

**Roger William Riis Papers**  
**A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress**



**Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**2023**

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm81075875>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms007103>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2007  
Revised 2023 July

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Roger William Riis Papers

**Inclusive Dates:** 1903-1990

**Bulk Dates:** 1921-1952

**ID No.:** MSS75875

**Creator:** Riis, Roger William, b. 1894

**Extent:** 3,500 items

**Extent:** 14 containers

**Extent:** 5.6 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

**Location:** Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm81075875>

**Summary:** Author and editor. Correspondence, diaries, journal, speeches, articles and other writings, subject files, scrapbooks, printed matter, and photographs pertaining to Riis's work as an author and editor. Subjects include consumer fraud, tobacco smoking, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Sherman Antitrust Act. Also includes material pertaining to his service in the U. S. Navy during World War I.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

### People

Baldwin, Roger N. (Roger Nash), 1884-1981--Correspondence.

Benton, William, 1900-1973--Correspondence.

Donner, Robert, -1964--Correspondence.

Ernst, Morris L. (Morris Leopold), 1888-1976--Correspondence.

Foster, Elizabeth Hipple Riis--Correspondence.

Fredericks, Carlton--Correspondence.

Hayes, Arthur Garfield--Correspondence.

Holmes, John Haynes, 1879-1964--Correspondence.

Moore, Martha Riis, 1914-2008--Correspondence.

Owre, J. Riis, 1908- --Correspondence.

Riis, Jacob A. (Jacob August), 1849-1914--Correspondence.

Riis, Roger William, 1894-1953.

Rorty, James, 1890-1973--Correspondence.

Seldes, George, 1890-1995--Correspondence.

Wallace, DeWitt, 1889-1981--Correspondence.

### Organizations

American Civil Liberties Union.

Reader's Digest Association.

United States. Navy.

United States. Sherman Act.

### Subjects

Antitrust law.

Automobile repair fraud.

Cigarettes.

Fraud.

Smoking.

Tobacco.

World War, 1914-1918--Naval operations, American.

## Occupations

Authors.  
Editors.

## Acquisition Information

The papers of Roger William Riis, author and editor, were given by J. Riis Owre in 1977 and Martha Riis Moore from 1987 to 1991.

## Processing History

The papers of Roger William Riis were arranged and described in 1999 by Melinda K. Friend. The finding aid was revised in 2007. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

## Transfers

Some photographs have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of the Roger William Riis Papers.

## Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Roger William Riis is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

## Access and Restrictions

The papers of Roger William Riis are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Roger William Riis Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

Date	Event
1894, Mar. 15	Born, Richmond Hills, N.Y.
1913	Attended the Hill School, Pottstown, Pa.
1917	A. B., Williams College, Williamstown, Mass. Reporter, New York <i>Sun</i>
1917-1918	United States Naval Reserves
1920	Associate editor, <i>American Legion Weekly</i>
1921-1922	Associate editor, <i>Collier's Weekly</i>
1921-1952	Contributor, magazine articles
1922-1942	Free-lancer, public relations and publicity work for corporations and social movements

1926	Published with Charles W. Bonner, Jr., <i>Publicity: A Study of the Development of Industrial News</i> . New York: J. H. Sears & Co.
1926-19??	Member and Board of Directors, American Civil Liberties Union
1941	Married Elizabeth Hipple
1941-1945	Civilian advisor, Bureau of Aeronautics, United States Navy
1942	Published with John Patric, <i>Repairmen Will Get You If You Don't Watch Out</i> . New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co.
1943	Honorary M. A., Williams College, Williamstown, Mass.
1943-1952	Roving editor, <i>Reader's Digest</i>
1951	Published, <i>The Truth About Smoking</i> . New York: Grosset & Dunlap
1953, Jan. 23	Died, Wilton, Conn.

## Scope and Content Note

The papers of Roger William Riis (1894-1953) span the years 1903-1990, with the bulk of the items concentrated in the period 1921-1952. The papers are arranged in four series, [Personal File](#), [Writings File](#), [Subject File](#), and [Scrapbooks](#).

