

Collection #
SC 0493

**EUGENE V. DEBS
PAPERS, 1881–1940**

[Collection Information](#)

[Biographical Sketch](#)

[Scope and Content Note](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Cataloging Information](#)

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 4 Folders

COLLECTION DATES: 1881-1940

PROVENANCE: Purchased from several sources, 1941-2013 (see Calendar)

RESTRICTIONS: None

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the Indiana Historical Society

ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

OTHER FINDING AIDS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: M 235 Stephen Marion Reynolds

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 41.0403, 58.1001, 69.1010, 70.0303, 70.0406, 72.0403, 73.0007, 73.0008, 74.1105, 74.1106, 75.1007, 77.1004, 94.0624, 94.0625, 94.0626, 94.0627, 94.0628, 94.0629, 94.0630, 94.0631; 2013.0052

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eugene Victor Debs (1855-1926) was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, of parents who had immigrated from Germany in 1849. He attended school until he was fifteen, then worked in the shops of the Terre Haute and Indianapolis Railroad, eventually becoming a locomotive fireman.

In 1875 Debs helped found a local chapter of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and three years later was made editor of their magazine. Two years after that (1880) he was made secretary and treasurer of the national Brotherhood and editor of their magazine. For a period in the early 1880s he was holding all these union jobs and at the same time functioning as city clerk of Terre Haute. After 1883 he concentrated on his union duties, but found time to serve one term (1885) in the lower house of the Indiana legislature.

This was the period when labor was being shaped by Samuel Gompers into a federation of workers organized by individual crafts, the American Federation of Labor. Debs opposed this method of organization, preferring to organize a whole industry, and in the ensuing decades he operated in opposition to Gompers. In 1893 Debs helped to form the American Railway Union, encompassing all workers in the railway industry, and was elected its president.

This industrial union came into being just in time to participate in the Pullman strike of 1894. Debs originally opposed participation, but once the decision was made he organized a boycott which led to his citation for contempt of court (for violating an injunction) and imprisonment for six months.

Debs now turned his attention to national politics. He campaigned for Bryan in 1896, but the next year he transformed what was left of his union into a Social Democratic (Socialist) Party of America. He was this party's candidate for President in the next four elections, polling 96,000 votes in 1900, 402,000 in 1904, 420,000 in 1908, and 901,000 in the Bull Moose election of 1912 (the highest the party was ever to achieve). Meanwhile, in 1907, he helped found another non-craft labor organization, the Industrial Workers of the World.

Debs refused to run in the 1916 election. World War I brought new issues to be faced by the Socialist party, which opposed participation because it saw war as a form of capitalist oppression. When the United States joined the conflict, Debs was vocal in decrying prosecutions under the Smith Espionage Act, and in September 1918 he was sentenced to ten years imprisonment. He was released by President Harding in 1921. While in prison he again ran for President, polling 919,000 votes.

Though Debs remained active, his health, never strong, was broken, and he spent lengthy periods of his remaining years in the Lindlahr sanatorium in Evanston, Illinois.

Debs was an eloquent speaker, attracting large crowds of listeners but many fewer votes. His personal character was blameless, and his personal relations, except with labor leaders, almost saintly.

Sources: Materials in collection

Article on Debs in *Dictionary of American Biography*

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection, filling four folders, consists of correspondence. It was purchased from several different sources, which are listed at the beginning of the Calendar, in which the source of each letter is indicated, when known.

Folder 1 contains letters of Eugene Debs from 1881 to 1925. These include one of 1885 as an official of the firemen's Brotherhood; two Socialist aphorisms apparently written as autographs in 1904 and 1905; some routine acknowledgements; and two letters to Jack Carney, editor of *Truth* (that of 11-18-1918 is interesting as showing his attitude toward Samuel Gompers).

Folder 2 contains seven letters of Theodore Debs between 1919 and 1940 on his brother's behalf. One to Jack Carney in 1919 mentions Debs's objection to the deportation of radicals during the Big Red Scare. Three others are to George Sylvester Viereck, editor of *The American Monthly*.

