

Ralph Block Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the
Library of Congress

Prepared by Mary A. Lacy



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2009

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Collection Summary

Title: Ralph Block Papers

Span Dates: 1872-1971

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1906-1971)

ID No.: MSS56820

Creator: Block, Ralph, 1889-1974

Extent: 6,570 items; 22 containers plus 1 classified and 1 oversize; 10.7 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Journalist, motion picture producer, screenwriter, and public official. Correspondence, memoranda, writings, family papers, printed material, photographs, and other papers relating primarily to Block's career as an author, reviewer, screenwriter, movie editor, associate producer, and as an official of the Office of War Information in India.

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.

People

Block, Ralph, 1889-1974.

Organizations

Hollywood for Roosevelt (Organization)

Screen Writers' Guild.

United States Information Agency.

United States. Office of War Information.

Occupations

Journalists.

Motion picture producers and directors.

Public officials.

Screenwriters.

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of Ralph Block, journalist, motion picture producer, screenwriter, and public official, were given to the Library of Congress in 1976 by Block's estate.

Processing History:

The papers of Ralph Block were arranged and described in 1996. The finding aid was revised in 2009.

Transfers:

Items have been transferred from the Manuscript Division to other custodial divisions of the Library. Some motion picture films and sound recordings have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division. Some photographs have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division. All transfers are identified in these divisions as part of the Ralph Block Papers.

Copyright Status:

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Ralph Block in these papers and in other collections in the custody of the Library of Congress is reserved. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division for further information.

Access and Restrictions:

The papers of Ralph Block are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Security Classified Documents:

Government regulations control the use of security classified material in this collection. Manuscript Division staff can furnish information concerning access to and use of classified materials.

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Ralph Block Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1889, June 21	Born, Cherokee, Iowa
1910	Married Mary Greenacre (died 1972)
1911	B.A., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. Reporter, <i>Louisville Courier-Journal</i> Reporter, <i>Detroit News</i>
1912-1917	Drama editor, <i>Kansas City Star</i>
1917-1918	Washington staff writer, <i>New Republic</i>
1918-1919	Washington correspondent, <i>New York Tribune</i>
1919-1922	Associate editor, Goldwyn Picture Corp.
1926-1927	Editor-in-chief, Paramount-Famous Players-Lasky Corp.
1927-1928	Associate producer, Pathe Studios
1929	Producer, Fox Film Corp.
1929-1937	Freelance screenwriter, Beverly Hills, Calif., and Europe
1932-1935	President, Screen Writers' Guild
1939	Awarded Oscar for Motion Picture Relief Fund activities
1940	Secretary, Hollywood for Roosevelt campaign drive

1942	Assistant regional director, Federal Ninth Civilian Defense Region, San Francisco, Calif.
1943-1945	General representative, Office of War Information, India
1945-1946	Chief Public Affairs Officer, American Mission, India
1946	Awarded Medal of Freedom for outstanding service, 1943-1945
1954-1960	Special advisor to director, Information Center Service Chief, Bibliographic Division, United States Information Agency
1960-1963	Book reviewer, <i>Washington Post</i>
1974, Jan. 2	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Ralph Joseph Block (1889-1974) span the years 1872-1971, with the bulk of the items concentrated in the period 1906-1971. The collection contains correspondence, writings, memoranda, printed matter, photographs, and other material documenting Block's career as an author, reviewer, screenwriter, movie editor and associate producer; as president of the Screen Writers' Guild, and secretary of Hollywood for Roosevelt, 1940; and as a government official with the Office of War Information and the United States Information Agency. The Block Papers are arranged into the following series: [Family Papers](#), [Subject File](#), [Speeches and Writings](#), [Miscellany](#), [Oversize](#), and [Classified](#).