The [Personal File](#), 1903-1990, contains Riis's correspondence with his family and associates, servicemen who visited the Riis home during World War II, and letters to the editor as well as a journal chronicling his articles and their publication. The largest number of family correspondence was written to his niece, Martha Elizabeth Riis (later Martha Riis Moore), from about 1929 to 1950. Letters after his death were exchanged mostly among Martha Riis Moore and family members, including Elizabeth Hipple Riis Foster and Jacob Riis Owre, known as "Riis." Noteworthy are letters written in 1903 and 1904 to Riis's father, Jacob Augustus Riis, and a photograph dated 1905 of the elder Riis with Theodore Roosevelt. Some of the letters written to Roger William Riis by prominent persons were removed by the donor and replaced with photocopies.

The [Writings File](#), 1916-1953, is comprised mostly of articles written by Riis for magazines and includes fillers for magazines, pamphlets and booklets, poetry, and speeches. Although a majority of the articles were written under Riis's name, some were published under his pseudonym, Niel Hunter. In 1941, Riis's began publishing a controversial series entitled "The Repairman Will Gyp You If You Don't Watch Out" in the *Reader's Digest*. The series criticized the unscrupulous behavior of various types of repairmen including automobile mechanics and those servicing watches and radios. Riis kept a scrapbook of the many articles, advertisements, and letters to the editor that defended the repairmen. The series was published in 1942 as the book *Repairmen Will Get You If You Don't Watch Out*, coauthored with John Patric. Riis also maintained scrapbooks of his articles and other writings which can be found in the [Scrapbook](#) series.

The [Subject File](#), 1912-1953, contains information on research topics and Riis's involvement with various organizations. One of his early concerns related to claims made by advertisers which led to his investigations of the Lever Brothers Company and the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. His findings regarding cigarettes and tobacco smoking prompted Riis to publish *The Truth About Smoking* in 1951 and related articles found in the [Writings File](#). The American Civil Liberties Union file concerns the union's defense of communists, its involvement with the National Labor Relations Board regarding the Ford Motor Company, the report of the Dies Committee, and the ouster of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn as a board member. Because Riis was the roving editor for the *Reader's Digest*, a file related to his work includes reports and correspondence with various editors about his articles.

[Scrapbooks](#), dated from 1920 to 1952, document Riis's participation on a federal grand jury in the winter of 1941-1942 investigating possible violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act, his service in the United States Navy during World War I, a collection of clippings on various topics, and family photographs.

Correspondents include Roger Nash Baldwin, William Benton, Robert Donner, Morris Leopold Ernst, Carlton Fredericks, Arthur Garfield Hayes, John Haynes Holmes, James Rorty, George Seldes, and DeWitt Wallace.

## Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in four series:

- [Personal File, 1903-1990](#)

- Writings File, 1916-1953
- Subject File, 1912-1953
- Scrapbooks, 1920-1952

## Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-3	<p><b><u>Personal File, 1903-1990</u></b></p> <p>Correspondence, diaries, a journal of articles, photographs, and items relating to a trip to Denmark.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by type of material and therein chronologically.</p>
BOX 3-8	<p><b><u>Writings File, 1916-1953</u></b></p> <p>Articles, a book, fillers for magazines, pamphlets and booklets, poetry, and speeches.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX 8-13	<p><b><u>Subject File, 1912-1953</u></b></p> <p>Correspondence, clippings, and printed matter.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by topic or name of person or organization, and therein chronologically.</p>
BOX 13-14	<p><b><u>Scrapbooks, 1920-1952</u></b></p> <p>Scrapbooks containing clippings, writings, and correspondence.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by subject.</p>

