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# **Guide to the Gilbert A. Harrison Papers Relating to Thornton Wilder**

**YCAL MSS 372**



by Michael L. Forstrom

May 26, 2010

P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** YCAL MSS 372

**CREATOR:** Harrison, Gilbert A.

**TITLE:** Gilbert A. Harrison papers relating to Thornton Wilder

**DATES:** 1939-1975

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 7.72 linear feet (21 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The collection contains research files, interviews, correspondence, writings, and other materials relating to Gilbert A. Harrison's biography of Thornton Wilder, *The Enthusiast: A Life of Thornton Wilder* (New Haven: Ticknor & Fields, 1983). Harrison's research files, which include notes, photocopies of correspondence and writings, and clippings, make up the bulk of the collection. In addition to the research files, the collection includes: sound recordings of interviews with members of the Wilder family and others, such as Alfred Hitchcock and Lillian Gish; correspondence with Wilder family, scholars, and publishers; a corrected draft of the biography and reviews; and other materials, including biographical information, a copy of Wilder's will, and reference photographs.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.harrison>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.harrison>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.        box  
    item barcode

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Gilbert A. Harrison, 1984 and 1985.

## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Boxes 15-16 (audiovisual material): Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.

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## Conditions Governing Use

The Gilbert A. Harrison Papers Relating to Thornton Wilder is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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## Preferred Citation

Gilbert A. Harrison Papers Relating to Thornton Wilder. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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## Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit. This collection received a basic level of processing, including rehousing and minimal organization.

Information included in the Description of Papers note and Collection Contents section is drawn from information supplied with the collection and from an initial survey of the contents. Folder titles appearing in the contents list below are often based on those provided by the creator or previous custodian. Titles have not been verified against the contents of the folders in all cases. Otherwise, folder titles are supplied by staff during initial processing.

Formerly classed as Uncat ZA MS 324 and Uncat ZA MS 352.

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## Gilbert A. Harrison (1915-2008)

Gilbert A. Harrison was born in Detroit on May 18, 1915, one of three children to Samuel and Mabel Wolfe Harrison. He earned a B.A. degree in psychology from UCLA in 1937 and went on to serve in the U.S. Army in World War II. Following the war, in 1948, Harrison became national chairman of the American Veterans Committee. In 1953, with his wife, Anne Blaine, he purchased *The New Republic*, where he served as publisher and editor until 1974. Harrison was the author of two books, *A Timeless Affair: The Life of Anita McCormick Blaine* (1979), a biography of his grandmother-in-law, and *The Enthusiast: A Life of Thornton Wilder* (1983), and editor of several others, including *Gertrude Stein's America* (1965) and *The Critic as Artist* (1972).

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## Scope and Contents

The collection contains research files, interviews, correspondence, writings, and other materials relating to Gilbert A. Harrison's biography of Thornton Wilder, *The Enthusiast: A Life of Thornton Wilder* (1983). Harrison's research files, which include notes, photocopies of correspondence and writings, and clippings, make up the bulk of the collection. In addition to the research files, there are audio recordings of interviews with members of the Wilder family and others, such as Alfred Hitchcock and Lillian Gish, correspondence

with Wilder family, scholars, and publishers, a corrected draft of the biography, and reviews. Other materials include biographical information, a copy of Wilder's will, and photographs.

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## **Arrangement**

Organized into five series: I. Research Files, 1976-[1983]. II. Interviews, 1979-1981. III. Correspondence, 1956-1985. IV. Writings, 1980-1984. V. Other Papers, 1984.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Research Files, 1976-[1983]

5.63 linear feet (14 boxes)

The bulk of the Gilbert A. Harrison papers consist of research files for Harrison's biography of Thornton Wilder, *The Enthusiast: A Life of Thornton Wilder* (1983). In addition to Harrison's notes, the research files contain a significant quantity of photocopies of correspondence and writings relating to Wilder, and clippings. Though largely undated, the files most likely date from the earliest interviews and correspondence in 1979 to publication of the biography in 1983.

