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Jason Rogers Papers, 1825-1971

MS# 1424

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SUMMARY INFORMATION

Creator

Jason Rogers, 1868-1932

Title and dates

Jason Rogers Papers, 1825-1971

Abstract

This collection contains records related to the career of Jason Rogers, a journalist and publicist who contributed to the field of newspaper advertising. It features correspondence between Rogers and many important figures in the industry during the early twentieth century, and will be useful for researchers interested in journalism and advertising from this period.

Size

6 linear feet (12 archival document boxes)

Call number

MS# 1424

Location

Columbia University
Butler Library, 6th Floor
Rare Book and Manuscript Library
535 West 114th Street
New York, NY 10027

Language(s) of material

English

Biographical Note

An innovative journalist from print's heyday, Jason Rogers made his greatest contributions to the field of newspaper advertising. He was best known as the publisher of the *Globe*, a minor but venerable daily in New York City. For more than a decade, starting in 1910, he made the publication a success; maintaining its "clean and purposeful" reputation, while also multiplying circulation more than tenfold. By 1923, even competitors recognized the *Globe* as "the finest afternoon paper in existence." Nevertheless, that year he could do nothing to prevent a hostile buyout by a media rival. The new owner fired the staff and discontinued the paper. Neither Rogers, nor his career, ever fully recovered from this calamity.

An advocate for probity and transparency, Rogers dedicated himself to sloughing off the advertising profession's snake-oil taint. He promised his clients "steady returns" rather than miraculous windfalls. "The day is gone by," he wrote, "when it is safe to count on a sucker being born every minute." But, it was a hustling age in newspapers, and Rogers himself never fully shed his striver's skin. He called his method "printed salesmanship," and it is difficult, at times, to differentiate his efforts from the sort of Barnum-esque stunts that he despised. From his desk at the *Globe*, Rogers inundated the industry with enthusiastic campaigns. Month on month, year on year, colleagues received his circulars, broadsides, novel ideas, stunning assertions, and confident projections. "Please Read This Carefully," a typical letter began, "I Think it Means Dollars in Your Pocket." Another offered to "Open the Door to Opportunity." A third predicted "the Biggest and Most Profitable Advertising Season on Record."

Born on August 5, 1868, in Morrisania – now part of the Bronx – Rogers had printer's ink in his veins. His grandfather, William Cauldwell, owned and edited a local weekly called the *Sunday Mercury*. He encouraged young Jason to produce his own broadsheet, and the child took to the work, setting type and cranking a printing press by hand. After that experience, Rogers recalled, "I looked forward to the day when I should be able to work on a real newspaper." He did not wait patiently, but pestered his family for the freedom to launch his career. His parents held out until he was twelve. Then, though he had not yet completed grammar school, they permitted him to take a position in his grandfather's plant, at a salary of two dollars a week.

"Once started at the newspaper office," he wrote, "during a period of fifteen years I worked in practically every department of the shop, enjoying every phase of activity, just because I was so keenly filled with a desire to master every detail and eventually rise to the top." The *Mercury* office was on Park Row in lower Manhattan. Also known as Newspaper Row, this street was the center of the publishing universe, housing such legendary enterprises as the *Times*, the *World*, and the *Tribune*. When awake, Rogers learned his business; at night he sometimes slept between stored newsprint rolls. On weekends, he returned to his parents' house in Morrisania. In 1893, his grandfather promoted him to publisher of the *Mercury*. When the paper failed two years later, Rogers circulated from the *Providence News*, to the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, the *Chicago Journal*, and then the *New York Sun*. During this apprenticeship he learned the trade from header to footer. "I had been through the business office from office boy to assistant cashier and bookkeeper," he recalled. "I had been through all the mechanical departments, had traveled over all outlying newspaper territory on circulation work, and had considerable experience in selling advertising."

In 1904, he signed on as a manager at the *Commercial Advertiser*, an irrelevant evening paper in New York. Founded by Noah Webster in 1793, it was the oldest daily in the city. By the twentieth century, the journal had little but longevity to boast of. Quaint and old-fashioned, it could not even think to compete with the mammoths of the industry. At a time when the *World* claimed a circulation of 600,000 and the *Journal* boasted an astounding 950,000, the *Commercial Advertiser's* hovered around 12,000. This changed on February 1, 1904. That morning, tens of thousands of New Yorkers received miniature globes in the mail. Rogers had transformed his old journal into the new *Globe*. He also halved the price, to one penny. The first issue sold 100,000 copies.