# Container List

<b>Container</b>	<b>Contents</b>
<b>BOX 1-3</b>	<b>Personal File, 1903-1990</b> Correspondence, diaries, a journal of articles, photographs, and items relating to a trip to Denmark. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and therein chronologically.
<b>BOX 1</b>	Correspondence
<b>BOX 1</b>	General, 1903-1904, 1914, 1925-1989, undated (8 folders)
<b>BOX 2</b>	Letters from servicemen, 1942-1944, undated
<b>BOX 2</b>	Letters of condolence, 1953 (5 folders)
<b>BOX 3</b>	Diaries, 1914-1915
<b>BOX 3</b>	Journal of articles, 1936-1952
<b>BOX 3</b>	Miscellany, 1918-1923, 1937-1946, 1953, 1967, 1990, undated
<b>BOX 3</b>	Photographs, 1905, 1928, 1948, 1990, undated
<b>BOX 3</b>	Trip to Denmark, 1948
<b>BOX 3-8</b>	<b>Writings File, 1916-1953</b> Articles, a book, fillers for magazines, pamphlets and booklets, poetry, and speeches. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
<b>BOX 3</b>	Articles
<b>BOX 3</b>	"4th of July in Denmark," 1948
<b>BOX 3</b>	"88th Acre," 1945
<b>BOX 3</b>	"4000 Years of Failure of OPA," 1946
<b>BOX 3</b>	"16,000,000 Kisses," 1952
<b>BOX 3</b>	"America First," 1941
<b>BOX 3</b>	"--And Like Him," 1952
<b>BOX 3</b>	"The Anti-Trust Division's Record of Failure," 1944
<b>BOX 3</b>	"Anybody Fly This Plane?" 1950
<b>BOX 3</b>	"Are You a Bigot?" 1946
<b>BOX 3</b>	"Astrology," 1945
<b>BOX 3</b>	"Aunt Martha and the Whiskey Cake," 1946
<b>BOX 4</b>	"The Battle with the Slum, 1900-1950," 1950
<b>BOX 4</b>	"Big Stuff in Small Towns," 1945
<b>BOX 4</b>	"The Billboards Must Go--II," 1938
<b>BOX 4</b>	"A Bitter Outcry," undated
<b>BOX 4</b>	"Boimondau," 1948
<b>BOX 4</b>	"Book of the Month Club," undated
<b>BOX 4</b>	"But What Can I Do About It?" 1950
<b>BOX 4</b>	"Can You Stop Smoking for Two Weeks?" 1953
<b>BOX 4</b>	"Cancer," 1949

## Writings File, 1916-1953

### Container

### Contents

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BOX 4	"Chiropractors," 1946
BOX 4	"Christmas Seals," 1948-1949
BOX 4	"Civic Progress--Toledo Style," 1938
BOX 4	"A Critic Looks at Advertising," 1949
BOX 4	"Cruising Down the Styx," 1944
BOX 4	"The District Attorney Isn't Always Right," 1946
BOX 4	"Don't Be an Ass about Aspirin," 1947
BOX 4	"Every Man Has His Own Weather Bureau," 1949
BOX 4	"Every Middlesex Village and Farm," undated
BOX 4	"Fortunate City," 1945
BOX 4	"Freedom and Food," 1942
BOX 4	"Gary Urban League," 1947
BOX 4	"A German Silhouette," 1921
BOX 4	"Give Me a Seaplane," undated
BOX 4	"Give the Unions a Church," 1945
BOX 4	"The Golden Rule Is Good Business," 1947
BOX 4	"Grass Roots, or Brass Hats?" 1945
BOX 4	"The Great Maple Syrup War," undated
BOX 4	"Grown-Up Industrial Relations," 1945
BOX 4	"Hearing Aids Win New Popularity," 1947
BOX 4	"Here's a Banker with Imagination," 1945
BOX 4	"Home, Dangerous Home," 1952
BOX 4	"Honorable Mention," 1944
BOX 4	"How Harmful Are Cigarettes?" 1950
BOX 4	"How Not to Fill a Prescription," 1947
BOX 4	"How Uncle Sam Plays Shylock," 1922
BOX 4	"How's Your Aura? or Yogi, Biophysics, and Halos," 1949
BOX 4	"Human Nature <i>Has</i> Changed," 1941
BOX 4	"I Admire the Human Race," 1951
BOX 4	"I Have 130,000,000 Friends," undated
BOX 4	"In Our Hands," 1952
BOX 4	"Incident in the Day of a Machinist," undated
BOX 4	"Industry's Plan for Postwar Prosperity," 1943
BOX 4	"Ingenuity," n.d
BOX 4	"It's Backward We Are Going," 1951
BOX 4	"It's Wrong, What They Say Against Laundries," 1948
BOX 4	"The Jackpot That Doesn't Cost a Nickel," 1952
BOX 4	"Jail-Collecting," undated
BOX 4	"Jimmy," 1947
BOX 4	"John Doe Versus Caesar," 1946
BOX 4	"John Doe Versus Caesar," 1949
BOX 4	"Junior Councillors," 1946
BOX 4	"The Jury Nuisance," 1938
BOX 5	"The King Is Sick," 1920
BOX 5	"Learning the Habits of Free Men," 1945
BOX 5	"Let's Refurbish Our Jury System," 1950



