

Ayers, Harry Mell

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

University Libraries Division of Special Collections, The University of
Alabama 2015

Box 870266

Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 35487-0266

205.348.0500

archives@ua.edu

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Summary Information

Repository:	University Libraries Division of Special Collections, The University of Alabama
Creator:	Ayers, Harry M. (Harry Mell), 1885-1964
Title:	Harry Mell Ayers papers
ID:	MSS.0097
Date:	1918-1956
Physical Description:	16.4 Linear feet
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	Contains the correspondence of this New Deal Democrat and Civil Rights supporter who owned the newspaper, the Anniston Star. The correspondence deals with local, state, and national political campaigns, elections, education, civil rights, editorials, letters to the editor, and events of the times. The collection also contains personal correspondence with other newspapermen, educators, and statesmen; copies of editorials and clippings on Alabama politics, Anniston, education, the Federal Government, foreign affairs, religion, the South and segregation.

Preferred Citation

Harry Mell Ayers papers, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama.

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Biographical/Historical note

Ayers was born in Anniston, Alabama, on 18 December 1885, the son of Dr. Thomas Wilburn and Minnie (Skelton) Ayers. He was educated in Anniston public schools and accompanied his father, the Southern Baptist Convention's first medical missionary to China, to Hwanghsien, where he taught English from 1901 to 1903. In the latter year he returned to Alabama to attend Jacksonville State Teachers College and became city editor of the Anniston Star, a post he held until 1913. He purchased the newspaper in 1912 and remained principal owner and publisher until his death. In 1917-1918 he managed the successful gubernatorial campaign of Thomas E. Kilby of Alabama. Following American's entry into World War One, Ayers was commissioned a Captain and served as Assistant to the Chief

of Personnel, Chemical Warfare Service, United States Army. Following the war he organized the Anniston Post of the American Legion, and from 1919 to 1923 served as Lieutenant Colonel, in the Alabama National Guard, on the staff of Governor Kilby. In 1921 he married Edel Lenoir Ytterboe of Northfield, Minnesota. The couple had two children: Edel Elise (Mrs. P. A. Sanguinetti) and Harry Brandt. During the 1920s he served in various capacities in the American Legion, became President of the Anniston Chamber of Commerce (1922), was selected as a delegate-at-large and a member of the Platform Committee at the 1928 Democratic National Convention in Houston, Texas. In 1931 he received the degree of Doctor of Law from Howard College, Birmingham, Alabama, and throughout the 1930s and 1940s continued his civic service, serving as President of the Rotary Club and Governor of the Twenty-Sixth District (1936-37), representing the Governor of Alabama at the laying of the keel for the Battleship Alabama at Newport News, Virginia (1938), serving as Alabama National Guard Lieutenant Colonel on the staff of Governor Frank M. Dixon (1938-1943), as a member of the Board of Directors of the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association (1940-1941), as State Director of the Newspaper Salvage Campaign (1942), as Chairman of the Fort McClellan Committee of the Anniston Chamber of Commerce (c. 1942-1946), on the National Board of Censorship at Washington, as state chairman of the first Rubber Salvage Campaign in Alabama, and in numerous other capacities. His honors and awards were similarly numerous: in 1954 he received a Certificate of Appreciation for Special Service to the Women's Army Corps, Headquarters Third Army, Fort McPherson, Georgia, in 1955 he was presented the first Ernie Pyle Award for editorial support of the military services, in 1956 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Alabama, the following year he was named by Alabama members of Kappa Phi Kappa, the national professional educational fraternity, as the man contributing the most to education in the state during 1956 and was named "Alumnus of the Year" by Jacksonville State College, and in 1958 he received a Certificate of Appreciation from William M. Brucker, Secretary of the United States Army, was featured as "Editor of the Week" in Publishers' Weekly, and was awarded the second highest decoration awarded by the Army to civilians, the Outstanding Civilian Service Medal. Ayers continued his public service until 1963, when he retired from the Alabama State Board of Education and was elected vice president emeritus. He died the following year in Anniston.

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Scope and Contents note

The Ayers collection contains the correspondence of the owner and publisher of the Anniston Star, a New Deal Democrat and Civil Rights supporter. The correspondence deals with local, state, and national political campaigns, elections, education, civil rights, editorials, letters to the editor, and events of the times. The collection also contains personal correspondence with other newspapermen, educators, and statesmen; copies of editorials and clippings on Alabama politics, Anniston, education, the Federal Government, foreign affairs, religion, the South, and segregation.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Provenance

Gift of Ayers Family, 1964

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Controlled Access Headings

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General note

To provide faster access to our materials, this finding aid was published without formal and final review. Email us at archives@ua.edu if you find mistakes or have suggestions to make this finding aid more useful for your research.

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