Arranged chronologically and alphabetically by Harrison's folder headings.

b. 1	"Early Years" 3 Folders	undated
b. 1	1915-1919 2 Folders	undated
b. 2	1915-1919 2 Folders	undated
b. 2	1920-1927 3 Folders	undated
b. 3	1920-1927 2 Folders	undated
b. 3	1928-1929 3 Folders	undated
b. 4	1930-1936 3 Folders	undated
b. 4	"Family and 1937" 2 Folders	undated
b. 4	1938	undated
b. 5	1938	undated
b. 5	1939-1940 2 Folders	undated
b. 5	1941-1942 3 Folders	undated
b. 6	1943-1947 2 Folders	undated
b. 6	1948-1949 3 Folders	undated
b. 6	1950-1951	undated
b. 7	1950-1951 2 Folders	undated

b. 7	1952-1954 <i>3 Folders</i>	undated
b. 7	1955-1958	undated
b. 8	1955-1958 <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 8	1959-1961	undated
b. 8	1962-1963 <i>3 Folders</i>	undated
b. 9	1964-1965 <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 9	1966-1967 <i>3 Folders</i>	undated
b. 9	1968-1969 <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 10	1970-1972	undated
b. 10	1973 <i>3 Folders</i>	undated
b. 10	1974-1975 <i>3 Folders</i>	undated
b. 11	"Beliefs"	undated
b. 11	"Charlotte Wilder"	undated
b. 11	"Comments & Observations & Chronology"	undated
b. 11	["Counder"?] <i>3 Folders</i>	undated
b. 11	"Men and Women"	undated
b. 12	"Miscellaneous" <i>7 Folders</i>	undated
b. 13	"Miscellaneous" <i>2 Folders</i>	1976-1982, undated
b. 13	"One and the Many..."	undated
b. 13	"Personal Characteristics"	undated
b. 13	Untitled <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 14	Untitled <i>2 Folders</i>	undated

**Series II: Interviews, 1979-1981***0.42 linear feet (2 boxes)*

Series II, Interviews, contains sound recordings of interviews conducted by Harrison with members of the Wilder family and others. Interviewees include Amos Wilder, Isabel Wilder, Janet Wilder Dakin, "Tappy" Wilder, Alfred Hitchcock, Lillian Gish, Malcolm Cowley, and Catherine Coffin.

Boxes 15-16 (audiovisual material): Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.

Arranged alphabetically by audio cassette label heading.

b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184249	Alfred Hitchcock Hollywood then Samuel Steward, San Francisco <i>1 Audiocassette 01:34:56 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> There is an audio imbalance from about 00:18-27:45. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. High background noise is present. <a href="#">[Aviary] ycal_mss_0372_39002137184249</a>  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 January 4-6
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184215	Amos Wilder (Cambridge) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:27:51 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise can be heard. Static is present. The tape speed gradually increases during the program. There is a warble on the tape. The program is distorted at times. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 April 7
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184223	Amos Wilder (Cambridge) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:08:04 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> Static is present. High background noise is present. Audio is unbalanced. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 April 9
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184231	Amos and Mrs. Wilder, Cambridge; W. J. Lewis, followed by Louise Talma NYC <i>1 Audiocassette 01:24:05 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> There is an audio gap from about 01:05:53-01:06:14. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. There is a warble heard in the audio. There are speed fluctuations. The tape speed gradually increases on the tape. High background noise is present.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 May 30 and June 17
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184256	Amos Wilder and Wife III and IV <i>1 Audiocassette 01:29:11 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> Static can be heard. High background noise is present.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 April 7
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184264	Cass Canfield, Theresa Robinson NYC <i>1 Audiocassette 01:34:18 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise is present. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. The program is distorted at times. Audio is unbalanced. There is a gap in the audio from about 28:44-36:35.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 October 19 and November 6



