

## ***Mercedes McCambridge Papers 1935-2004, undated***

**Creator:** Mercedes McCambridge (1916-2004)

**Extent:** 3 linear feet (6 boxes)

**Language:** English

**Repository:** Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago. Please contact [WLArchives@luc.edu](mailto:WLArchives@luc.edu) regarding use.

### **Administration Information**

**Access Restrictions:** Some objects in the collection will only be available by preapproved request as noted in the finding aid.

**Usage Restrictions:** The copyright of materials created by Mercedes McCambridge was transferred to the WLA.

**Preferred Citation:** Identification of item, date, box #, folder #, Mercedes McCambridge Papers, Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago.

**Provenance:** Mercedes McCambridge donated her papers to the Women and Leadership Archives in her will. The papers were sent to the archives by the executor of her estate, Mark Mandell, on March 14, 2005. (WLA 2006.87). Other materials were added to the collection from the Mundelein College Collection Alumnae files.

**Processor:** Lisa Calahan, July 2007; Updated by Kat Latham, April 2009.

**Processing Information:** Finding aid updated January 2025.

**Separations:** None. Compromising bindings were removed, and material was preserved in a more appropriate manner.

**See Also:** The Mundelein College Records at the Women and Leadership Archives.

### **Biographical History**

Charlotte Agnes Mercedes McCambridge was born March 16, 1916 in Joliet, Illinois to Irish Catholic immigrant parents. Originally called Carlotta by her mother, McCambridge came to be known as Mercedes early in her childhood. She attended St. Thomas Apostle High School on the south side of Chicago.

After a year at Rosary College, now Dominican University, Mercedes McCambridge transferred to Mundelein College as a theatre major. She performed in many of the college's theatre productions including *Twelfth Night*. McCambridge formed a close bond with the head of Mundelein's Drama department, Sister Mary Leola Oliver, BVM, whom she called the most influential person in her life. McCambridge performed in the Verse Speaking Choir and was president of the Laetare Players. She graduated in 1937.

After being invited to perform on the radio in McCambridge's senior year, the Mundelein College Verse Speaking Choir was signed to a one-year contract to perform weekly on the radio with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. McCambridge, the choir's soloist, was signed to a five-year contract with NBC. She played parts in radio programs such as *I Love a Mystery* (1939-1953), *One Man's Family* (1932-1950), *Lights Out* (1934-1947), and *Abie's Irish Rose* (1942-1944). Her performances in radio led Orson Welles to credit her as the world's greatest living radio actress.

After graduating from Mundelein College in 1937, McCambridge moved to New York to further her acting career in theatre. She starred in plays such as *The Mad Woman of Chaillot* (1948-1950), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962). Later in her career, she had a successful run as the grandmother in the award-winning play by Neil Simon, *Lost in Yonkers* (1991). Her early stage work led her to Hollywood. McCambridge won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her film debut performance in *All the King's Men* (1949), which also won the award for Best Picture. Her filmography also includes a leading role in the cult classic *Johnny Guitar* (1954), an Oscar nominated role in *Giant* (1956), a supporting role in *A Farewell to Arms* (1957), an uncredited role in Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958) among many others. Although she continued to regularly perform throughout the 1960s, McCambridge only again gained widespread recognition when she portrayed the voice of the demon in *The Exorcist* (1973). This led to more offers of roles in both film and television.

Throughout her career in film and theatre, McCambridge won national recognition – including an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress and two Golden Globes for Best Actress and Most Promising Newcomer, Female all for her role in “All the King's Men”. She also has two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, one for film and the other for her work in television. McCambridge published her autobiography, *The Quality of Mercy*, in 1981 and was also an accomplished, although unpublished, poet.

After years of battling alcoholism, McCambridge reached sobriety with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. When not acting, Mercedes devoted her time to educating the public about alcoholism and rehabilitation, a topic not often discussed at the time. In 1969, she testified before Senator Harold E. Hughes' Subcommittee on Alcohol and Narcotics, speaking out about her past problems with alcoholism. Although making her struggles public is said to have hindered her career, it helped bring public recognition and acceptance of the disease of addiction and gave other alcoholics, especially celebrities, the courage to also come forward and seek help. In the 1970s, she became heavily involved with organizations such as The National Council of Alcoholism and The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. In January of 1970, Mercedes was announced the honorary chair of Alcohol Information Week and in December of the same year was named honorary chair of the National Council of Alcoholism. Starting in 1974, she served as the president of Livengrin Alcohol Rehabilitation Center in Philadelphia. She later became CEO of the foundation and was in charge of the rehabilitation facility's operations. Because of her dedication to the cause of eradicating alcoholism, she received numerous awards and was honored at the White House for her humanitarian work.

McCambridge frequently voiced her opinion on the Hollywood film industry, politics, and women's rights. She campaigned for Adlai Stevenson in his two runs for the presidency.

McCambridge was presented with an honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters in 1984 by Mundelein College. McCambridge died March 2, 2004.

## **Scope and Content**

The Mercedes McCambridge Papers consist of 3 linear feet and span the years 1935 to 2000. The papers are organized into five series and alphabetically within each series. The material within this collection consists of paper, objects, and photographs. The Oscar and Golden Globe are available for viewing by pre-approved request due to their fragile condition.

### **Series 1: Biographical, 1935-2004, Box 1**

Contains material related to Mercedes McCambridge's education, resume, and personal friendship with Adlai Stevenson and include correspondence, Adlai Stevenson commemorative stamps, obituaries, photocopies from encyclopedias, grade cards, and a recording of a commencement speech.

