

THEODORE ROETHKE PAPERS  
Accession No. 1624-15

GUIDE

PROVENANCE

This accession consists of 124 letters written by Theodore Roethke to Mary Kunkel between 1935 and 1938 and was purchased from Sarah Kunkel Stafford (Mary's sister) in 1990. It was processed in 1991.

BIOGRAPHY

Roethke's romantic involvement with Mary Kunkel began while Roethke was teaching English at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. The letters begin during the summer of 1935, Roethke's last days teaching there. During that summer he was pursuing prospects of jobs at NYU, Bennington College, Yale, University of Michigan and Michigan State. He travelled to New York and Saginaw and while in Saginaw worked on a history of the Hartland, Michigan community founded by J. Robert Crouse, a wealthy Cleveland businessman.

Roethke remained in Saginaw until, in late September, he was offered a position as English instructor at Michigan State College. Roethke accepted the job and began work in October. He continued to correspond with Mary Kunkel in Easton. While at Michigan State, Roethke suffered his first bout with mental illness. He was hospitalized at Lansing Sparrow Hospital from November 11 to 21. Roethke was admitted to Mercywood Sanitarium near Lansing in mid-December and remained there until mid-January 1936. He then returned to Saginaw on an unpaid leave of absence from Michigan State. In the spring, Roethke was notified by Michigan State that he would not be re-appointed for the next year. As he regained his health, Roethke began looking for another job and in August accepted a position at Penn State.

Roethke taught at Penn State from fall 1936 until spring 1943. His correspondence with Mary Kunkel continued, but was infrequent after 1936. Mary Kunkel subsequently married Jeremy Bagster-Collins, and the couple remained on friendly terms with Roethke.

ARRANGEMENT

The majority of the letters are undated. The inventory indicates exact dates only when they are known. The bulk of the letters are grouped by period in an approximate order based on content and correlation with Mary Kunkel's letters to Roethke. (For Mary Bagster-Collins' letters to Roethke, see Theodore Roethke Accession No. 418 box 2.)

These letters were not included in Selected Letters of Theodore Roethke, edited by Ralph J. Mills, although photocopies of most of the letters were loaned to Mills in 1966 and he worked with them. The photocopies were subsequently added to the Roethke papers (Accession no. 653, part VII, box 150), together with a chronological list corresponding to numbers pencilled on the top of the originals. (The list is in box 147.) It was discovered during processing of the letters in 1991 that the order of the list was inaccurate, and it was not followed.

INVENTORY

| <u>Box/Folders</u> |                                  | <u>#PP</u> | <u>Dates</u> |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel |            | SUMMER, 1935 |
| 1/1                | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/2                | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/3                | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/4                | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/5                | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/6                | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/7                | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/8                | A.L.S. (June 10, 1935)           |            |              |
| 1/9                | A.L.S.                           | 3          |              |
| 1/10               | A.L.S.                           | 3          |              |
| 1/11               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/12               | A.L.S.                           | 3          |              |
| 1/13               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/14               | A.L.S.                           | 3          |              |
| 1/15               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/16               | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/17               | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/18               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/19               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/20               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/21               | A.L.S.                           | 4          |              |
| 1/22               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/23               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/24               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/25               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/26               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/27               | A.L.S.                           | 3          |              |
| 1/28               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/29               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/30               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/31               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/32               | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/33               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/34               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/35               | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/36               | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/37               | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/38               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/39               | A.L.S. (August 15, 16, 1935)     |            |              |
| 1/40               | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/41               | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |

| <u>Box/Folders</u> |  | <u>#PP</u> | <u>Dates</u>    |
|--------------------|--|------------|-----------------|
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel (cont.) |            | SUMMER, 1935    |
| 1/42               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/43               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/44               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/45               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/46               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/47               | A.L.S. (August 29, 1935)                 |            |                 |
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel         |            | FALL, 1935      |
| 1/48               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/49               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/50               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/51               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/52               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/53               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/54               | A.L.S.                                   | 4          |                 |
| 1/55               | A.L.                                     |            |                 |
| 1/56               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/57               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/58               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/59               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/60               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/61               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/62               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/63               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/64               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/65               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/66               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/67               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/68               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/69               | A.L.S.                                   | 4          |                 |
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel         |            | WINTER, 1935-36 |
| 1/70               | A.L.S.                                   | 4          |                 |
| 1/71               | A.L.S.                                   | 4          |                 |
| 1/72               | A.L.S.                                   | 3          |                 |
| 1/73               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/74               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/75               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/76               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/77               | A.L.S. (January 17, 1936)                |            |                 |
| 1/78               | A.L.S. (January 22, 1936)                | 2          |                 |
| 1/79               | A.L.S. (January 28, 1936)                |            |                 |
| 1/80               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/81               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |

| <u>Box/Folders</u> |  | <u>#PP</u> | <u>Dates</u>    |
|--------------------|--|------------|-----------------|
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel (cont.) |            | WINTER, 1935-36 |
| 1/82               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/83               | A.L.S.                                   | 3          |                 |
| 1/84               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/85               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/86               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/87               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/88               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel         |            | SPRING, 1936    |
| 1/89               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/90               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/91               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/92               | A.L.S. (April 2, 1936)                   |            |                 |
| 1/93               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/94               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/95               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/96               | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/97               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/98               | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel         |            | SUMMER, 1936    |
| 1/99               | A.L.S.                                   | 3          |                 |
| 1/100              | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/101              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/102              | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/103              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/104              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/105              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/106              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel         |            | FALL, 1936      |
| 1/107              | A.L.                                     |            |                 |
| 1/108              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/109              | A.L.S.                                   | 2          |                 |
| 1/110              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/111              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/112              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/113              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |
| 1/114              | A.L.S.                                   |            |                 |

| <u>Box/Folders</u> |                                  | <u>#PP</u> | <u>Dates</u> |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
|                    | OUTGOING LETTERS--to Mary Kunkel |            | 1937-38      |
| 1/115              | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/116              | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/117              | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/118              | A.L.S.                           |            |              |
| 1/119              | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/120              | A.L.S. (March 8, 1938)           |            |              |
| 1/121              | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/122              | A.L.S. (August 27, 1938)         |            |              |
| 1/123              | A.L.S.                           | 2          |              |
| 1/124              | A.L.S. (October 12, 1938)        |            |              |