The [Family Papers](#) contain correspondence between Block his family, mostly with his parents while he attended the University of Michigan between 1907 and 1911 and with his mother after his father's death in 1914. Also in the series are letters to his wife after his return from India, 1946-1947. Files on the deaths and estates of his father and mother and his brother Julius include correspondence and other documents. This series also includes correspondence of his wife, Mary Greenacre Block, literary manuscripts labeled "MGB MSS" by several authors, and Block family financial records.

The [Subject File](#) contains correspondence, clippings, printed matter, and photographs relating to Cherokee, Iowa, Block's boyhood home; his and his wife's alma mater, the University of Michigan, and membership in Michigauma and other student associations; his work with the Screen Writers' Guild, for whom he testified to Congress in opposition to the Neely anti-block booking bill of 1939-1940; and charitable activities in the Motion Picture Relief Fund, for which he received an Oscar in 1939. Block was secretary of Hollywood for Roosevelt in 1940, and his files on this organization include telegrams arranging radio addresses by Claude Rains and others and record financial contributions by such figures as Ernst Lubitsch, Edward G. Robinson, Myron Selznick, and Daryl Francis Zanuck.

During World War II Block served as public affairs officer with the Office of War Information in India, where his duties included psychological warfare operations in Southeast Asia. He received the Medal of Freedom for outstanding service in 1946. Memoranda and clippings from India concern his duties in the Office of War Information and as chief public affairs officer of the American Mission in 1945-46. From 1952 to 1960, his activities as chief of the Bibliographic Division in the United States Information Agency are documented by the book reviews he wrote for that agency. The [Speeches and Writings](#) series includes Block's articles on propaganda and the

Cold War. After retiring in 1960, Block reviewed books for the *Washington Post*, participated in seminars, and attempted to resume his writing career.

The [Speeches and Writings](#) series includes draft articles, many never published, mostly written by Block for the United States Information Agency and after retirement. Articles written for Rob Wagner's *Script* and other periodicals and newspapers using his own name and the pseudonym Alfred Count mostly published during the 1920s and 1930s concerned the theater, motion pictures, and current events in Europe. Also in the series are typescripts and drafts of plays Block wrote in the 1930s and 1940s.

Block's years as a freelance screenwriter are represented by typescripts, stories, and outlines for screenplays written in the 1930s. Most of his short stories were never published. Block also wrote numerous poems, some of which were published between 1915 and 1920 and in the 1930s. This series includes notes of speeches and talks; school and college writings, some published in the University of Michigan student publication *The Gargoyle* and elsewhere; and two radio scripts, 1938-1939. Block wrote as a book and drama reviewer at several stages of his career, as drama editor of the *Kansas City Star*, 1916-1917, as theater critic for the *New York Tribune*, 1918-1919, and as a book reviewer for the *Washington Post* and *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 1960-1963. Book reviews he wrote for the United States Information Agency are in the [Subject File](#).

The [Speeches and Writings](#) series also includes numerous drafts of and notes for three unpublished novels and an unpublished autobiography. The novel, originally titled *The Years and the Town*, was begun around 1961. Several drafts culminating in the title *The Pilgrimage of the Second Best Friend of Essie Kettle* were revised throughout the decade. The other major unpublished work of this decade was Block's autobiography, variously titled *Search for Identity*, *My Life in Two Centuries*, and *The Zoned Quest*, which he began around 1960.

The [Miscellany](#) series contains general correspondence, including letters from Francis Hackett and John P. Marquand; photographs of Ralph and Mary Block and their daughter Bridget, as well as of the extended families of Block and Chraplewski, his mother's family; a photograph of the Greenacres, Mary Block's family, and of Block family friends and relatives. Some photographs of Ralph, Mary, and Bridget Block, as well as of the extended families of Block and Chraplewski, his mother's family, many of which are not specifically identified; photographs of the Greenacres, Mary Block's family, friends and relatives of both families, and the University of Michigan have been retained in the [Miscellany](#) files. Selected photographs of the Blocks, Block and Chraplewski relatives, Greenacre relatives and friends, the University of Michigan, India, family homes, dated circa 1879 through 1938 and undated, as well as albums of Mary Greenacre, 1903, and of Block at the University of Michigan, 1907, have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division.