"My boy," a mentor once confided to Rogers, "don't let the other fellow make your newspaper. Make your own newspaper, and as long as it is marching forward don't waste any time watching what the other fellows are doing." In May 1910, Rogers was promoted to publisher, and the *Globe* became his newspaper. Finally, he had the "opportunity of trying out and applying plans and ideas picked up in thirty years' work." His position made him a public figure, and he did not hesitate to weigh-in on questions of national importance. A member of the ocean-liner set, he traveled the world, writing home on stationery from whichever grand hotel at which he happened to be staying. Yet, he never lost interest in the most picayune questions of picas and points. On the same day, he might wire the President with a foreign-policy suggestion, and also rebuke a typesetter for wasting a line of print on the back page of the night edition.

Concerning himself with every detail of the *Globe's* production, he demanded high-minded and independent reporting. "A real newspaper maker," he believed, was "a man who recognizes that in his daily task he must be both a student and a teacher." His paper ran guides to purchasing pure food, offered home study courses, and printed bedtime stories for children. Rogers was a despot when it came to typography. A sloppy header was shabby as "a soiled white tie on a man." A worn-out piece of type was "like a weather-beaten silk hat." He wanted his publication to be neither garish nor fussy, but suited both to "a Bowery bar where the pugs study the sport stuff" and "the boudoir of the refined lady interested in the musical or dramatic departments." When the printers finally applied his suggestions, he exulted: "the *Globe* is beginning to look like a real newspaper!"

Perhaps Rogers's most important contribution to professionalizing the advertising business was his drafting of the plan for the Audit Bureau of Circulations, an organization that still exists. Since the nineteenth century, newspapers had set advertising rates based on circulation figures, but had rarely kept accurate – or honest – records. The *Sun* boasted on its masthead of "over 1,000,000" a week, but did not specify if this number referred to copies printed or those that actually sold. Where the *New York Times* displays its motto, "All the News That's Fit to Print," Joseph Pulitzer's *World* promised "Books Open to All." Yet there was no standard method of accounting, and advertisers knew they were being overcharged. In Rogers's first year at the *Globe*, he kept exact records based on copies sold. Against the advice of colleagues, he published the results, and challenged competitors to do the same. In 1913, he promoted a scheme for a national organization to objectively measure newspaper circulation. Such a group would take the guesswork out of setting advertising rates. A year later, the Audit Bureau of Circulations was founded on Rogers's principles. Today, circulation auditing is a universal practice.

By 1923, the *Globe's* readership was well above 200,000 per day. The paper was renowned for its innovative features and serious reporting; it could "be counted on to take a courageous stand on all public questions." What's more, it was profitable. In May, however, news started spreading that the *Globe's* ownership wanted to sell. Several buyers showed interest. One was Frank Munsey, who owned the evening *Sun*. He wanted to buy out the *Globe* in order to eliminate a

competitor. A notorious media tycoon, Munsey's critics said he lacked "the slightest recognition that there are such things as journalistic ideals, or public service, or the nobility of a great profession;" he was a "dealer in dailies – little else and little more." In New York alone, he had already purchased the *Daily News*, the *Sun*, the *Press*, the *Herald*, the *Telegram*, and the *Daily Continent*. These, as well as many other papers and magazines, had passed through his control. Once in his grasp, a newspaper faced merger, decline, or demise. If a property disappointed him, he gave a simple order: "Kill it."

Rogers had no financial interest in his newspaper, and thus no say in its fate. "My plans are rather jumbled right now," he wrote to his son. "If anyone unsatisfactory to me buys the paper I will gracefully drop out." In late May, Munsey, the most unsatisfactory buyer possible, purchased the *Globe* for \$2.3 million. He incorporated its most popular features and franchises into the *Sun*, and dismissed almost the entire staff with two weeks' pay. On the evening of June 2, solemn workers at the doomed paper gathered in the basement of the printing plant to watch the last edition blur through the presses. Everyone signed the final copy and presented it to Rogers as a gift. The next evening, the city paused for a moment of mourning. "Today in New York a considerable number of newspaper readers find themselves without a usual companion," a sentimental writer noted. "An axe has once more been swung. Where once was a tree is now not even a stump."

