

The Helen Gray Cone Collection
1859-1934
Finding Aid



Archives and Special Collections



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GENERAL INFORMATION

Accession Number: 14-01

Size: 0.9115 cu. ft.

Provenance: Helen Gray Cone

Location: Range 5 Section 8 Shelves 43

Restrictions: None

Archivist: Prof. Julio L. Hernandez-Delgado

Assistants: Ms. Julie Sorokurs

Date: February 2014

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



Helen Gray Cone was born in New York City, on March 8, 1859, to John Carpenter Cone and Julia Gray. Cone was living in the 125th Street neighborhood of Harlem when she began attending the Normal College of New York City, now Hunter College, at the age of 14. Thirteen years following her graduation in 1876, she was appointed the temporary substitute for Mary Willard, a history and literature teacher who insisted upon the appointment herself. By 1899, she was the first woman to hold a professorship at the Normal College and, subsequently, was recognized as the head of the English Department.

During her tenure as “Poet Professor” at Hunter, Cone’s courses in Shakespeare and Romantic poetry earned her the respect and devotion of both students and colleagues alike, while her work as a poet brought her and the College international reverence. She also wrote the school’s alma mater. Cone’s contributions to her college were recognized with an honorary doctorate of literature on Hunter’s fiftieth anniversary in 1920. This was in addition to the Master of Humane Letters degree that she had previously been awarded by New York University in 1908.

Following her retirement in 1926, Helen Gray Cone’s legacy was further recognized with the Helen Gray Cone Fellowship established in Hunter’s English Department. Oftentimes a special guest speaker at college functions, Cone’s relationship with her alma mater was maintained despite her retirement.

From 1885 to 1919, Cone had five volumes of her poetry published - *Oberon and Puck* (1885), *The Ride to the Lady* (1891), *Soldiers of the Light* (1911), *A Chant of Love for England* (1915), and *The Coat Without a Seam* (1919). *Harvest Home* (1930) was a volume of poems selected from these previous works.

Upon her death on January 31, 1934, Cone’s memory was honored with a special issue of *The Hunter Bulletin*. The entirety of the publication was dedicated to the celebration of her varied activities and services within the College. Members of the organizations to which Cone belonged - The Alumnae Association, Phi Beta Kappa, The Shakespeare Society, The Fellowship of Goodwill, and The Seven in One Group - were among the faculty and students to contribute. As *The Hunter Alumni Quarterly* remarked in its Spring 1964 issue, “no graduate of the college, no member of the teaching staff was perhaps more widely admired and revered, in the first decades of this century.”

Helen Gray Cone never married and had no children. She was survived by a nephew, Joseph D. Cone.



SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Helen Gray Cone collection provides insight as to the breadth of her career at Hunter. It is composed primarily of the articles written in her honor, photographs, the drafts and manuscripts of her plays, poems, and speeches, and the entirety of her published works. These include the prints and reprints of her most esteemed poems, published in a variety of magazines, pamphlets, and anthologies - which leaves little wonder as to the influence of Hunter's "Poet Professor" on the growing popularity of the then newly-established College. The poetry and prose dedicated to the College and its founder, Thomas Hunter, can be found in this collection as well.

The collection also includes her correspondence, which reinforces the assertions of those who memorialized her - that she was surrounded by a wide circle of friends and admirers, and that her insight was hugely sought after. The sketches of her "imaginary friends," (whose likenesses she was known to draw during "tiresome" business meetings), included in a letter she addresses to a close friend are especially revealing in that they reflect Helen Gray Cone's warm and genial character.

The Helen Gray Cone collection may be of interest to anyone researching the genesis of Hunter College's English Department and its most distinguished alumni and faculty. The collection may also interest those looking into examples of the most noted American poetry of the early 20th century.

Those interested in more material pertaining to Helen Gray Cone's role as professor and head of the English department are encouraged to look into Series 1 of the English Department collection, which contains the annual reports written by Cone from 1908 to 1916.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Series I – Biographical Information

Series I consists primarily of material published following Helen Gray Cone's death, including the special issue of the *Hunter Bulletin* - the entirety of which was dedicated to the testimony of her students and colleagues. These articles provide insight into Cone's childhood, education, and career as "Poet Professor" at Hunter College. Series I also contains details of her memorial services and her family tree. The folders are arranged chronologically.

