Collection Summary

Title: Craig Rhea Collection of Karl Struss Papers
Date: 1901–1977, bulk 1915–1930
Creator(s): Struss, Karl (1886–1981)
Extent: .2 Linear Feet
Code: CRC
Repository: Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives
Abstract: The Craig Rhea Collection of Karl Struss Papers contains the personal and business correspondence of photographer and cinematographer Karl Struss, business records, exhibition catalogues, newspaper clippings, and a small sampling of photographs from a movie set. The materials date from 1911 to 1977 with the bulk being from 1915 to 1930.

Information for Researchers

Access Restrictions
The collection is open to qualified researchers.

Use Restrictions
The Craig Rhea Collection of Karl Struss Papers is the physical property of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. The Amon Carter Museum of American Art assumes no responsibility for infringement of literary property rights or copyrights or for liability to any person for defamation or invasion of privacy.

Preferred Citation
Craig Rhea Collection of Karl Struss Papers, [item identification], Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives.

Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives
John and Susan Harvith Collection of Karl Struss Papers
Stephen White Collection of Karl Struss Papers
Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

More than 200 prints, 55 Lumiére autochromes, and over 5,000 negatives by Struss in the Photography Collection.

Contact the museum archivist at archivist@cartermuseum.org or 817.989.5077 for additional information.

Administrative Information

Acquisition and Custody Information

Gift of Craig Rhea

Processed By

Jonathan Frembling

Biographical Note

Karl Struss (1886–1981) was one of the leading pictorial photographers of the pre–World War I era. His reputation was established when Alfred Stieglitz selected Struss’ work for the 1910 International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography and then published a portfolio in Camera Work in 1912. In 1909 Struss invented the Struss Pictorial Lens, a soft–focus lens that proved immensely popular with other photographers of the period, including Laura Gilpin. After studying with Clarence White, Struss took over White’s studio in 1914 and specialized in portraiture, advertising, and magazine illustration. Five years later he moved to Hollywood and became Cecil B. DeMille's still–cameraman. Struss soon turned from still photography to cinematography, filming such works as Ben Hur (1925) and Sunrise (1927), for which he received the first Academy Award for cinematography. Struss’ Hollywood career spanned more than two decades of black–and–white and color cinema and incorporated silent and talking films, musicals, and 3–D features. In the 1950s and 1960s, as Struss’ motion picture work decreased, he began filming television series, industrial films, and commercials. In the 1970s Struss, in his late eighties and retired, was rediscovered after his Man with a Camera photographic exhibition and film festival tour.

Scope and Content Note

The Craig Rhea Collection of Karl Struss Papers contains the personal and business correspondence of Karl Struss, business records, a variety of exhibition catalogues, newspaper clippings about Struss, and a small sampling of photographs from a movie set. The materials date from 1911 to 1977 with the bulk being from 1915 to 1930. The material has been organized into five series: Correspondence, Professional, Artifacts, Periodicals and Clippings. Where possible the materials have been organized chronologically.
Correspondence: This is the bulkiest series in the collection. It offers a window into the personal life of the artist through correspondence with his family and friends, notably the active role his mother Marie and sisters played in maintaining his photography business and professional advancement and his early partnership in a photography business with a family friend, Paul Anderson. Also illustrated in the letters are his difficult dealings with the United States Army during World War I over Struss’ supposed pro–German sympathies. Correspondence is found in boxes 1 and 3.

Professional: Materials illustrating Struss’ daily business dealings including legal papers from his work as a cinematographer are contained in this series.

Artifacts: Small souvenirs from Struss’ career, including photographs of an active movie set are in this series. Artifacts are found in boxes 2 and 4.

Periodicals: Magazines to which Struss contributed are the primary materials, but also a few titles that were of interest to him are included. Periodicals are found in boxes 2 and 4.

Clippings: These materials round out the view offered by the other series. Items include articles on Struss’ photographic and cinemagraphic careers as well as on events and entertainments of the time. Clippings are found in boxes 3 and 4.

A more detailed series description appears at the start of each series in this finding aid.

Inventory

Series I: Correspondence

Scope and Content Note: This series contains Struss’ personal correspondence with his family, friends, and business associates. Much of the family correspondence is with his mother, Marie Fischer Struss.

