

HERBERT EMERSON WILSON

an inventory of his fonds in

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA LIBRARY

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

arranged and described by

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May 1993

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Herbert Emerson Wilson was born in Wyoming, Ontario, on March 1, 1881. His mother was a devout Baptist, but his older brother Edward Arthur Wilson later became the religious cult leader known as Brother Twelve.

In 1900 Wilson volunteered for military service in the Boer War. While a prisoner of war there, he became acquainted with Winston Churchill, and was later decorated.

Returning to London, Ontario, Wilson became a Baptist evangelist. He was ordained into the Baptist ministry after studies at McMinnville College in Oregon, and became pastor of successively larger congregations in Oregon and California. In 1916 he resigned from the pastorate.

Posing as a successful Los Angeles businessman, Wilson then embarked on a lucrative career as a safe-cracker. He employed methodical and scientific techniques in this trade, but in 1921 he was arrested. In 1923 he was convicted of murder, and served 20 years of a life sentence in San Quentin Prison.

Following his release from prison, Wilson was deported and lived in Courtenay and Vancouver, B.C. He worked as a newspaper columnist, artist, Museum of Crime proprietor, and literary agent.

Wilson published four books:

I Stole \$16,000,000.

This autobiography, possibly ghostwritten by Dean Jennings, was published in May 1956, according to correspondence in File 1 of the Wilson fonds. However, it is not listed in any standard bibliographic references sources.

Canada's false prophet: the notorious Brother 12/Herbert Emmerson Wilson. -- Richmond Hill, Ont.: Simon & Schuster, 1967. -- 144 p.

(UBC: HR BF 1815 W5 W5)

A biography of Wilson's brother, the leader of the Aquarian Foundation, a religious cult based in the Gulf Islands of B.C. from 1926 to 1933.

Rogues -- all of us/by H.E. Wilson, -- Vancouver: Authors Agency Publishers, [ca. 1964]. -- 395 p.

(UBC: HR HV 6245 W5)

A collection of vignettes and stories of personalities Wilson knew in prison. The publisher is Wilson's own agency.

Greed/by H.E. Wilson. -- Vancouver: Authors Agency Publishers, [ca. 1964].
-- 323 p.

(UBC: HR PR 9337 I43 G7)

A crime novel about a search for a lost gold mine in Mexico.

The movie rights to I stole \$16,000,000 were purchased by a Hollywood producer. The movie was eventually released, starring Tony Curtis.

CUSTODIAL HISTORY

Following Wilson's death his second wife Amelia retained custody of his papers. In 1978 she sold his Boer War medals to Hugh MacMillan, and agent of the Archives of Ontario, but destroyed eight cases of papers fearing that they might contain incriminating evidence. In 1988 she donated the remaining papers to Special Collections.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The one file of correspondence and larger volume of literary typescripts provide insight into the character of an unusual man. The reader is cautioned, however, that Wilson often embellished his stories, and the boundary between his fiction and non-fiction is not always distinct.

DESCRIPTION

CORRESPONDENCE

- 1-1 Correspondence, legal contract, notes, clippings, Herbert and Amelia Wilson, 1952-1982. Concerning movie "I Stole \$16,000,000"; art gallery; biography; deposit of memorabilia in the Archives of Ontario. Correspondents include Stanley Kubrick, Pierre Berton, Nicholas (Nick the Greek) Dandolos.

TYPESCRIPTS: BOOKS

Caught. Wilson's biography describing his experiences as a soldier, Baptist pastor, professional safecracker, and prisoner, written ca. 1935 in San Quentin Prison.

- 1-2 Introduction, p. 1-122

- 1-3 p. 123-241

1-4 p. 242-346

1-4(cont.) Erotic love. A fictionalized account of homosexuality among prisoners.

1-5 p. 1-152

1-6 p. 153-280

TYPESCRIPTS: ARTICLES AND STORIES

1-7 Bibles and criminals.

1-8 Close-up.

1-9 \$500,000,000-- and a heart.

1-10 If I were a prison warden.

1-11 The menace.

1-12 A million for a minute.

1-13 Mirth.

1-14 My raid on Sinclair Oil.

1-15 Prison literati.

1-16 Tijuana -- vice and crime.

1-17 The unrepentent parson who stole \$16 million.

1-18 Crime was my business. Chapter 9. When hell broke loose.

ARTICLE ABOUT WILSON

1-19 The number one crook of the twentieth century/by Frank O'Leary.

1-4 Erotic love. A fictionalized account of homosexuality among prisoners.

1-5 p. 1-152

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ADDITIONS

<u>Box</u>	<u>Content</u>	<u>Date</u>
V.F. 423	Correspondence, copyright certificates, contracts.	1949-1966
1-20	<u>Presidio Magazine.</u> Articles concerning H.E. Wilson.	1957