BIOGRAPHY:

Leon Milton Birkhead was born on April 28, 1885, on a farm outside Winfield, Missouri, fifty miles northwest of St. Louis. His first job was in a St. Louis shoe factory, for which he later became a salesman. When, in 1904, he had saved enough money to pay for his education, he began his studies at McKendree College, a small Methodist institution in Lebanon, Illinois. He graduated from McKendree with an A.B. degree in 1910, and was ordained a Methodist minister in St. Louis in 1911. Birkhead also did graduate work in theology and philosophy at Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey, and Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University in New York, but did not complete another degree.

Reverend Birkhead held pastorates at the Maple Avenue and Wagoner Memorial Methodist Episcopal Churches in St. Louis, and the Ewing Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in Madison, Illinois. In 1913, he married Agnes Schiereck of St. Louis, who was the youngest Deputy Collector of the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, she was the first woman to hold a position of that rank. They had one child, Kenneth. In 1914, Reverend Birkhead resigned from the Methodist Church and took a ministerial post at the First Unitarian Church in Wichita, Kansas. He remained there until 1917, when he came to Kansas City, Missouri, and began more than twenty years of service to All Souls Unitarian Church.

Reverend Birkhead was a popular, progressive figure in religious and civic affairs. He advocated women’s suffrage, the use of advertising for churches, companionate marriage, and the teaching of evolution in schools. He and his wife
were present at the Scopes trial in 1925, with Reverend Birkhead assisting Clarence Darrow with miscellaneous research tasks and Agnes Birkhead serving as defense stenographer. Reverend Birkhead served as technical advisor to his friend, Sinclair Lewis, during the writing of *Elmer Gantry*, the 1927 publication which caused great debate in religious circles.

In 1935, Birkhead traveled to Germany, where he became alarmed at the influence of Nazism there and in the United States. He resigned from All Souls in 1939 to begin the Friends of Democracy, an “anti-propoganda” organization whose purpose was to expose hate-based groups during World War II and the McCarthy Era. Birkhead moved the Friends of Democracy operation to New York City in 1939. He died there in December of 1954. He was survived by his wife, Agnes, and his son, Kenneth.

PROVENANCE:

This gift was received from Barbara Birkhead as accession KA0766 on August 24, 1993.

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PREFERRED CITATION:

Specific item; folder number; Leon Milton Birkhead (1885-1954) Papers (K0280); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-KC].

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DESCRIPTION:

The papers consist of a variety of materials documenting Reverend Birkhead’s professional and public career. Much of the collection consists of printed materials from his churches, organizations of which he was a member, and his speaking engagements. A small amount of correspondence is also included. Records of All Souls Unitarian Church include postcards mailed to the congregation concerning upcoming sermon topics, guest speakers, and activities.
There is also a log book with clipped advertisements and weekly attendance and offering figures. The Liberal Center was also a function of All Souls, and the collection contains some programs and youth newsletters concerning its activities.

As head of the Friends of Democracy, Birkhead collected many publications from the groups he was fighting against. The publications are anti-Communist, anti-Socialist, anti-Fascist, anti-semitic, pro-McCarthy, and white supremacist in nature. Much printed material generated by the Friends of Democracy is also included.

Two folders of material contain information about Agnes Schiereck Birkhead, and one folder contains correspondence and ephemeral material related to Kenneth Birkhead.

The scrapbooks consist almost entirely of clippings and are generally in fair to poor condition. They contain many loose clippings which will require further weeding for duplicates. The volumes will be microfilmed at a later date.

INVENTORY:

BOX 001

PRINTED MATERIALS

Folder 1. Miscellaneous material removed from scrapbooks, 1893-1933
Folder 2. Publications:
   * The Results of an Inquiry into the Aims and Characteristics of Unitarian Preaching, 1902
   * Report of the War Work Council of the Unitarian Churches, 1917-1918
   * The Western Unitarian, November 1924
   * We Press Toward the Mark, 1936
Folder 3. Programs, printed materials, announcements - LMB speaking engagements, events attended, 1908-1919
Folder 4. Weekly programs - Maple Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church (St. Louis), 1911-1914
Folder 5. Miscellaneous publications, printed material, ca. 1912-1937
Folder 6. Speech notes, clippings - “Patriotism and Patriotic Celebration (Safe and Sane Fourth),” June 29, 1913
Folder 7. Programs, postcards, yearbook, printed materials - Wagoner Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, Ewing Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, 1913-1914
Folder 8. Programs, publications - other churches concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1914-1935
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Programs, postcards, printed materials, notes expressing LMB’s dissatisfaction with position - First Unitarian Church, ca. 1915-1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Fifty Years Ago,” by Mary L. McCarty, 1916; clipping concerning 92nd birthday, 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Programs, newsletters - Western Unitarian Conference, 1916-1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Programs, speech, clippings - Southwestern Federation of Religious Liberals, 1917, 1923-1932, 1938 (also includes Kansas Universalists and Kansas/Oklahoma Liberal Religious Conference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Monthly programs - All Souls Unitarian Church, February-May, December 1918; January 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1918-1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Correspondence, 1918-1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Publications, printed material - mentioning/written by LMB, 1918-1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>Citizens' League Bulletin</em>, 1918-1925 (incomplete)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Pamphlet - “A University for the Kansas City Memorial to Our Soldiers,” 1919; “A Notable Memorial” by Henry J. Haskell in <em>The Council Table</em> concerning Liberty Memorial, ca. 1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Program - memorial service for Unitarians who died in WWI, October 15, 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Newsletters - The City Club, 1919-1921 (incomplete)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Printed material - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1919-1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Newsletters - Kansas City Athenaeum, 1919-1935 (incomplete)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Programs, publications, printed materials concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1920-1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>Advertising Club News</em>, 1920-1927 (incomplete)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Postcards notifying LMB of events, ca. 1920-1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1921-1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Programs, clippings - Missouri Federation of Music Clubs, 1923-1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Correspondence, 1923-1947, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Program, speech notes - 25th anniversary of Dr. Harry H. Mayer’s ministry at B’Nai Jehudah, May 2, 1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Correspondence - B.H. Smith, October 1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Program, speech notes - memorial to Mrs. Henry J. Haskell, March 28, 1924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Folder 32. Programs, clippings - *Lilliom* - stage play in which LMB performed, week of October 13, 1924

Folder 33. “Instructions to Judges and Clerks” - general voter registration, September 22-25, 1924

Folder 34. Programs, publications, printed materials concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1924-1925

Folder 35. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1924-1926

Folder 36. *The Cooperator* - publication of the Cooperative Club, 1924-1926

Folder 37. Publication - *The City Ice Man*, December 1925

Folder 38. Publications, printed material - mentioning/written by LMB, 1926

Folder 39. Programs, publications, printed materials concerning LMB speaking engagements, 1926-1944

Folder 40. Publications, articles concerning Sinclair Lewis and *Elmer Gantry*, 1927

Folder 41. *The Cooperator* - publication of the Cooperative Club, 1927

Folder 42. Advertisements for *The Debunker* magazine, ca. 1927-1928; the *Commonwealth College Fortnightly* - mention of *The Debunker*, February 15, 1933

Folder 43. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, 1927-1928, 1938

Folder 44. Postcards - All Souls Unitarian Church, undated

Folder 45. Advertising cards - City Ice Cream, 1927, Westport Dairy, ca. 1933

Folder 46. *Joy* - collection of poetry by John Milton Smither, including a handwritten poem to LMB, “The Liberal’s Hope,” 1928

Folder 47. *The Cooperator* - publication of the Cooperative Club, 1928

Folder 48. Publications, printed material - mentioning/written by LMB, 1928-1944, undated

Folder 49. *The Liberal* - published by All Souls Unitarian Church, September 25, 1930, January 14, 1932, May 1, 1939

Folder 50. Scrapbook - LMB lectures. Information includes ad clipping, weather, attendance, donations, September 1932-June 1935

**BOX 002**

**PRINTED MATERIALS/CORRESPONDENCE/REPORTS**

Folder 51. Programs, printed materials - The Liberal Center and Students’ Social League, 1932-1939

Folder 52. Religious publications: *The Moralist*, October 1936
1936 and Conflicts
The Converted Catholic Magazine, June 1953
“Why Should the Christians Be Kind to the Jews?” undated

