Summary

Creator: New York Times Company


Size: 10.08 linear feet (24 boxes)


Abstract: This collection documents the tenure of Lester Markel (1894-1977), longtime Sunday editor at The New York Times, whose career there spanned 1929 to 1973. Files contain letters, memoranda, speeches, photographs, typescripts, and clippings related to Markel's involvement with the paper, primarily the Sunday Division, along with a small amount of personal correspondence and documents.

Access: Apply to Manuscripts and Archives Division for access at http://www.nypl.org/mssref.

Copyright information: Copyright for documents created by New York Times Company principals and staff has been transferred to The New York Public Library.


Custodial history: This collection was originally appraised, re-housed, and organized in 1988 by The Times archives staff. Initially, the collection consisted of 36 boxes (11 cubic feet).

Processing note: The order and folder titles, which The Times archives staff imposed on the collection, have been maintained.

Related collections

Creator history
Influential journalist and editor Lester Markel (1894-1977) was the Sunday editor of The New York Times from 1923 to 1964. Between 1964 and 1973, Markel held the titles associate editor and consultant.
Markel was born in New York City and graduated from the City College of New York and Columbia University's School of Journalism. After working for several years as a reporter and editor at the *New York Tribune*, Markel succeeded Ralph H. Graves as *The Times* Sunday editor in 1923. As Sunday editor, Markel ran a largely independent staff of contributors (including correspondents in London, Paris, and Washington), editors, and designers that produced the Sunday edition of *The Times*. He assigned stories, wrote headlines, approved layouts for photographs and images, and was the final editor for every story printed. Markel was an exacting editor and was territorial over his staff and their articles. During his long tenure, Markel greatly expanded the size of the Sunday Department, both in staff numbers (from five staff members in 1923 to 84 in 1951), as well as the amount of content produced and the overall stature of the Sunday paper. He grew the *The New York Times Magazine*, the Book Review, the Drama, and the Rotogravure (which merged with the Magazine in 1942) sections, and added several specialty sections including the Week in Review, Arts and Leisure, and the Travel sections, as well as pages on gardening, food, and fashion. As the scope of the Sunday edition increased, its popularity and advertising revenue grew as well.

In 1964, Markel became associate editor, a move that signaled the beginning of his retirement from the paper. In this position, he gave up his editorial duties and was asked to study and improve the International Edition and to lead the newly formed Public Affairs Department, which was concerned with assessing the ways the paper could foster a well-informed populace. In this new capacity, Markel also chaired the "Committee of the Future," which collaborated with outside researcher groups to study how technological advances would affect *The Times* and journalism in general. He officially retired as associate editor in 1969, but continued at the paper as a part-time consultant until 1973 when, at age 79, he formally left.

Markel was an active public intellectual, giving speeches around the country and writing essays and articles for various publications and journalist organizations. He helped found the International Press Institute in 1951, serving as chairman of the organizing committee, the first chairman of the executive board, chairman, and later honorary chairman. He published the book *What You Don't Know Can Hurt You* in 1972 about the role of the press in society. Markel also moderated the PBS television program *News in Perspective* throughout the 1960s.


**Scope and content note**

The Lester Markel papers contain letters, internal memoranda, reports, photographs, article drafts, and speeches that Markel created while Sunday editor and associate editor at *The New York Times*. Also present are many speeches and essays that Markel wrote in conjunction with outside journalist and research organizations, and a small amount of personal correspondence and documents.

The collection is divided into two series: I: People and II: Subjects; these series are each arranged alphabetically by folder title. The People files consist of records pertaining to individuals, while the Subjects files contain items on specific topics. Items germane to two or more people or subjects are often cross-referenced in the finding aid; documents related to specific issues are generally located in subject files rather than the people folders of those involved. *The Times* archivists imposed this arrangement on Markel's files. These papers do not make up the entirety of Markel's files; *The Times* archives staff discarded many items, and in 1977 Markel sent a collection of professional *Times*-related files to the Wisconsin Historical Society.
The bulk of the records relate to Markel's management of the Sunday Department between 1952 and 1964. Included are communications with the publishers and senior editors regarding editorial decisions, sensitive news topics, and specific Sunday edition stories; memoranda with staff reporters and freelance journalists concerning assignments and the development of stories; notes about published articles and the design of the sections; administrative memoranda concerning staffing and production schedules and costs; and notes on interviews that Markel conducted with prominent politicians. Also present are letters from many of his principal associates, notably Editor of the Review of the Week John G. Desmond and Assistant Sunday Editor Daniel Schwarz. Other contributors include Arthur Hays Sulzberger, Adolph Ochs Sulzberger, Orvil Dryfoos, and E. Clifton Daniel. The collection contains very little material from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s; items from the late 1960s and early 1970s are largely critiques of articles, sections, or general editorial decisions made by *The Times* that Markel submitted to various editors.

Another significant portion of the collection relates to Markel's activities outside of *The Times*. These include extensive files of correspondence, planning documents, and committee reports regarding his involvement with several journalist and public policy organizations, most notably the International Press Institute, American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the United Nations Public Opinion Survey. Markel was an active committee member, and served as chairman and board member for the International Press Institute. These files reveal his advisory, leadership, and agenda setting roles for these organizations and his strong opinions on the press' duties to inform and educate the public. Other outside activities represented in the collection include speeches from Markel's many public speaking engagements, and scripts and correspondence related to his television and radio appearances.

This collection contains a small amount of personal papers, including correspondence, such as invitations from friends to social events; financial records (records of car sales and car insurance); and legal documents, primarily items concerning the settlement of estates of various family members.