b. 15, █ 39002137184272	Catherine Coffin <i>1 Audiocassette 01:30:43 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. High background noise is present. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	undated
b. 15, █ 39002137184280	Genee and Bill Fadiman, Beverly Hills; Isabel Wilder, New Haven <i>1 Audiocassette 00:07:31 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise is present. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. Tape speed increases gradually on the tape. Speed fluctuations are present. The program was recorded at a very low level at times. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 May 9 and 17
b. 15, █ 39002137184298	Isabel Wilder, NYC <i>1 Audiocassette 01:15:41 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise is present. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 April 5
b. 15, █ 39002137184306	Isabel Wilder (1 of 2) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:31:00 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program is distorted at times. High background noise is present. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 May 17
b. 15, █ 39002137184314	Isabel Wilder (2 of 2) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:13:08 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. Audio is unbalanced. The program is distorted at times. High background noise is present. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 May 17
b. 15, █ 39002137184322	Isabel Wilder III; Isabel Wilder IV, Catherine Coffin <i>1 Audiocassette 01:34:36 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program is distorted at times. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. High background noise is present. Static can be heard. Audio is unbalanced. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 January 3
b. 15, █ 39002137184330	Isabel Wilder #1 and #2, New Haven (1 of 2) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:34:12 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise is present. Static can be heard. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 February 11
b. 15, █ 39002137184348	Isabel Wilder #3 and #4 (2 of 2) <i>1 Audiocassette 00:52:44 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise can be heard. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 February 11

b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184355	Isabel Wilder #1 and #2 <i>1 Audiocassette 01:32:53 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> Static and high background noise is present. Audio is unbalanced. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 February 18
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184363	Janet Dakin, Amherst <i>1 Audiocassette 01:51:14 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program is distorted at times. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. Audio is unbalanced for the last 18 minutes of the program. High background noise and hiss are present. Static is present.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 November 17
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184371	Lillian Gish, NYC <i>1 Audiocassette 00:39:11 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise can be heard.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 June 22
b. 15, ■■■■ 39002137184207	Malcolm Cowley, Sherman, CT <i>1 Audiocassette 00:53:41 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> Static and high background noise can be heard. Audio, at times, sounds hollow or unclear. The program is distorted at times.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 April 14
b. 16, ■■■■ 39002137184389	Mrs. Gilbert Chapman, Church Newton, W. Herbert Allen (Pasadena, Calif.) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:48:10 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program begins and ends abruptly. The program is distorted at times. High background noise can be heard. Static is present. The right channel's audio was recorded at a low level for the last 14 minutes.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 December 4 and 1980 January 2
b. 16, ■■■■ 39002137184397	Paul Weiss, Washington D.C, Joseph Martino, Isabel Wilder <i>1 Audiocassette 01:34:31 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program begins and ends abruptly. High background noise is present on the tape. Static can be heard. Silence was recorded on the tape from 53:20-53:43.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 January 11
b. 16, ■■■■ 39002137184405	Sally Begley 2 and 3 (1 of 3) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:03:17 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program begins and ends abruptly. The right channel was recorded at a low level. High background noise can be heard.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 May 24
b. 16, ■■■■ 39002137184421	Sally Begley 5 (2 of 3) <i>1 Audiocassette 01:03:39 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise can be heard. The right channel was recorded at a lower level. The program ends abruptly.  Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	undated

b. 16, [REDACTED] 39002137184413	Sally Begley 6 (3 of 3) <i>1 Audiocassette 00:27:26 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> High background noise can be heard. The program ends abruptly. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	undated
b. 16, [REDACTED] 39002137184439	Samuel Steward, Mary Louise Ans[?], Mrs. Harold Kelley, Berkeley, Calif. <i>1 Audiocassette 01:20:25 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program begins abruptly. High background noise can be heard. The right channel was recorded at a lower level. Static can be heard. <a href="#">[Aviary] ycal_mss_0372_39002137184439</a> Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 January 6-7
b. 16, [REDACTED] 39002137184447	Solof Faye Lesser, Los Angeles, George Schaefer, Wm. Roerick, Bel-Air, California <i>1 Audiocassette 01:31:47 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program increases in speed from 31:16 until the end of the tape. The program is distorted at times. High background noise can be heard. There is a warble in the audio. The right channel was recorded at a lower level. The program's speed fluctuates in the last 46 minutes of the tape. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 May 6 and 8
b. 16, [REDACTED] 39002137184454	Tappy Wilder, Washington D.C. <i>1 Audiocassette 01:30:43 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program begins abruptly. Speed fluctuations on the tape occur at the beginning of the tape. The right channel's audio is low for the first 44 minutes. High background noise is present on the tape. The program ends abruptly. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1980 April 29
b. 16, [REDACTED] 39002137184462	Timothy Findley Re: Thornton Wilder <i>1 Audiocassette 00:07:17 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> Static and a hum can be heard. The program is distorted at times. High frequency noise is present. The program ends abruptly. A note on the cassette case reads: (first met TNW in 1954 - London, England - during "Matchmaker" rehearsals. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1981 October
b. 16, [REDACTED] 39002137184470	Wm. Roenick, Emmett Lavery (Hollywood) <i>1 Audiocassette 00:43:34 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> The program's speed fluctuates throughout the tape. High background noise and static can be heard. A high amount of hum is present. The program begins abruptly. Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1979 May 8-9