Series II – Correspondence

Series II is a collection of letters sent to and from Helen Gray Cone, both professional and personal, with correspondents ranging from school friends and family members to President Woodrow Wilson's secretary. All letters are arranged chronologically.

Series III – Hunter College

Series III comprises documents, arranged chronologically, pertaining to Helen Gray Cone's activities at Hunter. These include a description of one of her well-known Shakespeare classes, a piece about Hunter's first Christmas play published in *The Hunter College Echo*, and booklets from two separate Alumni reunions containing her work. Details as to the scholarship established upon Helen Gray Cone's retirement, The Helen Gray Cone Scholarship, are also found in this series.

Series IV – Photographs

Series IV consists of a single folder composed of photographs which, though undated, span the entirety of her lifetime.

Series V – Drafts and Manuscripts

Series V consists of the mostly handwritten drafts of Helen Gray Cone's plays and poems. Both *The Masque of The Feast of Gold* and *The Masque of The Twenty-Third of April* are fantastical plays dedicated to the celebration of Hunter College and William Shakespeare, respectively. The remaining drafts and manuscripts are of poems, most of which were received enthusiastically by critics and admirers alike - including the Hunter College song "The Good Ship Alma Mater." All works are arranged chronologically.

Series VI – Publications

Apart from her five volumes of poetry, this series contains pieces Helen Gray Cone had published in magazines, such as *Scribner's Monthly* and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. This series also has several pamphlets, containing Cone's work, which were distributed during such occasions as the President's Address and Alumnae Association meetings. The folders are arranged in chronological order.

CONTAINER LIST

SERIES I – BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
1	1	Dedications, 1927, 1934
	2	Articles, 1934
	3	Memorial Services, 1934, 1958
	4	Family Tree, n.d.

SERIES II – CORRESPONDENCE

1	5	Incoming, 1919, 1920, 1924, 1930, 1944, 1945, 1959
	6	Outgoing, 1875, 1903, 1906, 1907, 1920, 1925, 1926, 1929

SERIES III – HUNTER COLLEGE

1	7	Alumnae Shakespeare Class, 1891
	8	“The Tale of Troy Divine” – <i>Hunter College Echo</i> , 1891
	9	Annual Fall Reunion – Program, 1906
	10	Annual Fall Reunion – Address, 1927
	11	The Helen Gray Cone Scholarship in English, n.d.

SERIES IV – PHOTOGRAPHS

1	12	Photographs, n.d.
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SERIES V – DRAFTS AND MANUSCRIPTS

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
1	13	Poems, 1872, 1875, 1877, 1892, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1921, 1922, 1930, 1937, 1947
	14	<i>The Masque of The Feast of Gold</i> , n.d.
	15	<i>The Masque of The Twenty Third of April</i> , n.d.
	16	Poems, n.d.

SERIES VI – PUBLICATIONS

1	17	Cone, Helen G. <i>Oberon and Puck: Verses Grave and Gay</i> . New York: Cassell & Company, limited, 1885
	18	“Claim of the Alma Mater,” President’s Address, 1886
	19	“The River Floweth On,” <i>Harper’s New Monthly Magazine</i> , 1886
2	1	Cone, Helen G. <i>The Ride to the Lady: And Other Poems</i> . Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891
	2	---. <i>The Ivy Leaf: A Book of College and Alumnae Poems</i> . New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1899
	3	“Dear Captain of Our Staunch Old Ship,” The Welcome Address of The Associate Alumnae, October 27, 1906
	4	“When the Wistaria Blooms,” The Reunion of Associate Alumnae, May 16, 1908
	5	Cone, Helen G. <i>Soldiers of the Light</i> . Boston: R.G. Badger, 1911
	6	“In Memoriam - Thomas Hunter,” <i>The Alumnae News & Hunter College Bulletin</i> , 1915
	7	Cone, Helen G. <i>A Chant of Love for England and Other Poems</i> . London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd, 1915
	8	Cone, Helen G. <i>The Coat Without a Seam: And Other Poems</i> . New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1919

SERIES VI – PUBLICATIONS

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
2	9	Cone, Helen G. <i>Harvest Home. Selected Poems</i> . New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1930
	10	“A Young Woman of Culture,” <i>Scribner’s Monthly</i> , n.d.
	11	<i>Poems of Today</i> , n.d.