## Writings File, 1916-1953

### Container

### Contents

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BOX 5 "Live in the Country--and Live!" 1948  
BOX 5 "Many a Germ 'Twixt Cup and Lip," 1937  
BOX 5 "Meier & Frank, Portland, Ore.," 1945  
BOX 5 "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met," 1942  
BOX 5 "Mothers-in-Law," 1952  
BOX 5 "The Murderous Blind Men," undated  
BOX 5 "Neighborliness at the UN," 1949  
BOX 5 "A New Year's Resolution for Every American," 1950  
BOX 5 "New Yellow Dust in Placerville," 1951  
BOX 5 "Nothing Rotten in Denmark," 1943  
BOX 5 "Now I Am For the Churches," 1941  
BOX 5 "The Nutrition Foundation," 1952  
BOX 5 "The Official O.K.," undated  
BOX 5 "Ohio's Co-Op Giant," 1944  
BOX 5 "A One-Year Old Inquires," undated  
BOX 5 "Optometry on Trial," 1937  
BOX 5 "Our Biggest War Prize," circa 1942  
BOX 5 "Our Case of Atomic Nerves," 1947  
BOX 5 "Paint Up, Folks!" 1948  
BOX 5 "Pay By the Year Is Labor's Goal," 1944  
BOX 5 "People Like to Do Business with Friends," 1947  
BOX 5 "Phantom Inventions," 1950  
BOX 5 "Plant America," 1952  
BOX 5 "Playground in the Sky," undated  
BOX 5 "President Cleveland's Action in the Chicago Strike, 1894," undated  
BOX 5 "Private Charity," 1944  
BOX 5 "Profit-Sharing or Profit-Fighting?" 1946  
BOX 5 "Progress by Protest or Historical Hysterias," 1945  
BOX 5 "Public Relations Needs Public Relations," 1947  
BOX 5 "Punish the Sucker, Too," 1947  
BOX 5 "Quiet, Please," 1936  
BOX 5 "Quincy Goes to Church," 1941  
BOX 5 "Quinine and Public Policy," 1942  
BOX 5 "Radiophone," undated  
BOX 5 "Radio's Plug-Uglies," 1942  
BOX 5 "Repairman" series, 1941  
BOX 5 "Research Board for National Security," 1945  
BOX 5 "Restaurant," undated  
BOX 5 "Rubber--It's Coming at Last!" 1943  
BOX 5 "Saint Timothy," 1944  
BOX 5 "Slyly the Veterans Grab for Five Billions More," 1941  
BOX 5 "Smoothing the Road to Europe," undated  
BOX 5 "The Soil and the Soul of America," 1941  
BOX 5 "The Song of the Cow-Bell," undated  
BOX 5 "Sounding Boards," undated  
BOX 5 "A Spectre and a Talisman," 1921