Clippings and scrapbooks document Block's writings and include articles citing his works. Personalized Christmas and greeting cards created by Ralph Block and the Block family over the years (many with photographs), house plans of the family home in Cherokee, Iowa, and diplomas of Ralph and Mary Block are also in the [Miscellany](#) series.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in six series:

- [Family Papers, 1872-1967](#)
- [Subject File, 1899-1969](#)
- [Speeches and Writings File, 1909-1971](#)
- [Miscellany, 1900-1967](#)
- [Oversize, 1900-1910](#)
- [Classified, 1944-1955](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-4	<u>Family Papers, 1872-1967</u> Correspondence, financial records, wills, and albums and manuscripts of Block's parents and relatives. Arranged alphabetically by family member.
BOX 4-8	<u>Subject File, 1899-1969</u> Book reviews written for the United States Information Agency, correspondence, printed matter, financial records, and photographs documenting Block's collegiate and professional activities. Arranged alphabetically by topic.
BOX 8-20	<u>Speeches and Writings File, 1909-1971</u> Articles, an autobiography, student writings, essays, novels, plays, poems, book and drama reviews, screenplays, and short stories. Arranged alphabetically by type of material, then by title.
BOX 20-22	<u>Miscellany, 1900-1967</u> General correspondence, photographs, albums, clippings, house plans, diplomas and awards, Christmas cards, and visiting cards. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX OV 1	<u>Oversize, 1900-1910</u> Oversize photographs, art work, and house plans. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.
BOX CL 1	<u>Classified, 1944-1955</u> Government classified documents. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-4	Family Papers, 1872-1967 Correspondence, financial records, wills, and albums and manuscripts of Block's parents and relatives. Arranged alphabetically by family member.
BOX 1	Block, Bridget (daughter), 1946-1951, 1960, undated
BOX 1	Block, Doris (mother)
BOX 1	General, 1872-1886, 1915-1926
BOX 1	Death and estate, 1921, 1932-1933, undated
BOX 1	Receipts from legatees, 1932
BOX 1	Block, E. S. (father)
BOX 1	Address ledger, 1888-1914, undated
BOX 1	Death and estate, 1914-1918
BOX 1	Family album, 1882
BOX 1	Financial records, 1910-1913 (1 folder)
BOX 2	(1 folder)
BOX 2	Block, Ida M. (aunt), 1898-1899
BOX 2	Block, Julius (brother), 1918-1919
BOX 2	Block, Mary Greenacre (wife)
BOX 2	Correspondence, 1912, 1927, 1946-1953, undated
BOX 2	Manuscripts
BOX 2	"Golden Egg," undated
BOX 2	"Thursdays Out," by Christine Ericson, undated
BOX 2	Untitled, 1931
BOX 2	"The Woman I Marry," by Hector Turnbull, undated
BOX 2	Block, Ralph
BOX 2	Correspondence
BOX 2	Block, E. S. and Doris, 1902-1911, 1917-1926, undated (2 folders)
BOX 3	(6 folders)
BOX 4	Block, Mary Greenacre, 1947
BOX 4	Other relatives, 1907, 1932-1947, 1958-1967
BOX 4	Financial records, 1920
BOX 4	Chraplewski family (mother's family), 1886, 1897-1900
BOX 4-8	Subject File, 1899-1969 Book reviews written for the United States Information Agency, correspondence, printed matter, financial records, and photographs documenting Block's collegiate and professional activities. Arranged alphabetically by topic.
BOX 4	Cherokee, Iowa