The sale, Rogers later wrote, "was a tragedy to me and my co-workers." None could have suffered more than he, who had dedicated himself to the paper's improvement over the previous twenty years. Rogers worried for his staff, but tried to seem confident about his own future; "it will be a matter of weeks or months to catch hold again," he wrote his son. "I have no fears but one can never tell." Instead of taking a job at a different publication, he tried to replace what he had lost. He had launched many campaigns in his career, but now he organized his greatest yet. On the morning of June 10, 1924 – almost a year to the day after his paper's demise – Rogers placed an ad in the *New York Times*. "Do You Want a Clean and Purposeful Newspaper Like the Old *Globe*?" it asked. He was inserting the notice to ascertain "the extent of the interest in a clean and uncontrolled new evening newspaper" like the one that had been destroyed. "If *you* want such a newspaper, please write to me," Rogers concluded. As a final enticement, he offered to let the readers themselves vote on the name for the new publication.

At first, the venture looked promising. Letters and cards tided in. Rogers drafted a business plan and filed papers of incorporation. A week after his first ad, he ran a second notice, to the "several thousand" responders. "On behalf of my co-workers," he wrote, "I thank you sincerely for your interest in our effort to restore journalism to freedom from purely commercial domination." Soon after this, he announced that 12,000 people had replied to his challenge. The new paper was supposed to begin publication in the fall or winter. But eager responses apparently did not add up to interested investors. Rogers's vision of a "newspaper organized and operated by newspapermen of sound experience and unselfish purpose for the benefit of the people" was not to be.

He was 56 years old at the time of this second disappointment, and would never again hold a position commensurate with the one he had lost at the *Globe*. From 1924 to 1926, he edited and published *Advertisers' Weekly*, an industry newsletter. Then he worked as general manager of the *Kansas City Journal-Post*, leaving this job after two years. Always a prolific writer, Rogers had authored several books on newspapers and advertising. His manuals, filled with peppy exhortations, were widely used in the nation's journalism schools. In his later life, though, he found it increasingly difficult to find publishers for his work.

Rogers had married Marian Shillaber in 1894. Their son, Walter, was born during 1901 in New Rochelle, New York. As a child, Rogers had vacationed on Cape Cod. During his time at the

Globe, he had summered there with his family. In 1929, he moved to North Falmouth, Massachusetts. Even in retirement, he continued his advertising drives; perhaps his last, the New England campaign, was inspired by his new home. According to the *Falmouth Enterprise*, he was "a familiar figure on Main Street where he liked to drop in and chat with the merchants on their local problems." During his final illness, he still assembled figures and crafted plans for municipal improvements. Jason Rogers died on April 26, 1932. He was 63 years old.

Description

Jason Rogers devoted his career to promoting journalism and professionalizing newspaper advertising. This collection contains drafts and documents related specifically to his work, as well as his research on the wider industry. It includes correspondence between Rogers and scores of editors and publishers, advertisers, educators, and politicians from cities and towns around the nation. Most of these letters were generated by Rogers himself, who ceaselessly – relentlessly, his colleagues must have thought – shared his latest ideas with the rest of the profession. From Adolph Ochs at the *Times* to the business manager at the Spokane *Spokesman-Review*, no one was safe from Rogers's broadside campaigns.

The collection also features documents from 1910-1923, when Rogers was the publisher of the *Globe* in New York City. There are editions of the newspaper, internal memoranda related to his formatting suggestions, as well as clippings concerning the publication's eventual demise. Rogers launched most of his largest campaigns during these years, since it was his position at the *Globe* that gave his ideas weight.

Rogers was the author of several books on newspaper publishing. They were all focused on the same general topic – the proper way to run a profitable publication – and so it is not surprising that their titles have a certain uniformity: *Newspaper Building*, *Newspaper Making*, *Fundamentals of Newspaper Making*, *Building Newspaper Advertising*, etc. The collection includes many typescript and manuscript drafts of these, and other, works. It also features shorter advertising materials written by Rogers, and some correspondence with prospective publishers.

Rogers involved himself with many of the pressing publishing issues of his era. This collection contains materials on some of these, including newsprint pricing, newspaper associations, circulations auditing, and the Pressman's Strike of 1919. It also features some advertising materials that Rogers himself acquired, including several advertising maps from the 1920s.