Folder 55. Correspondence - organization of Friends of Democracy board, 1938-1939
Folder 56. Publications, printed materials - Friends of Democracy (removed from scrapbook), 1939-1945
Folder 57. Correspondence, printed material - Flatbush Council to Promote Racial Tolerance; Flatbush Council for Religious Good-Will, 1939-1942
Folder 58. Miscellaneous publications, printed material, 1939-1954, 1980
Folder 59. Typed manuscripts - tax speech; pro-Truman/anti-Communist; “Walter Steele and the National Republic,” ca. 1940s
Folder 60. Religious publications - International Council of Christian Churches, ca. 1940s-1950s
Folder 61. Bound booklet - “A Letter by John Steinbeck to the Friends of Democracy,” 1940
Folder 62. Little Blue Books - catalog, “America’s Little Hitlers,” 1940’s
Folder 63. City Reporter, April 1941-February 1942
Folder 64. City Reporter, March-May 1942
Folder 65. City Reporter, June-September 1942
Folder 66. The Party of Betrayal, 1942
Folder 67. Report - Friends of Democracy Expansion Fund, ca. 1944
Folder 68. Black Mail, by Henry Hoke, 1944
Folder 69. Friends of Democracy publications - Joe Kamp: Peddler of Propaganda and Hero of the Pro-Fascists, ca. 1944; The Case of McCormick-Patterson Press, 1945
Folder 70. Friends of Democracy newsletters - The Propaganda Battlefront, May 1944-October 1946 (incomplete); Friends of Democracy’s Battle, December 15, 1949, October 1951
Folder 71. Stenographer’s minutes, complaints memorandum, clippings - libel case against LMB, 1947
Folder 72. The Smear Terror, by John T. Flynn; response in newsletter of Federation to Fight Fascism, 1947
Folder 73. Interview of LMB in *The New Yorker*, 1947
Folder 74. Reports - George Armstrong Foundation, 1947-1948
Folder 75. Report - “The Pattern of McCarthyism,” 1950
Folder 76. Reports - Alvin O’Konski and Ralph Gamble, 1950
Folder 77. *Closer Ups* - Upton Close’s personal newsletter, April 6, 1950, June 26, 1950
Folder 78. Radio scripts - Upton Close broadcasts, April 30, 1950, May 28, 1950
Folder 79. Report - George S. Benson, 1950
Folder 80. Religious printed materials, ca. 1950-1951
Folder 81. *The Defender Magazine*, printed materials, December 1951, June 1953
Folder 84. Newsletter - *Headlines*, 1952
Folder 85. Correspondence, reports, clipping - Henry Darlington and John Beaty book “The Iron Curtain over America,” 1952
Folder 86. Radio broadcast transcript - “The Author Meets the Critic,” March 20, 1952
Folder 87. *McCarthyism: The Fight for America*, 1952
Folder 89. *Women’s Voice* (anti-Semitic), November 27, 1952
Folder 91. Printed material, handbook - National Renaissance Party (anti-Semitic), ca. 1953
Folder 92. Report, program, guest list - Dr. J.B. Matthews Dinner, February 13, 1953
Folder 93. Newsletter - The Political Reporter (anti-Communist, anti-Semitic), November 1953
Folder 94. Newsletters - Elizabeth Dilling (anti-Communist, anti-Semitic), November-December 1953
| Folder 95. | Correspondence, printed materials - Christian Anti-Jewish Party, 1953 |
| Folder 96. | Newsletters of the Citizens’ Protective Association - “The White Sentinel” and “The Kiss of Death,” 1953 |
| Folder 97. | *National Republic*, March, April, September 1953 |
| Folder 98. | *Independence Magazine* - pro-McCarthy, February 1954 |
| Folder 100. | Seating list - Roy M. Cohn Testimonial Dinner, July 28, 1954 |
| Folder 101. | Correspondence - condolences and notification of memorials to Agnes and Kenneth Birkhead after the death of LMB, 1954-1955 |
| Folder 102. | Obituaries - LMB, 1954-1955 |
| Folder 103. | Program - service honoring deceased Unitarian ministers, May 20, 1955 |
| Folder 104. | Summaries of anti groups, ca. 1955 |
| Folder 105. | Sheet music - “Nobody’s for McCarthy but the People,” undated |
| Folder 106. | Constitution, printed materials - American Council of Christian Churches, undated |
| Folder 107. | Printed materials - American Protestant League, undated |
| Folder 108. | Grade card (1894), business cards, biography, commencement announcements (1910) - LMB, undated |
| Folder 109. | Postcards |
| Folder 110. | Handwritten notes, undated |
| Folder 111. | Photographs, slides |
| Folder 112. | Clippings about Agnes Schiereck, 1907 |
| Folder 114. | Correspondence; commencement programs from Border Star, Southwest High School, University of Missouri; *The Herald of Longan School*; handwritten note; Chemical Weekly Sentinel (Army base newsletter) - Kenneth Birkhead, 1927-1950 |
| Folder 115. | Newsletters - *The Hornet*, published by the Students’ Social League of the Liberal Center, October 1932-May 1933 |

**BOX 003**

**SCRAPBOOKS**

**Volume 1.** August 1932-June 1933
Volume 2.  Loose clippings, ca. 1923-1924
Volume 3.  May-December 1935
Volume 4.  September 1917-March 1918
Volume 5.  March 1918-June 1919 (also includes some from 1913+)
Volume 6.  September 1919-February 1921
Volume 7.  March 1921-March 1922
Volume 8.  May 1915-July 1917
Volume 9.  ca. 1910-ca. 1915

BOX 004

SCRAPBOOKS

Volume 11. Correspondence, printed material, 1939
Volume 13. September 1925-December 1926
Volume 14. 1927
Volume 15. December 1923-May 1924/December 1924-June 1925
Volume 16. November 1927-December 1928 (includes some 1924)
Volume 17. March 1922-March 1923
Volume 18. January-July 1939

BOX 005

UNPROCESSED CLIPPINGS

FLATBOX

Folder 1. Printed materials, posters, publications, photographs