Subject File, 1899-1969

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 4	Clippings, 1937, 1949, 1956-1968, undated (2 folders)
BOX 4	Correspondence, 1916-1970
BOX 4	Printed matter, 1899, 1907, 1950-1967 (2 folders)
BOX 4	Constitutional law cases, undated
BOX 5	Dvorák, Antonín, research material for movie on, 1939, undated
BOX 5	Hollywood for Roosevelt
BOX 5	Campaign records, 1940-1941
BOX 5	Expenses and receipts, 1940
BOX 5	India, 1942-1950, 1963, undated <i><u>See also Classified</u></i> (2 folders)
BOX 5	Johns Hopkins University Operations Research Office, Baltimore, Md., consultation for, 1955
BOX 5	Motion Picture Relief Fund, 1939, 1957-1960
BOX 5	Neely anti-block booking bill
BOX 5	Clippings, 1939
BOX 5	Hearings, 1939-1940 (2 folders)
BOX 6	Opposing statements by Block and others, 1939-1940
BOX 6	Players membership, 1953-1964
BOX 6	Rockefeller Public Service Award application, 1952-1953
BOX 6	Tregaron Center School, Washington, D.C., 1960
BOX 6	United States Information Agency (USIA)
BOX 6	Awards, 1958-1960, undated
BOX 6	Book reviews, 1953-1966 <i><u>See also Classified</u></i> (3 folders)
BOX 7	(1 folder)
BOX 7	Memoranda, 1953-1964
BOX 7	Position descriptions and performance rating, 1952-1959
BOX 7	Retirement, 1960
BOX 7	University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.
BOX 7	General, 1951-1969, undated
BOX 7	Photographs, 1907-1910, undated <i><u>See Oversize</u></i>
BOX 7	Printed matter, 1908-1914, 1930, 1956 (2 folders)
BOX 8	Tribe of Michigauma, 1911, 1949-1968, undated
BOX 8	Screen Writers' Guild, 1933-1936, undated (2 folders)
BOX 8	Seminars
BOX 8	Diplomatic and Consular Officers, Retired (DACOR), 1959
BOX 8	George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1963
BOX 8-20	Speeches and Writings File, 1909-1971 Articles, an autobiography, student writings, essays, novels, plays, poems, book and drama reviews, screenplays, and short stories. Arranged alphabetically by type of material, then by title.

Speeches and Writings File, 1909-1971

Container

Contents

BOX 8	Speeches and talks, 1940, 1958-1960, undated
BOX 8	Writings
BOX 8	Articles
BOX 8	Manuscript drafts
BOX 8	"August 29, 1946--New Delhi, India," 1946-1947
BOX 8	"Closeup," undated
BOX 8	"Culture--USA," undated
BOX 8	"Du Temps Perdu" ("Chronicle"), 1948, undated
BOX 8	"Going Up," undated
BOX 8	"Hare and Hounds in Hollywood," 1929
BOX 8	"Instant Stuff," 1963, undated
BOX 8	"London: Then," 1971, undated
BOX 8	"The Neglect of America's Richest Heritage in Official Output," 1958
BOX 8	"On Borrowed Time," 1960, 1971
BOX 9	"Political Warfare in the Cold War" ("The U.S. in the Looking Glass"), 1948, undated
BOX 9	"Propaganda and the Free Society," 1947-1949, undated <i><u>See also</u></i> <i><u>Classified</u></i>
BOX 9	Untitled, 1958, undated
BOX 9	Published copies
BOX 9	Magazine articles, 1919-1941, 1950
BOX 9	Newspaper clippings
BOX 9	Loose, 1914-1919, undated
BOX 9	Scrapbook, undated
BOX 9	Autobiography
BOX 9	<i>The Zoned Quest</i> (revision of <i>Search for Identity and My Life in Two Centuries</i>)
BOX 9	Discarded pages, 1961, undated
BOX 9	Drafts
BOX 9	Early, 1960-1961, undated (1 folder)
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BOX 10	Revised, 1966-1971, undated (4 folders)
BOX 11	Notes, 1943-1945, 1956-1967, undated (3 folders)
BOX 11	Synopsis, 1966
BOX 11	Miscellany, undated
BOX 11	Novels
BOX 11	<i>Fellow Mortal</i> , 1931, 1969
BOX 11	Notes for possible novel(s), 1965-1968, undated
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BOX 11	Draft A, 1963-1965 (1 folder)