### **Series 2: Professional, 1949-2000, Box 1**

Contains material relating to Mercedes McCambridge's professional career as an actress and her community work against alcoholism. This series includes correspondence from various members of the White house commending her for her interest in abolishing alcoholism in the United States, original drafts of speeches that McCambridge presented at various events, press releases and news articles. Special items of note in this series include signed letters from Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. Photocopies are kept within the collection, and the originals are filed with the case file. The original letters can be viewed for research purposes with the approval of the archives director.

#### **Subseries 2.1: General, 1935-1994, Box 1**

Includes correspondence, news clippings, Playbills, press releases, and other materials related to her career.

#### **Subseries 2.2: Scripts, 1948-1991, Boxes 1-2**

This subseries contains four original scripts that McCambridge used to fulfill her roles in film and stage theatre. Of particular note is the "All the King's Men" script which includes production stills within the bound script and newspaper reviews that McCambridge cut out and glued in the back of the script.

#### **Subseries 2.3: Writings, 1981, undated, Box 2, 6**

This subseries includes McCambridge's published autobiography, *The Quality of Mercy*, poems, and drafts of two unpublished writings. "A Collage of Hope, Healing, and Humor" is an unpublished autobiographical essay with Mercedes' personal notes and edits on the draft. The second unpublished work is a portion of a biography about actress Sarah Siddons entitled, "The World's Greatest Actress: A Profile of Mrs. Siddons" and includes several variations of the same section of writing, with different notes and subtle changes to each version.

### **Series 3: Photographs 1947-1973, undated, Box 3**

Contains photographs of Mercedes McCambridge at a poetry reading, with Adlai Stevenson II, involved in acting, and at other unidentified events.

**Series 4: Awards, 1971-1995, Box 3**

Contains honorary degrees, plaques, and certificates Mercedes McCambridge received throughout her life in recognition of her work as an actress and as an advocate for alcoholism awareness.

**Series 5: 3-D Objects and Oversized Materials 1949-1965, Boxes 4-6**

Contains Mercedes McCambridge's Academy Award, two Golden Globe Awards, a scrapbook, a biography of Adlai Stevenson II, and Sarah Bernhardt's autograph. Photocopies of Bernhardt's autograph are available in the collection; originals are stored in the case file.

**Subjects:**

Mercedes McCambridge (1916-2004)  
Adlai E. Stevenson (1900-1965)  
*All the King's Men*  
Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
*Giant*  
Mundelein College

Box	Folder	Title	Dates
		<b><i>Mercedes McCambridge Papers</i></b> <b><i>1935-2004, undated</i></b>	
		<b>Series 1: Personal 1935-1999, undated</b>	
1	1	Adlai Stevenson II	1952-1965, undated
1	2	Biographical Information	1970-1984, undated
1	3	Mundelein College	1935-1999, undated
1	4	Obituaries	2004
		<b>Series 2: Professional, 1949-2000, undated</b>	
		<b>Subseries 2.1: General 1935-1994</b>	
1	5	Correspondence	1963-1988
1	6	<i>Monster's Inc.</i> , Roz Character Description	2000
1	7	Newspaper Clippings	1936-1994, undated
1	8	Playbills	1935, undated
1	9	Press Releases	1942-1984, undated
1	10	Ray Apicalla Speech	1994
		<b>Subseries 2.2: Scripts 1948-1991</b>	
1	11	<i>All the King's Men</i>	1948
1	12	<i>Giant</i>	1956
2	1	<i>'Night Mother</i>	1983
2	2	<i>Lost in Yonkers</i>	1991

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<b>Subseries 2.3: Writings 1981, undated</b>			
2	3	“A Collage of Hope, Healing and Humor,” draft	undated
2	4	Poetry	undated
2	5	“The Quality of Mercy” (hardback copy 1)	1981
2	6	“The Quality of Mercy” (hardback copy 2)	1981
2	7	“The Quality of Mercy” (paperback copy)	1982
6	4	“The World’s Greatest Actress,” draft	undated
6	5	“The World’s Greatest Actress,” draft	undated
6	6	“The World’s Greatest Actress,” draft	undated
6	7	“The World’s Greatest Actress,” draft	undated
<b>Series 3: Photographs 1947-1973, undated</b>			
3	1	Photographs, Poetry Reading with U.S. Air Force Band	1973
3	2	Photographs, Adlai Stevenson	undated
3	3	Photographs, Theatre and Acting	1947, undated
3	4	Unidentified Photographs	undated
<b>Series 4: Awards, 1971-1995</b>			
3	5	American Ireland Fund Award	1995
3	6	Antoinette Perry Award Nomination	1971-1972
3	7	Honoris Causa Degree, Mundelein College	1984
3	8	Honoris Causa Degree, St. Edwards University	1974
3	9	Honoris Causa Degree, St. Mary’s University	1994
3	10	LOOK Film Achievement Award	1949
3	11	National Council on Alcoholism Award	1973
3	12	Neil Simon Letter Plaque	1992
3	13	White House Certificate of Appreciation	1971
<b>Series 5: 3-D and Oversize Materials, 1949-1965</b>			
4	1	Academy Award Oscar: <i>All the King’s Men</i>	1949
5	1	Golden Globes: <i>All the King’s Men</i>	1949
6	1	Sarah Bernhardt Autograph (original in case file)	1965
6	2	Scrapbook	
6	3	Stevenson Biography: <i>Man of Honor Man of Peace</i>	1965