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William Gillette Series: American Notables Collection

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THE WILLIAM GILLETTE SERIES: AMERICAN NOTABLES COLLECTION

Watkinson Library, Trinity College

William Gillette (1853-1937)

William Hooker Gillette was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 24, 1853. He was the youngest of the six children of Francis Gillette, reformer and United States Senator, and his wife Elisabeth Daggett Hooker. On his mother's side, he was descended from the Reverend Thomas Hooker, one of the founders of Hartford.

William Gillette is best known for his role on the stage. Gillette displayed histrionic talents early in his life and was later urged to adopt the stage as a career by Mark Twain, a neighbor of his family in Hartford. It was Twain's influence which aided Gillette in securing his first amateur acting positions. In later years, he became a well-known playwright, producer and actor. One of Gillette's most popular acting roles was that of the great detective Sherlock Holmes which he first played from 1899 until 1936.

Although Gillette "retired" from the stage many times, retirement, at least in Gillette's case, never meant inactivity. In 1919, following his first retirement from the stage, Gillette built a twenty-four-room castle overlooking the Connecticut River at Hadlyme, Connecticut. He added a three-mile miniature railway over which he enjoyed driving a variety of guests including Dr. Albert Einstein.

The William Gillette Series includes a group of nine documents (eight letters and a sketched map.) Five of the nine documents are letters written by Gillette to Judge Kenneth Wynne. The four additional items include one letter from Governor Wilbur Cross to Kenneth Wynne, another memorandum from Kenneth Wynne to Moses Berkman, a letter from Kenneth Wynne to Moses Berkman, and a sketched map of directions to Gillette's Castle.

Series I: Background

Series II: Letters

A. Five letters from William Gillette to Judge Kenneth Wynne:

- July 23, 1936: Gillette describes a strategy to ensure the reelection of Governor Wilbur Cross. (2pp + envelope)

-August 10, 1936: Gillette invites Mr. And Mrs. Wynne and a few guests of their (the Wynne's) choice for a day at the castle and a ride on his train. (2pp + envelope)

-August 23, 1936: Governor Wilbur Cross has finally agreed to accompany Wynne and a few others for a visit to Gillette's Castle. (4pp + envelope)

-August 24, 1936: Gillette writes to confirm the arrangements that had been made for a visit to his castle. (1pp + envelope)

B. Letter from Governor Wilbur Cross to Judge Kenneth Wynne:

-August 6, 1936: Cross requests that Wynne arrange a visit to Gillette's castle on his behalf. (1pp.)

C. Memorandum from Judge Kenneth Wynne to Moses Berkman:

-June 14, 1937: Wynne gives an account of the visit of Governor Cross to Gillette's castle. (1pp)

D. Letter from Judge Wynne to Moses Berkman:

-June 15, 1917: Letters written by Gillette while he was attempting to persuade the Governor (Cross) to make a visit are sent to Berkman in the hopes that it would make "a very good public interest story." (1pp)

E. Sketched map of directions to Gillette's castle.

Arranged by Tonya S. Anderson, Library Assistant, March 1992.
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