
Western Theological Seminary
Papers, 1923-1994.  2.00 linear ft.

Two business days required for collection retrieval – please contact archivist.

Abstract

Paul Wilberforce Harrison was born in Scribner, Nebraska, and attended grammar school there until eleventh grade. He attended Franklin Academy for one year and graduated. He attended Doane College in Crete, Nebraska, for two years before transferring to the University of Nebraska for medical training. Further medical training took him to Johns Hopkins located in Baltimore, Maryland. Harrison served as a medical missionary to Arabia for Trinity Reformed Church of Plainfield, New Jersey, starting in 1909 and lasting until 1954. He married Anna Bilkert after the death of his own wife and of Henry Bilkert in 1929. They returned to Arabia and retired in 1954. The collection contains an Arab Bedouin outfit owned by Paul Harrison, which includes an inner and outer garment, keffiyeh, two types of agal rope, and shoes; biographical material; books, including The Arab at Home, published in 1924; and three photographs of Harrison taken by William Vande Water in Holland, Michigan. The Bedouin outfit is stored in Archives 2.

Accession No: W89-1000  
Provenance: Paul W. Harrison  
Donor: Elton Bruins  
Photographs: 3 images  
Processed by: Geoffrey Reynolds, June 2005

Biography

Paul Wilberforce Harrison was born in Scribner, Nebraska, and attended grammar school there until eleventh grade. He attended Franklin Academy for one year and graduated. He attended Doane College in Crete, Nebraska, for two years before transferring to the University of Nebraska for medical training. Further medical training took him to Johns Hopkins located in Baltimore, Maryland.

Harrison served as a medical missionary from Trinity Reformed Church of Plainfield, New Jersey. His first book, The Arab at Home, was published in 1924. After the murder of Henry Bilkert at the hands of a Bedouin bandit on January 21, 1929, near Basrah, Mesopotamia, and the death of his first wife, he married Anna Monteith Bilkert in the offices of the Mission Board Rooms in New York City, New York, on September 21, 1931.

Once the marriage had taken place, the couple returned to Arabia with the four youngest children of the new family (Tim and Dorothy Harrison and Barbara and Virginia Bilkert). The four oldest (Paul and Clinton Harrison and Margaret and Monteith Bilkert) remained in the United States with relatives. Paul and Anna returned with their four youngest children in 1939 and began a life of traveling around the United States to speaking engagements. Paul Harrison finished and published his second book, Doctor in Arabia, in 1940. In March 1941, they returned, this time without any children, to Bahrain, a small island in the Persian Gulf. They
returned in 1949 and after a short spell on the campus of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, they settled down in Berea, Kentucky, to work at the small hospital there. They stayed there until 1952, when they returned to Bahrain for a two-year stint to replace Jerry and Rose Nykerk who had returned to the United States while they recovered from tuberculosis.

In 1954, Paul and Anna Harrison settled at Penney Farms in Florida to head up the staff of medical personnel at the clinic there that cared for the retirement home occupants. At Penney Farms, Anna Harrison wrote a book about Dr. Paul Harrison’s life in the Arabian Mission called A Tool in His Hand. This book was published in 1958, as well as another of his books, The Light that Lighteth Every Man. She went on to write Pearls Are Made for use in Reformed Church education and Sunday school classes.

In the fall of 1962, Paul Harrison passed away after a brief illness and Anna stayed on at Penney Farms. On December 25, 1963, she remarried Paul Johnson, a close friend of Paul Harrison. They remained at Penney Farms during the winter months and summered in Bay View, Michigan, until Paul’s death in November 1975 from cancer. Anna passed away naturally on March 31, 1987, also at Penney Farms. She is buried between Paul Harrison and Paul Johnson at Penney Farms.

Scope and Content

The collection contains an Arab Bedouin outfit owned by Paul Harrison, which includes an inner and outer garment, keffiyeh, two types of agal rope, and shoes; biographical material; books, including The Arab at Home, published in 1924; and three photographs of Harrison taken by William Vande Water in Holland, Michigan. The Bedouin outfit is stored in Archives 2.

Container List

Box 1

Biographical, 1923-2008
Photographs of Paul Harrison, ca. 1940 (3 images)
Publications
Booklet, The Arabian Nights and Days of Dr. and Mrs. Paul W. Harrison, Medical Missionaries of the Reformed Church in America, ca. 1938
Books
A Spiritual Legacy: Commentaries on John, Romans, Hebrews, 1994
The Arab at Home, 1924
The Desert Doctor: Paul Harrison of Arabia, 1950
Periodicals, n.d., 1926-1963

Box 2

Arab Bedouin outfit owned by Paul Harrison, which includes an inner and outer garment, keffiyeh, two types of agal rope, and shoes