Folder 3 contains letters from Eugene Debs, then living in Girard, Kansas, and working on the magazine *Appeal to Reason*, to Stephen Marion Reynolds, a friend in Terre Haute whom Debs knew after 1900 and who took an active part in the Presidential campaign of 1908. These letters should be looked at in conjunction with the Debs-Reynolds correspondence in the Reynolds collection, M 235.

Folder 4 contains Xerox copies of correspondence with Helen Keller, in terms of mutual admiration.

CALENDAR

The various dealers from whom this material was obtained are listed below, each being given a capital letter. In the calendar this source, when known, is indicated by a letter at the end of the citation, e.g. TLS 2p A.

A. American Foundation for the Blind 1972 Accession #72.0403

B. Walter R. Benjamin 1969-1970 Accession #s 69.1010, 70.0303, 70.0406

C. Walter R. Benjamin 1973 Accession #s 73.0007, 73.0008

D. Walter R. Benjamin 1977 Accession # 77.1004

E. Hamill and Barker 1990 Accession # 90.0155

F. Doris Harris 1974 Accession #s 74.1105, 74.1106

G. Paul C. Richards 1970 Accession # 70.0406

H. Leon Kramer 1941 Accession # 41.0403

I. Charles Hamilton 1958 Accession # 58.1001

J. Swann Galleries 1994 Accession #s 94.0624-94.0630

History in Ink Historical Autograph, 2013 Accession # 2013.0052

Folder 1 Correspondence of Eugene V. Debs 1881 - 1924

7-24-1881 EVD, Terre Haute, to Bro. Stephens. Thanks for your boldness and frankness and your noble endeavors for the brotherhood. Here is a list of your indebtednesses to the Grand Lodge. ALS 2p J

8-14-1885 F. W. Arnold, Grand Master, and Eugene V. Debs, Grand Secretary, Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, to John Newell, Cleveland, Ohio. Please honor the credentials of our Delegates for transportation over your railroad. TLS 1p F

10-15-1892 EVD, Locomotive Fireman's Magazine, Terre Haute, to Lloyd Bryce, New York City. My article will appear in the November issue of our magazine. Sorry that timing prevented its use in your Notes and Comments. TLS 1p H

1-14-1895 EVD note penned from jail in Woodstock, Illinois. "The foundations of our Republic rest in the intelligence of our people and the virtues that cluster about the fireside. ANS ½ p.

2-2-1904 EVD, Appeal to Reason, Girard, Kansas, to Nora White Simpson, San Diego, Calif. My tribute to Anna Ferry Smith has been lost. Comrade Elliott has written one which will be ready for the next issue. TLS 1p J

8-18-1904 EVD, Terre Haute. The abolition of the wage system will be followed by the full-orbed day of Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood. ALS 1p B

4-11-1905 EVD, Terre Haute. The triumph of the working class means the end of class rule and the freedom of all mankind. ALS 1p I

1-26-1907 EVD, Terre Haute (Theodore Debs's stationery) to J. E. Remsburg, Oak Mills, Kansas. Thanks for copy of your "Six Historic Americans." I met your son at Leavenworth. I admire your fight against ignorance and superstition. TLS 1p H

1-20-1913 EVD, Terre Haute, to Mrs. Thomas J. Ryan. Condolences on the death of your brother Tom. A noble, manly, man, he was generous to a fault. TLS 1p J

3-15-1913 EVD, Terre Haute, to Mary Grant Ryan. Condolences on the deaths of your brother Tom and of your son. TLS 1p J

(with clippings about Thomas J. Grant, typographer of Muscatine, Iowa) 2-1-1915 EVD en route to Los Angeles. Greetings. ALS 1p H

5-15-1915 EVD, Terre Haute (Theodore Debs's stationery) to Mr. Schwarzschild. Defines aim of the Socialist Party. TLS 1p H

11-18-1918 EVD, Terre Haute (Theodore's stationery) to Jack [Carney] Please give space to the enclosed. The Socialists saved the lives of Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone while Gompers and his crowd were indifferent and hostile. Moyer has forgotten this, and fawns at the feet of the labor misleaders. Please send 25 copies of the article; I am going to reproduce it widely, giving credit to Truth. TLS 1p C