**Series III: Correspondence, 1956-1985***0.42 linear feet (1 box)*

Series III, Correspondence, contains letters relating to Harrison's research project on Wilder. Letters between Harrison and others date chiefly from the research project, from 1979 through 1983, with a few exceptions, including copies of third-party correspondence (enclosures).

Additional correspondence relating to publication and reception of Harrison's biography can be found in Series IV. Writings.

Arranged alphabetically.

b. 17	"A" general	1979-1985, undated
b. 17	"B" general	1979-1983, undated
b. 17	"C" general	1978-1982
b. 17	"D" general	1979-1983
b. 17	Dakin, Janet Wilder	1969-1982
b. 17	"E" - "F" general	1979-1982
b. 17	"G" general	1979-1982
b. 17	"H" general	1979-1983
b. 17	"I" - "K" general	1979-1981, undated
b. 17	"L" general	1979-1983, undated
b. 17	"M" general	1979-1982, undated
b. 17	"N" general	1975-1982, undated
b. 17	"O" - "R" general	1979-1982, undated
b. 17	"S" general	1979-1982, undated
b. 17	"U" - "V" general	1979-1982, undated
b. 17	"W" general	1979-1981, undated
b. 17	Wilder, Amos Niven	1979-1982

b. 17	Wilder, Isabel <i>3 Folders</i> Includes copies of third-party correspondence between Isabel Wilder and others dating from 1961 to 1981	1956-1982
b. 17	Wilder, Thornton <i>2 Folders</i> Contains copies of third-party correspondence dating from 1935 to 1975	undated
b. 17	Others <i>2 Folders</i>	1979-1982, undated

**Series IV: Writings, 1980-1984***1.04 linear feet (3 boxes)*

Series IV, Writings, consists of correspondence, a corrected draft, and reviews relating to Harrison's biography of Thornton Wilder, *The Enthusiast: A Life of Thornton Wilder*. The correspondence contains letters with his literary agent, Brandt & Brandt, and publisher, Ticknor & Fields, documenting production of the book, and fan mail. The fan mail and reviews document critical reception of the book.

Arranged in order of the creative process.

*The Enthusiast: A Life of Thornton Wilder*

b. 18	Correspondence <i>3 Folders</i>	1980-1984
b. 18	Draft, typescript, corrected <i>5 Folders</i>	undated
b. 19	Draft, typescript, corrected <i>5 Folders</i>	undated
b. 19	Miscellaneous pages	undated
b. 20	Miscellaneous pages <i>2 Folders</i>	undated
b. 20	Book jacket	[circa 1983]
b. 20	Reviews <i>3 Folders</i>	1983-1984

**Series V: Other Papers, 1984, undated***0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

Series V, Other Papers, contains biographical information on Thornton and other Wilder family members, a copy of Wilder's 1967 will and testament, and photographs. Photographs include individual portraits and snapshots of Wilder and several images of Wilder with political and cultural figures, including Eleanor Lansing Dulles, Willi Brandt, and Ethel Waters, at the opening of Congress Hall in Berlin in 1957.

Arranged alphabetically by material type.

b. 21	Biographical information	undated
b. 21	Legal documents	undated
b. 21	Photographs	1984, undated

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

American drama -- 20th Century  
American literature -- 20th Century  
Authors, American -- 20th Century -- Biography  
Biographers

### **Genres / Formats**

Audiovisual materials  
Photographic prints  
Sound recordings

### **Names**

Gish, Lillian, 1893-1993  
Harrison, Gilbert A.  
Hitchcock, Alfred, 1899-1980  
Wilder, Thornton, 1897-1975

### **Corporate Body**

Ticknor and Fields