Speeches and Writings File, 1909-1971

Container

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BOX 12	Draft B, undated
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BOX 12	Draft C, 1965, undated
	(2 folders)
BOX 12	Draft D, undated
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BOX 14	Revised, 1963
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BOX 14	Plays
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BOX 14	<i>Brief Pilgrimage</i> , 1935-1937, undated
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BOX 15	Correspondence, 1946-1967, 1968-1969
BOX 15	Drafts, 1945, 1946
BOX 15	Typescripts, 1946
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BOX 16	"A Song for Clotilde," 1939
BOX 16	Reviews
BOX 16	Book
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BOX 16	Typescript and print reviews, 1918-1933, 1960-1963, undated
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	(2 folders)
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Speeches and Writings File, 1909-1971

Container

Contents

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BOX 18	(1 folder)
BOX 18	Screenplays
BOX 18	Stories and outlines
BOX 18	"Anne Severn and the Fieldings," 1933
BOX 18	"For This We Live," with Jerry Horwin, undated
BOX 18	"Foreign Affairs," with Manuel Seff, undated
BOX 18	"The Game," undated
BOX 18	"The Joker," undated
BOX 18	"Miss Robinson Crusoe," with Frederick Kohner, undated
BOX 18	"Prelude to Love," 1933
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BOX 18	"Where the Wild Horses Ran," undated
BOX 18	Typescripts
BOX 18	<i>The Future Belongs to You</i> (or <i>The Right to Live</i>), 1934
BOX 18	<i>Gambling Lady</i> , with Doris Malloy, 1933
BOX 18	<i>The Golden Era</i> , with Nina Fraser, 1936
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BOX 19	<i>I Am a Thief</i> , with Doris Malloy, 1934
BOX 19	<i>Last of the Mohicans</i> , undated
BOX 19	<i>Massacre</i> , with Sheridan Gibney, 1933-1934
BOX 19	<i>The Melody Lingers On</i> , with Philip Dunne, 1935
BOX 19	<i>One Hour of Glory</i> , 1940
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BOX 20	Short stories
BOX 20	"A Date with Capricornus," 1948, undated
BOX 20	"De Rerum Natura," 1963-1965, undated
BOX 20	"A Dilettante," 1919
BOX 20	"Footnote to Romance," 1939-1940, 1948-1954
BOX 20	"A Gambler in the Wind," undated
BOX 20	"Here Is a Wreath" (revision of "Study in Communication"), undated
BOX 20	"Midnight Episode," 1948-1949, 1956-1960, undated
BOX 20	"The Perfect Wrong," undated
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BOX 20	"The Sin," undated
BOX 20	"This Is What It Was Like," 1970, undated
BOX 20	Untitled, undated
BOX 20-22	Miscellany, 1900-1967 General correspondence, photographs, albums, clippings, house plans, diplomas and awards, Christmas cards, and visiting cards. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Miscellany, 1900-1967

Container

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BOX 21	Correspondence, 1907-1908, 1920, 1931, 1947-1964, undated
BOX 21	Diplomas, 1907-1911
BOX 21	House plans, 435 Cherry St. Cherokee, Iowa, 1900 <i>See Oversize</i>
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BOX 21	Family
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BOX 21	Block, Ralph, 1933-1967, undated
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BOX 21	Relatives and friends
BOX 21	Block family friends, 1937-1961, undated
BOX 21	Block and Chraplewski relatives
BOX 21	Zeiner, Flora and Milton Block (aunt and cousin), undated
BOX 22	Other and unidentified (3 folders), 1903-41, undated
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BOX 22	Sign, undated
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BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1900-1910
	Oversize photographs, art work, and house plans.
	Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.
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BOX OV 1	Photographs, 1909-1910, undated (Container 7)
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BOX CL 1	"Propaganda and the Free Society," 1947 (Container 9)