



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Vernon Torrence Collection, 1940-1942

NMAH.AC.0717

Susan B. Strange

November 2000

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Vernon Torrence Collection
Date:	1940-1942
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0717
Creator:	Donnald, Morrill Torrence, Vernon Keith, 1921-1946 (Creator) Kansas Wesleyan University United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation
Extent:	0.8 Cubic feet (1 flat box)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Photographs, a Kansas Wesleyan University yearbook (with personal messages and inscriptions), diplomas, correspondence regarding Torrence's disappearance, newspaper clippings, his memorial service booklet or program, and a diary which he kept during a week-long adventure as a "hobo" in Kansas.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The material in this collection was maintained by Vernon's parents, Ira and Madge Torrence, and his younger sister, Lois Torrence, a fellow student at Kansas Wesleyan University who was devoted to her older brother. Upon their deaths the material was obtained by the remaining sister, Margaret Torrence Donnald, whose husband, Morrill Donnald, donated the material to the Archives Center, NMAH, in January 2000.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Susan Strange, November 2000.

Preferred Citation

Vernon Torrence Collection, 1930-1957, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

Vernon Keith Torrence was born in McCune, Kansas, on November 18, 1921. After graduating from high school in Solomon, Kansas, Vernon entered Kansas Wesleyan University from which he graduated with honors in history in 1942. During his senior year he was the editor of the University's 1942 yearbook, the "Coyote." His pacifist beliefs were in place at least by his senior year as evidenced by the comments fellow students wrote in Vernon's copy of the yearbook. Vernon's father was a Methodist minister who also held anti war sentiments.

In September 1942 Vernon was drafted and joined the Civilian Public Service as a conscientious objector. His alternative service took him to Buck Creek, North Carolina, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and Markleeville, California, under the auspices of the National Park and Forestry Service. In December 1943 he began work with the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, serving in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. In March 1945 he walked out of Conscientious Objector's Camp # 98 in Arizona; two months later he was picked up, arraigned, and released on bond by the U.S. District Court. That fall Vernon received a notice of dismissal of his court case, and he took this to mean that his alternative service was now complete and began working for a construction company in Los Angeles. The government felt otherwise and declared him absent without leave.

In the summer of 1946 Vernon put his savings into American Express Travelers Checks and began hitchhiking to Kansas to visit his family. He never arrived. On August 27, 1956 a ranger found his body in rugged terrain in Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park, California, where Vernon had apparently fallen while hiking alone. The FBI, which had continued to search for Vernon until 1951, identified the body from the travelers checks. Vernon was buried in Minneapolis, Kansas, on October 13, 1956.

Scope and Contents

This small collection is comprised of several types of material including Vernon's high school and college diplomas, college yearbook with handwritten notes from classmates, photographs, correspondence, newspaper clippings about the discovery of his remains, and his memorial service booklet. Of special interest is a 1940 pocket diary containing Vernon's account of a week long adventure as a "hobo" in rural Kansas when he and a friend hopped freight trains, slept in boxcars and a hay stack, washed up in a "jungle," and met other men traveling the rails. In 2000 an attempt was made by the author of this finding aid to obtain additional information about Vernon from the FBI under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts (FOIA). The material obtained focused on the finding of his body and the process of identifying his remains; little information about his days as a conscientious objector was provided. The FOIA material is in this collection's control file.

Arrangement

1 series.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Conscientious objectors -- World War, 1939-1945
Public service employment
Tramps -- 1940-1990

Types of Materials:

- Commemoratives
- Contracts
- Correspondence -- 1930-1950
- Diaries -- 20th century
- Diplomas
- Memorial service booklets
- Pamphlets
- Photographs -- 1900-1950
- Programs -- Memorial services
- School yearbooks
- Travelers' checks

Container Listing

Box 1, Folder 1	Diplomas and 1940 pocket diary
Box 1, Folder 2	Kansas Wesleyan University yearbook, 1942
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence, newspaper clippings, memorial service booklet
Box 1, Folder 4	Photographs

	<p>[World War II conscientious objectors in front of their tents near Markleeville, California, July 1943 : black and white photoprint], 1943 1 Item (4.3" x 2.5".)</p> <p>Collector: Torrence, Vernon Language: English. Notes: 01071701.tif (AC Scan) Silver gelatin on paper. In Box 1, Folder 4. Unrestricted research use on site by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves. Vernon Torrence is second from left; photographer unidentified.</p> <p>Topic: World War, 1939-1945 -- Conscientious objectors Conscientious objectors -- World War, 1939-1945</p> <p>Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1940-1950 -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin</p>
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