The bulk of Struss’ correspondence is often mundane but notably turns to several themes: Struss’ photographic work, with his mother, Marie, and sisters, Hilda and Lilian, serving as a clearing house and vendor for his photographic images; the dissolving of their business by his business partner and friend, Paul Anderson, while Struss was at Fort Leavenworth; and Struss’ efforts to clear his name of supposed pro–German sympathies. Ultimately, each of these themes played a part in his decision to go to Hollywood and move into cinematography.

Box 1, Folder 1: Correspondence with Family, September 30, 1917–December 7, 1917, n.d.
15. Manuscript letter from Elsa. n.d. [1917?].

Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondence with Family, April 1, 1918–May 30, 1918
1. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 1, 1918.
5. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 6, 1918.
6. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 7, 1918.
7. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 8, 1918.
8. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 9, 1918.
10. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 12, 1918.
15. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 18, 1918.
18. Manuscript letter to Mother. April 24, 1918.
32. Manuscript letter to Mother. May 19, 1918.
33. Manuscript letter to Mother. May 21, 1918.
34. Manuscript letter to Mother. May 22, 1918.


Box 1, Folder 3: Correspondence with Family. June 2, 1918–September 1918, n.d.


32. Manuscript letter to Mother. August 9, 1918.
33. Manuscript letter to Mother. August 12, 1918.
34. Manuscript letter to Mother. August 14, 1918.
35. Manuscript letter to Mother. August 16, 1918.
41. Manuscript letter to Mother. September 1, 1918.
42. Manuscript letter to Mother. September 3, 1918.
43. Manuscript letter to Mother. September 4, 1918.
44. Manuscript letter to Mother. September 8, 1918.
45. Manuscript letter to Mother. September 9, 1918.
46. Manuscript letter to Mother. September 12, 1918.
47. Manuscript letter to Mother. September 13, 1918.

Box 1, Folder 4: Correspondence with Family, February 17, 1919–June 29, 1919, n.d.
23. Manuscript letter to (?). n.d.
34. Manuscript letter to Mother. May 18, 1919.


Box 1, Folder 5: Correspondence with Family, July 4, 1919–September 17, 1919, n.d.

2. Manuscript letter from (?) to Mrs. Struss. n.d.


17. Manuscript letter from Lilian to Reofle (?). August 2, 1919.
20. Manuscript letter from Lilian to Mother (?). n.d.
31. Manuscript letter from Mother to family. September 14, 1919.
34. Manuscript letter from Lilian to Mother. September 16, 1919.
35. Manuscript letter from Mother to Family. September 17, 1919.

Box 1, Folder 6: Correspondence with Family, September 25, 1919–January 30, 1921, n.d.
17. Pamphlet for Kolb Brothers Studio and Auditorium. n.d.
42. Manuscript letter from Mother. n.d.

Box 1, Folder 7: Correspondence with Family, February 1, 1921–June 14, 1921, n.d.
4. Written card from Ethel and Karl to Mother. n.d.
5. Manuscript letter from Ethel and Karl to Mother. n.d.
11. Typed telegram to Mother. April 10, 1921.


15. Manuscript letter from Ethel to Mother. n.d.


17. Manuscript letter from Karl (?). n.d.

Box 1, Folder 8: General Correspondence, 1914–1928, n.d.


Series II. Professional
Scope and Content Note: This series contains materials related to Struss’ career as a photographer. Of particular interest is a small collection of catalogues from exhibitions that included his work and his movie studio contracts and related records. The oversized business records are in box 3.

Box 1 Folder 9: Exhibition Catalogues, 1911–1976

2. *An Exhibition Illustrating the Progress of the Art of Photography in America at the Montross Art Galleries, New York, October tenth to Thirty–First, MCMXII.*


Series III. Artifacts

Scope and Content Note: This series includes a handwritten card file listing photographs and a small group of assorted items related to his movie career. Six oversized photographs of sets and scenes being shot and of Struss with a movie crew are in box 4.