12-7-[1918] EVD, Akron, Ohio, to Jack [Carney]. Here it is; make any changes you wish. You'd have had a check long ago, but I'm deeply in debt myself. Hoped to raise money this trip, but the Flu has cancelled meetings, and the Secret Service are at my heels. Thanks for your generous treatment of the Moyer article. ALS 2p C

1-2-1919 EVD, Terre Haute, to Art [Young, cartoonist]. Thanks for your big, beautiful greeting, which sets the heart singing the song of the Revolution. I am keeping step with you to every drumbeat to "victory or death." TLS 1p J

8-31-1922 EVD, Lindlahr Institute, Chicago, to Frank Sheridan, New York. Thanks for your kindness to Mrs. Curry and for your efforts during my prison days. TLS 1p F

10-13-1922 EVD, Lindlahr Health Resort, Elmhurst, Ill., to Comrade [Lincoln] Phipper. I am here trying to regain my shattered health and hope to resume my activities in the movement in a few weeks. Have you a copy of the "Triology"? I remember the glowing hours in your hospitable home. ALS 2p J

9-4-1925 EVD, Terre Haute (Theodore's stationery) to Comrade Himmelreich. Thanks for your beautiful letter congratulating me on my fiftieth year in the labor movement. TLS 1p B

9-22-1925 EVD, Terre Haute (Theodore's stationery) to Dr. Perceval Gerson, Los Angeles. En route between Milwaukee and Salem, Ohio, I cannot make fitting answer to your beautiful letter of the 17th. You must be a lofty and consecrated type to have won the affection of such sweet-souled types as Ruth and Harold. TLS 1p D

n.d. Lecture flier for EVD, Theodore Debs, manager.

Folder 2 Correspondence of Theodore Debs 1919 - 1940

2-12-1919 TD, Terre Haute, to Jack [Carney]. Thanks for your lovely note to Gene. I readily understand the inspiration you get from your wife. I enclose a statement Gene has just wired to the New York *Call* about the deportations. TLS 1p C

7-5-1923 TD, Terre Haute, to George S. Viereck, New York, N.Y. On my brother's behalf, thanks for the copy of your magazine, *The American Monthly*. TLS 1p D

11-13-1923 TD, Terre Haute, to George S. Viereck, New York. Thanks for your of the 14th. My brother returned from the East indisposed from overwork, and has had to cancel all his speaking engagements indefinitely. TLS 1p D

12-29-1923 TD, Terre Haute, to Art Young. Thanks for your New Years greeting. Gene is ill. Your unpretentious little document does more than a thousand pages to expose this odious and contemptible fraud and swindle. ALS 4p J

3-21-1924 Photograph of EVD, inscribed to Viereck, "poet, idealist, humanitarian."

4-5-1924 TD, Terre Haute, to George S. Viereck, New York. Thanks for your kind notes of the 27th and 29th, and for the splendid April issue of your *American Monthly*, filled with vital and bristling matter. My brother and I are glad to know the picture will fare so flatteringly at your hands. TLS 1p D

10-15-1924 TD, Terre Haute, to Isadore Fischer, Alfred, N. Y. My brother, just out of a sanatorium, will read your letter on criminology but will not be able to reply. He is

treating the subject in a book. He firmly believes that criminals are created by vicious economic conditions and that they can be reclaimed. TLS 1p J

12-28-1940 TD, Terre Haute, to Comrade Warford. Gene's ashes are at Highland Lawn Cemetery. In my life, the shadows grow longer. I wish you success in your debating experience. TLS 1p J

Folder 3 Letters from Eugene V. Debs to Stephen Marion Reynolds

1904 - 1910

6-1-1904 EVD, Gladstone, Michigan, to Reynolds. Vignerney[?] will have proofsheets of my pamphlet, "Unionism and Socialism"; please criticize freely and hand to Theodore. You should get acquainted with Comrade Tuttle of Milwaukee and his son, who are painting the Opera House. They belong to the world's true nobility, the same spirit which inspired Whitman's "Salut au Monde." Secret meeting here of railway workers. ALS 2p E

12-19-1905 EVD, Terre Haute, to Reynolds. Encloses letter. Article will get enormous circulation in Success. Hope to see you at barbecue next week. TLS 1p E

