January 2016

George P. Jackson Correspondence

George Pullen Jackson 1874-1953

Maine State Library

Robert S. Alvarez

Nashville Public Library

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JACKSON, George P

b. Monson

d. January 19, 1953
George Pullen Jackson, American religious folk-song authority, and for twenty-five years head of the German Department at Vanderbilt University, died Monday in Nashville, Tenn., at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Fitzgerald Parker. His age was 77.

A specialist in the music of the shaped-note hymnals popular in the Southern highlands, Dr. Jackson was frequently in controversy with other folk-song experts because of his contention that Negro spirituals were derived from traditional white hymn-tunes rather than from genuinely African musical materials.

Dr. Jackson’s interest in shaped-note hymnals began soon after his arrival on the Vanderbilt University campus, when a native Tennessean wagered that he could not name the largest musical organization in America. He took the bet and, losing, first learned of the existence of the “Sacred Harp Singers,” a predominantly rural organization with members in all parts of the country.

Dr. Jackson, who received his musical education in Europe, had never before seen the “Sacred Harp” hymnals, which use square, triangular and diamond-shaped note-heads to indicate pitch. His curiosity was aroused, and though he remained in the university’s German Department, he continued his researches in the so-called “white spirituals.”

His books on folk-songs were "White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands," "Spiritual Folk-Songs of Early America," "Down-East Spirituals," "White and Negro Spirituals," "Story of the Sacred Harp," "Sing, Brothers, Sing," and "White Spirituals."

Studied in Southern Schools

Born in Monson, Me., Dr. Jackson studied in the public schools of Birmingham, Ala., and in 1897 matriculated at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Dresden. He attended Vanderbilt in 1900-01, and the University of Chicago, where he received a Ph. B. degree in 1904 and a Ph. D in 1911. The subject of his doctor’s thesis was German folk-music.

Before going to Vanderbilt, Dr. Jackson had taught German at Kansas State Agricultural College, the Case School of Applied Science in Cleveland, the University of Chicago, Oberlin College and the University of North Dakota.

From 1913 to 1918, Dr. Jackson was president of the University Philharmonic Society, Grand Forks, Neb., and in 1920 became the founder and first president of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra.

In 1942 he received the "Useful Citizen of the Year" citation awarded to alumni by the University of Chicago.

Dr. Jackson was a member of the editorial board of the Southern Folklore Quarterly, past president of the Tennessee and Southeastern Folklore Societies, a council member of the American Folk-Music Society, and a member of the American Musico logical Society and the International Folklore Council. He was chairman of the National Federation of Music Clubs Committee on Religious Folk-Songs.

Besides Mrs. Parker, Dr. Jackson is survived by a son, George, Jr. of Denver; four sisters, Mrs. E. W. I. Davids and Mrs. John Beckwith of Birmingham and Mrs. Fletcher Quillian of Washington; a brother, Leicester C. Jackson of Boston, and six granddaughters.
January 28, 1953

Dr. Robert S. Alvarez, Librarian
Nashville Public Library
Nashville, Tennessee

Dear Dr. Alvarez:

Because Dr. George Pullen Jackson was born in Maine, we should like to get in touch with his daughter, Mrs. Fitzgerald Parker, who we understand lives in Nashville.

We do not have a Nashville directory available. Can you help us by sending us her address? If you prefer not to do this, may we send a letter to her in care of your library, for forwarding?

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
By

hmj

[Handwritten note:]

Mrs. address is:
Royal Oak Drive
Nashville, Tenn.
February 9, 1953

Mrs. Fitzgerald Parker  
Royal Oak Drive  
Nashville, Tennessee

Dear Mrs. Parker:

Only recently we learned that Dr. George Pullen Jackson was a native of this state. We deplore the fact that this escaped our attention, for we would have written to him about the Maine Author Collection. Possibly it is not the sort of collection that would have aroused his interest; on the other hand, he might, like many other distinguished sons and daughters of Maine, have considered it an idea worth furthering, and might have been pleased to inscribe copies of his books for inclusion.

The collection numbers about two thousand books at present, most of them inscribed gift copies. The inscriptions are original, serious, amusing, artistic, poetic, autobiographical -- as varied as the authors and their subjects; for of course all kinds of books are to be found in this exhibit. There are cook books, children's stories, poems, histories, biographies, novels, volumes on art, law, metaphysics, psychology, travel. It is a really valuable collection, and one which constantly attracts visitors and students. We gather all available biographical and critical material on our authors, and try to have as complete information about Maine writers as possible.

Dr. Jackson's unusual books are not in the Maine Author Collection and we regret that this is so. We cannot ask him whether he is interested. Is it possible that you, as his daughter, have available copies of these works which you would like to present to the collection?

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection
Mrs. Fitzgerald Parker  
4002 Royal Oaks Drive  
Nashville 5, Tennessee

Dear Mrs. Jacobs,

I'm sorry to be so slow answering your letter about my father, George Pullen Jackson, and his books. Unfortunately all his books are out of print at present except his latest, and a small little volume called the "Story of the Sacred Harp." I'm sending you a copy of that and will let you know about procuring a copy of his latest book.

Sincerely,

Frances Jackson Parker
Mrs. Fitzgerald Parker
4002 Royal Oaks Drive
Nashville 12, Tennessee

Dear Mrs. Parker:

Thank you for your friendly letter and for the copy of THE STORY OF THE SACRED HARP, 1844-1944, which we are delighted to be able to add to the Maine Author Collection through your generous interest.

We are not surprised to learn that Dr. Jackson's books are out of print. Perhaps we shall be able to pick them up from time to time from out-of-print dealers. Meanwhile, we are glad that a start has been made.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

hmj