## Writings File, 1916-1953

### Container

### Contents

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BOX 5	"The Stamford General Strike," 1946
BOX 5	"Steve," circa 1943
BOX 5	"Summertime on the South Shore with a Seaplane," undated
BOX 5	"Swindling the Vets," 1945
BOX 6	"Take It or Leave It," 1922
BOX 6	"Teargas, Pickhandles or ...?" 1945
BOX 6	"Thank God for Congress," 1944
BOX 6	"That Poor Man from Cook's," 1949
BOX 6	"These Roosevelts," circa 1936
BOX 6	"These, the Seekers," undated
BOX 6	"They Do It Differently," 1949
BOX 6	"Thirty-Six Churches in One," 1940
BOX 6	"Those ECA Productivity Teams Are Paying Off," 1950
BOX 6	"Thurman Arnold," 1943
BOX 6	Untitled, 1921-1927, 1937-1952, undated (3 folders)
BOX 6	"Up to Our Ears in Suds," 1949
BOX 6	"Watch-Dog of Liberty," 1938
BOX 6	"Weighed--and Found Wanting," 1938
BOX 6	"Welcome to Denmark," 1948
BOX 6	"Welfare State," 1949, undated
BOX 6	"What About Cartels?" 1945
BOX 6	"What Church Do You Belong To?" undated
BOX 6	"What Does Coffee Do to You?" 1950
BOX 6	"What Makes This Church Successful?" undated
BOX 6	What's That Thing on Your Dollar Bill?" undated
BOX 6	"What's Wrong with Management?" 1943
BOX 6	"What's Wrong with the American Flag?" 1951
BOX 6	"When Black and White Work Together," 1945
BOX 6	"When They Laugh," undated
BOX 6	"Which Helping Hand?" undated
BOX 6	"Who Said Civilized?" undated
BOX 6	"Who Was John Miller?" undated
BOX 6	"Why I Came to America," 1940
BOX 6	"Why I Go to Church," 1941
BOX 7	"Will Oil Run Out?" 1943
BOX 7	"Working Conditions in Heaven," 1947
BOX 7	"The World's Costliest Waste Basket," 1949
BOX 7	"Yoga and Science," 1947
BOX 7	"You Can't Pay Workers That Much," 1944
BOX 7	"You Can't Sell That!" 1947
BOX 7	"You Motorists Will Gyp Us If We Don't Watch Out," undated
BOX 7	"Your Airplane Is Waiting," 1935
BOX 7	Book, <i>The Truth About Smoking</i> , 1951
BOX 7	Fillers for magazines, 1920-1922, 1945, undated (2 folders)

## Writings File, 1916-1953

Container	Contents
BOX 7	Miscellany, 1933-1934, 1943-1945, undated (2 folders)
BOX 7	Pamphlets and booklets, 1923, 1942-1948, undated
BOX 8	Poetry, 1916-1952, undated (3 folders)
BOX 8	Speeches, 1941-1949
BOX 8-13	<b>Subject File, 1912-1953</b> Correspondence, clippings, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by topic or name of person or organization, and therein chronologically.
BOX 8	Advertising investigations
BOX 8	Lever Brothers Co., 1947-1952
BOX 8	Miscellany, 1931, 1947-1951, undated
BOX 8	R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., 1947-1951
BOX 8	American Civil Liberties Union
BOX 8	1938-1940 (2 folders)
BOX 9	1941-1952, undated
BOX 9	Anti-Trust Division, United States Department of Justice, 1941-1952, undated (3 folders)
BOX 9	Benton, William, 1950-1952
BOX 9	Bread
BOX 9	Fredericks, Carlton, 1950-1952, undated
BOX 9	Rorty, James, 1947-1951
BOX 10	Clippings and notes, 1944-1953, undated
BOX 10	Continental Committee on Technocracy, 1932-1933, undated
BOX 10	Donner, Robert, 1937-1947, undated (3 folders)
BOX 10	Ernst, Morris Leopold, 1944-1946
BOX 10	Merck & Co., report on public relations, 1942
BOX 10	Morgan, John Pierpont, 1933
BOX 10	"Negroes," 1951-1952
BOX 10	Politics, 1920-1950, undated
BOX 11	Presidential campaigns, 1944-1952 (4 folders)
BOX 11	<i>Reader's Digest</i>
BOX 11	Correspondence, 1937-1952, undated (3 folders)
BOX 11	Miscellany, 1944-1947, undated
BOX 12	Reports, 1943-1952, undated (2 folders)
BOX 12	Seldes, George, 1941-1947, undated (2 folders)
BOX 12	Smoking of tobacco, 1949-1952, undated
BOX 12	United States Navy, recruitment, 1940-1943, undated
BOX 12	United States of America, 1917-1921, undated

## Subject File, 1912-1953

Container	Contents
BOX 12	Williams College, Williamstown, Mass.
BOX 12	1912-1922, 1934, 1941-1948 (2 folders)
BOX 13	1949-1953, undated
BOX 13-14	<b>Scrapbooks, 1920-1952</b> Scrapbooks containing clippings, writings, and correspondence. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 13	Articles by Riis, 1937-1952
BOX 13	Federal grand jury, 1939-1942, undated
BOX 13	Fillers for magazines, 1920-1923
BOX 13	Reactions to "Repairman" series, 1941-1942 (2 folders)
BOX 13	Various topics
BOX 13	1937-1944
BOX 14	circa 1938-1952
BOX 14	World War I, writings, and photographs, 1910-1927 (4 folders)