5-18-1907 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Reynolds. Have just located the manuscript of "Barney Nolan." Article was not printed for lack of space, along with lots of others. Please send another copy of "Life"-- I want Warren [managing editor of Appeal to Reason] to read it. Will file the two papers for future use. TLS 1p E

10-12-1907 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Reynolds, Terre Haute. I have your circular letter to the Socialists and your personal note. Sorry not to see you before I left-- I left word for you with Tom Harper. Hope the convention will be well attended and produce best possible results. Will soon have a little contribution for your campaign fund. TLS 1p E

2-13-1908 EVD, Terre Haute, to Stephen [Reynolds]. I have been East. Agree with your letter about organizing; have an article about that in a recent Appeal. We have to do more than **talk** Socialism-- must get our machine in shape for political action. Will get a list of Indiana workers for you from Comrade Wayland. Will try to carry out your suggestion that Appeal discuss organization weekly. Being in West Virginia reminded me of John Brown. You are doing an immortal service which Old Walt [Whitman] would applaud. TLS 2p E

3-3-1908 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Stephen [Reynolds]. Sorry to miss you. Saw your wife at Comrade Hollingsworth's speech, but have been sick. I agree with your letter about organization. TLS 1p E

3-19-1908 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Stevie [Reynolds], Terre Haute. Glad to get your card about the convention. It must have been glorious. You deserve great credit. Glad to see Indiana waking up. Glad you are going out to work with the comrades elsewhere. Your

message conquers, and for good. Tom Harper has died; Old Walt will welcome him. TLS 1p E

3-26-1908 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Stephen [Reynolds], Terre Haute. Referring to yours of 1-23, the list of Indiana workers is being made up and will be sent to you. Good reports from you and your lieutenants. Glad to see obstacles overcome in Indiana. You seem to keep drinking from Old Walt's fountain. TLS 1p E

4-30-1908 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Stephen [Reynolds], Terre Haute. Thanks for yours of 2-28 and for my nomination as delegate to the convention. I may not be able to attend; Comrade Warren's trial begins Monday and I must be with him. Indiana is responding to your speaking and organizing. TLS 1p E

5-7-1908 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Reynolds. Bruce Rogers will have a message from me if I miss the convention. He is one of the finest and you must get to know him; you will gain strength from each other. I look for big things before the snow flies. TLS 1p E

5-19-1908 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Reynolds. Please drop a line and a copy of your "Life" to Mrs. Mae Lawson of Horton, Kansas, who has just issued a pamphlet. She wants to serve our movement, but doesn't quite know what Socialism is. TLS 1p E

5-25-1908 EVD to Stephen [Retnolds]. Thanks for your beautiful letter and for your sweet influence during the convention, which was grand and epoch-making. I am leaving for Chicago and probably New York. TLS 1p E

7-3-1908 EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Stephen [Reynolds], Terre Haute. Bruce [Rogers] will take care of the letter from Winston Book House. Thanks for the sweet message from Traubel et al. Hope you did not miss Cornwall. Am leaving today for about two weeks to fulfill engagements made for me by the national committee. Shall see you afterward. TLS 1p E

6-23-1908 EVD, Terre Haute, to Stevie [Reynolds], Terre Haute. Have just read the account of your successful series of lectures at Dixon, which will have enduring results. Exchange of greeting. TLS 1p E

10-12-1910 EVD, Minot, South Dakota, to Stevie [Reynolds]. Your trip here was a great success. They love you here. Our meetings are packed and overflowing, especially at Devil's Lake. Yesterday here was like a circus day. Best to George Bicknell and Miss Shaw. ALS 3p E

10-29-1910 EVD, Bellingham, Washington, to Stevie [Reynolds]. Your beautiful letter makes me fitter for the fight, and I rejoice in your splendid work. ALS 1p E

11-30- EVD, Girard, Kansas, to Reynolds, Terre Haute. Here are some documents to put in the archives. Traubel has no time to write an article for our Jail edition, but his letter is

far better than most articles. Hope the local and state organizations are doing well. TLS
1p E

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, SC 0493).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.