**Arrangement**
The New York Times Company records. Lester Markel papers are organized into the following series:

Series I: People, 1931-1973
Series II: Subjects, 1930-1997

**Key terms**

**Subjects**
American Newspapers -- New York (State) -- New York
Journalism -- United States -- 20th century
News agencies -- New York (State) -- New York
Newspaper publishing -- New York (State) -- New York -- History

**Names**
Markel, Lester, 1894-
New York Times Company

**Special formats**
Manuscripts for publication
Photographs

**Occupations**
Newspaper editors
Container list

**Series I: People, 1931-1973** *(7 boxes)*

This series is made up of files that contain items to, from, or concerning various individuals, such as *The New York Times* staff members, freelance reporters, politicians, other newsmakers, and Markel's friends and acquaintances. Files for *Times* employees typically contain discussions of specific articles or detail conflicts between departments related to editorial or staff decisions; items to or from Markel's close editorial associates, notably John G. Desmond and Daniel Schwarz, are filed throughout the collection. Records from the late 1960s and early 1970s are largely critiques of *The Times* that Markel submitted to various editors. Also present are letters from friends, many consisting of invitations to social events. Particularly sizable People files include those for Hannah Arendt, Irwin Edman, Eva Herrmann, Dr. Leo Szilard, and Barbara Ward.

Files are arranged alphabetically by name. Entries without box and folder numbers cross-reference related material in other files. These files do not necessarily collect every letter, memorandum, or document related to the individual; subject files should also be consulted.

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<td>Invitation to a Lamb Club luncheon honoring Atkinson</td>
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<td>Bennett, Isadore</td>
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Irwin Edman, a professor of philosophy at Columbia University, was Meta Markel's brother. He died in 1954; she was the executrix of his estate. These folders contain correspondence about the publication of his books and royalty arrangements, as well as some condolence letters and biographical material.

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Green, Monroe
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    Correspondence about Channel 13 television programs
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    Herbert, John R.
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Series II: Subjects, 1930-1997 (14 boxes)

This series is made up of alphabetical subject files that are organized (and titled) by topical keywords, events, geographic location, or company, organization, institution, or department. The bulk of the files consist of correspondence and memoranda between Times staff members concerning the production and improvement of the Sunday edition. This series also contains many letters and memoranda between Markel and Arthur Ochs Sulzberger concerning Sunday edition editorial and content matters. The series includes large files on advertising, articles and books by Markel, editorial and style policies, and Markel's domestic and international travel. Also notable are the files on outside organizations, such as the American Society of Newspaper Editors, International Press Institute, the United Nations Public Opinion Survey, which contain communications with officers and members concerning the mission, activities, and administration of the organizations. Many of the institutional files (universities and associations) contain invitations to Markel to give speeches, to attend luncheons, or soliciting memberships.

Files are arranged alphabetically by file title. Entries without box and folder numbers cross-reference related material in other files.

b.8 f.1-3  Advertising and Promotion, 1957-1964
Copy of Monroe Green's memorandum on cooperative advertising and the Federal Trade Commission's policy on this; memoranda about the acceptance or rejection of advertisements in the Book Review and Times Magazine; memoranda on promotion strategies. See also: Bloomingdale's; Book Review; Drama Section; Esquire (Magazine); Garden News; Home Section; Motor Boats; National Urban League; New York Times Magazine; Review of the Week

b.8 f.4  Albion College, 1963
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b.8 f.5  American Assembly, 1958
Invitation for Markel to attend sessions on the United States and Africa, declined
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b.8 f.6  American Association for Education in Journalism, 1960

b.8 f.7  American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors, 1960-1961
Correspondence about meetings and roster, the association’s acceptance of “favors” from hotels, restaurants, and others, and Markel’s resignation over this issue

b.8 f.8  American Council for Judaism, 1954

b.8 f.9  American Legion, 1951
Letters and memoranda about Irene Kuhn’s article in the American Legion Magazine and Bob Considine’s column in the *New York Journal-American* charging that the Book Review ignores anti-Communist books and favors pro-Communist writers and reviewers

b.8 f.10  American Library Association, 1952

American Museum of Natural History (See: Maps and Charts)
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b.8 f.11  American Press Institute, 1951-1963

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Memoranda, correspondence, reports, and other documents about the group’s objectives, programs, meetings, funding initiatives, and other activities. Also present are Markel’s articles for the ASNE Bulletin and speech texts. Topics discussed include the group’s relations with international journalist organizations, the difficulties of getting journalists into China and the Soviet Union, and Markel’s frustrations with the group.. Markel was an active member of ASNE and chaired its Committee on International Cooperation (Communication)

b.9 f.1-5  American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), 1953-1964

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b.10 f.3  Anniversaries, 1953-1963
Messages and articles concerning Markel’s 30th, 35th and 40th anniversaries with *The Times* and for his 39th wedding anniversary

b.10 f.4  Anniversaries: New York Times 100th, 1949-1950
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b.10 f.5  Arcade (Long Branch, New Jersey), 1961-1962

b.10 f.6  Architecture and Architects, 1960-1962 (See also: Huxtable, Ada Louise)
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b.10 f.7  Art News and Criticism, 1950-1965
Letters and memoranda concerning topics including John Canaday’s articles and the public’s response to them; a new Saturday guide to galleries and its overlap with the Sunday art page

**Articles about Markel**
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b.10 f.8  Articles about *The New York Times*, 1961, 1965
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