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Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards papers, 1884-1969

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Maine Women Writers Collection

Abplanalp Library
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Summary Information

Repository:	Maine Women Writers Collection
Creator:	Richards, Laura Elizabeth Howe, 1850-1943
Title:	Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards papers
ID:	0305
Date [inclusive]:	1884-1969
Physical Description:	.25 linear feet 20 folders
Language of the Material:	English

Preferred Citation

Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards papers, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, Maine

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Biographical/Historical Note

Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards was a prolific writer of fiction and poetry for children and for adults. She wrote over ninety books, and one of her works for children, *Tirra Lirra: Rhymes Old and New*, remained in print for forty-eight years, a good record for a volume of verse. Richards has the distinction of being the first prominent American writer of nonsense verse for children. Writing through the 1930s, she was the first woman awarded the first Pulitzer Prize in the biography category for her biography of her mother, Julia Ward Howe. Richards's father, Samuel Gridley Howe, was principally an educator who worked with the blind, deaf, and mute. He was the main founder of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind and the first person to teach a completely blind and deaf mute, Laura Bridgman, to communicate successfully with others. Laura Richards would eventually tell the story in her juvenile biography of Laura Bridgman (for whom Richards was named). Richards's mother, Julia Ward Howe, a poet and philosopher, is best remembered as the author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Richards married Henry Richards, an architect, on 17 June 1871. The couple had five daughters and two sons; they lived in Boston until 1876, when they moved to Gardiner, Maine, where Henry Richards entered the family paper mill. The Richardses remained in Gardiner for the rest of their lives. In her autobiography, *Stepping Westward* (1931), Laura Richards suggests that their lives were pleasant, almost enviably so, but there were challenges, though Richards played them down. Among

their greatest difficulties, aside from the deaths of two of the children, was the burning of the pulp mill in 1893. Although they rebuilt the facility, it closed permanently in 1900. They then opened Camp Merryweather, a summer camp for boys on Great Pond in Belgrade, Maine, which ran for more than thirty years. Richards does not mention any of the philanthropic work she and her husband did for the town of Gardiner, such as helping to establish a public high school, working to bring public health nurses to the area, or striving to stop abusive child labor practices. Richards's first published work appeared in 1880, *Five Mice in a Mouse-Trap*, the first of about forty-five works of fiction she would write for children. The most popular book she wrote for children was *Captain January*, published in 1891, and according to her autobiography, it was still her best-selling book in 1931 even though it had been one of the most difficult for which to find a publisher. *Tirra Lirra* is one of the best books of nonsense verse for children because of several qualities, including absurd incongruities, exaggerated rhythms, and Richards's use of sound. Readers are surprised to find a shark singing blithely and merrily from a housetop in *The Shark* and a woman falling in love with a man because she likes the back of his head in *Nonsense Verses*. In *The Uncle of Cato Theophilus Jones*, Richards uses rhythm as well as exaggerated alliteration, consonance, and assonance to advantage. Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards died in Gardiner in 1943.

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Collection Scope and Content

This collection holds a sampling of material related to the author: news articles and reviews of her writings, letters and postcards, 1929 ephemera from Camp Merryweather, photographs, a 1932 poem and a copy of an 1934 address by Charlotte R. Moore. The Maine Historical Society holds the complete Laura E. Richards collection which is extensive and provides an opportunity for in-depth research of the lives of the Howe and Richards families.

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Arrangement

This collection is organized as a single series.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access

Collection is open for research.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

The yellow house papers: the Laura E. Richards collection, Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine

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Controlled Access Headings

- Children's literature, American
- Pulitzer Prizes
- Gardiner (Me.)

- Clippings
- Photographs
- Correspondence
- Christmas cards
- Postcards
- Richards, Laura Elizabeth Howe, 1850-1943
- Richards, Laura Elizabeth Howe, 1850-1943

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Interviews, reviews, 1931-1936; 1961-1964; 1980-1992	Box 18	Folder 001
Photographs of Richards' home (postcards), her son John and reprint, 1915; 1969-1997	Box 18	Folder 002
Interview with John Richards (Richards' son) based on visit with Dorothy Healy, 1969	Box 18	Folder 003
Camp Merryweather flyer, 1929	Box 18	Folder 004
Richards Family biography -- given as an address by Charlotte Moore, 1934	Box 18	Folder 005
Correspondence from LER to unnamed recipient, 1884	Box 18	Folder 006
Correspondence from LER to Horace P. Chandler, undated	Box 18	Folder 007
Correspondence from LER to Mrs. George Abbott, 1909	Box 18	Folder 008
Correspondence from LER to "Redford", 1913	Box 18	Folder 009
Correspondence from LER to Miss (or Mrs.) Moore, 1937	Box 18	Folder 010
Correspondence TLS from Henry H. Richards to Charlotte Moore, 1934 January 2	Box 18	Folder 011
Correspondence 3 Postcards, Christmas card, undated	Box 18	Folder 012
Poem by LER "The Man at the Helm", 1932	Box 18	Folder 013
Short story "Why Co-Ra-Lie Was Ill", 1886	Box 18	Folder 014
Short story "The Travelling Companions" (offprint?) with inscription, undated	Box 18	Folder 015
Boston Herald photo with caption, 1941	Box 18	Folder 016
Lewiston Journal clipping, 1934	Box 18	Folder 017
"Phil's Secret" Sheet Music, 1892	Box OVS 3	Folder 018
Photograph of LER HR with great-grandchild	Box 18	Folder 019
Photograph of older LER, undated	Box 18	Folder 020