Box 2, Folder 1: Card File of Early Negatives, 1901–1916


3. Written list of names and photographs.


5. Theatre program for *Sunrise* at the Times Square Theatre. n.d.

6. Theatre program for *Sunrise* at the Carthay Circle Theatre. n.d.

7. Theatre program for *Poor Men’s Wives* at the Criterion Theatre. n.d.

Series IV. Periodicals
Scope and Contents Note: This series contains periodicals that either include images by Struss or that were of interest to him. Oversized issues of The Evening Post Saturday Magazine, California Arts & Architecture, Woman’s Home Companion, and Arts Monthly Pictorial are in box 4.

Box 2, Folder 3: Art and Industry in Education, 1912

Box 2, Folder 4: Art and Industry in Education, 1913
1. Art and Industry in Education. The Arts and Crafts Club of Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. 1913.

Box 2, Folder 5: Assorted Periodicals, 1930–1936
7. Western Tennis. March 1936.

Series I: Correspondence (Oversized)

Box 3, Folder 1: Correspondence with Family, September 29, 1917–March 25, 1918
12. Map for Hotel Chamberlin.
15. Manuscript letter to Mother. n.d.
24. Typed letter to Mother. n.d.

31. Manuscript letter from J. B. D. February 11, 1918.

32. Manuscript letter to Hilda. February 17, 1918.

33. Manuscript letter to Elsa. February 18, 1918.

34. Manuscript letter to Mother. February 19, 1918.


37. Manuscript letter to Mother. February 26, 1918.

38. Manuscript letter to Mother. February 27, 1918.


40. Manuscript letter to Mother. March 2, 1918.

41. Manuscript letter to Mother. March 4, 1918.

42. Manuscript letter to Lilian. March 5, 1918.

43. Manuscript letter to Mother. March 7, 1918.

44. Manuscript letter to Mother. March 9, 1918.

45. Manuscript letter to Mother. March 13, 1918.

46. Pamphlet with lyrics for *The Star Spangled Banner*.

47. Manuscript letter to Mother. March 16, 1918.


50. Manuscript letter to Mother. March 25, 1918.

Box 3, Folder 2: Correspondence with Paul Anderson, November 30, 1917–June 4, 1918

1. Written note and list. October 14, 1917.


8. Typed letter from Paul Anderson. n.d.


10. Typed letter from Paul Anderson. n.d.


15. Typed letter from Paul Anderson to Mr. and Mrs. Struss. June 4, 1918.

Box 3, Folder 3: Military Correspondence, 1917–1920, n.d.

1. Typed letter from Major, Signal Corps to Office Chief Signal Officer. August 30, 1917.


5. Typed letter from Signal Officer to Local Board for Division 146, New York. n.d.


7. Typed roster for Photographic School Detachment. n.d.


12. Typed Special Order no. 7. February 7, 1918.

13. Clipping. n.d.


15. Typed letter from (indecipherable) U.S. Senate to Henry W. Struss. February 9, 1918.


24. Three photographs. n.d.

25. Typed letter to Inventions Section, General Staff. August 6, 1918.


30. Clipping. n.d.

31. Typed monograph on photographing thru fog. August 30, 1918.
32. Typed letter from Paul Anderson. September 17, 1918.


34. Typed letter from W. E. MacNaughton. September 27, 1918.


36. Typed letter from Inventions Section, General Staff. October 16, 1918.

37. Clipping. October 19, 1918.

38. Typed letter from (indecipherable). November 1, 1918.


40. Clipping. February 16, 1919.


42. Typed letter from Captain Louis A. Humason. April 8, 1919.


44. Typed letter from Captain J. D. Miley. May June 25, 1919.

45. Typed letter to Director of Military Intelligence. August 6, 1919.


47. Clipping, Los Angeles Examiner. September 7, 1919.


49. Typed letter to Secretary of War. February 15, 1920.


53. Manuscript letter. n.d.

Series II. Professional (Oversized)


Series V. Clippings (Oversized)


Series III. Artifacts (Oversized)

Box 4, Folder 1: Photographs
1. 3 stills from Sparrows. 1926

2. 3 photographic prints of film crew

Series IV. Periodicals (Oversized)

Box 4, Folder 2: The Evening Post Saturday Magazine, 1913


5. The Evening Post Saturday Magazine. November 1, 1913.

Box 4, Folder 3: Assorted Periodicals, 1936, n.d.


**Series V. Clippings (Oversized)**