamphlet 1939; Description for CA film festival
12	Correspondence: 1933-1934
13	Correspondence: 1935-1945 and undated
14	Scrapbook of Source Materials (bound)
15	Scrapbook of Source Materials (unbound)
16	Scrapbook of Source Materials: notes on political history in America and France (unbound)
17	Source Materials: Works consulted list (typewritten)
18	Source Materials: Notes on American Revolution and French Revolution (handwritten)
19	Source Materials: Historical chronology (handwritten)
20	Source Materials: American Revolution: Lafayette and Washington (typewritten and handwritten)
21	Source Materials: Beaumarchais notes (typewritten and handwritten)

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| 22 | Source Materials: “The American Debt to France” and “Figaro” by Austin Strong |
| 23 | Source Materials: Narratives (typewritten) |
| 24 | Source Materials: <i>Theroigne de Mericourt</i> by Paul Hervieu |
| 25 | Source Materials: Miscellaneous |
| 26 | Miscellaneous: Invitations, programs (including the Coronation of George V.) |

Box 2

(Oversize)

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| Folder | |
| 1 | Scrapbook of Source Materials (bound) |
| 2 | Scrapbook of Source Materials (bound) |
| 3 | Source Materials: Newspaper Articles |
| 4 | Set Designs in pencil and watercolor by Austin Strong |