There are some personal materials present, including family correspondence. Jason Rogers's son, Walter Shillaber Rogers, maintained his father's papers after his death. Several files contain records related to Walter Rogers's career as an engineer and naval officer.

A selected bibliography of Rogers's published works is attached to the container list.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in six series.

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Subseries 1: Published Writings, 1915-1920	PAGE 9
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Series I: Correspondence, 1892-1958.

Series I contains general correspondence between Jason Rogers and his enormous circle of professional colleagues. These letters from journalists, educators, advertisers, and politicians mostly relate to Rogers's various campaigns to improve standards in newspaper marketing. One folder features correspondence from Rogers's time at the Kansas City *Journal-Post*. This series also includes some family letters, mainly between Jason Rogers and his son, Walter. Most of the correspondence here was filed separately in the Rogers papers. There are many more letters filed chronologically throughout the collection in folders directly related to specific subjects. For instance, each of Rogers's advertising campaigns contains its own documents, clippings, and correspondence.

Series II: Writings, 1915-1930.

Series II features typescripts, manuscripts, and published works from Rogers's career as an advertising writer and book author. Rogers's drafts tend to be combinations of typewritten and handwritten pages, combined with note cards and clippings.

Subseries 1: Published Writings, 1915-1920. These files contain typescripts and manuscripts of Rogers's books and pamphlets that were eventually published.

Subseries 2: Unpublished Writings, 1925-1931. The manuscripts and typescripts in these folders were never published.

Subseries 3: General Writings, 1916-1930. Rogers wrote most of these short pieces as advertising copy, or as marketing materials for his various campaigns.

Series III: Advertising Campaigns, 1912-1930.

Rogers may be little known today, but his contemporaries were all-too aware of his activities. In the productive years of his career, he inundated his colleagues with one campaign after another. Most of his ideas came from practices at the *Globe*; his extensive publicizing of his own innovations no doubt added to his paper's reputation for creative marketing. He launched each of these drives with a circular letter and some advertising materials, and then reaped responses from editors around the nation. These responses were then used to generate publicity for the next campaign. Rogers's efforts ranged from supporting the League of Nations to fighting income-tax evasion.

Series IV: *The Globe*, 1910-1924.

While much of the collection features records dating from Rogers's time as publisher of the *Globe*, this series deals specifically with his activities at the paper. These files feature some business documents, and contain several issues of the publication. Several folders are dedicated to the 125th anniversary edition, which was published in 1918. The saga of the *Globe's* demise – and

Rogers's unsuccessful attempt to replace it – unfolds through clippings and correspondence in this series.

[Series V: Newspaper Business, 1874-1948.](#)

This series holds materials collected by Rogers related to the wider newspaper industry.

[Subseries 1: Newspaper Associations, 1910-1948.](#) Some of Rogers's greatest contributions came from his advocating wider cooperation between journalists. This subseries contains files related to the origins of the Audit Bureau of Circulations. It also holds records from some publishing conferences.

[Subseries 2: Newspaper Research, 1874-1932.](#) This subseries holds a small selection of historical advertisements, as well as clippings on journalism history. Subjects in these folders include Henry Ford and Victor Lawson, founder of the Chicago *Daily News*. There is some information on the Pressman's Strike of 1919, and on the larger question of the price of newsprint.

[Series VI: Personal, 1825-1971.](#)

This series holds documents related to the personal lives and business activities of Jason Rogers and his son, Walter Shillaber Rogers.

[Subseries 1: Jason Rogers, 1825-1951.](#) This subseries holds business papers and clippings related to Rogers's career. It also has some research Rogers conducted into the life of John Dillingham, a nineteenth-century resident of Cape Cod. Dillingham's will of 1825 is also here.

[Subseries 2: Walter Rogers, 1919-1971.](#) Walter Rogers was an engineer, an advertising executive, and a naval officer. This subseries contains records from his education, business life, and documents a decades-long conflict with the military over his pension.

ACCESS AND USE

Access

This collection is located off-site. You will need to request this material at least twenty-four (24) hours in advance to use the collection in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library reading room.

This collection has no restrictions.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Curator of Manuscripts, Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML). The RBML approves permission to publish that which it physically owns; the responsibility to secure copyright permission rests with the patron.

Other Finding Aids

The Kansas City Public Library holds papers related to Jason Rogers's time as business manager at the Kansas City *Journal-Post*.

ACQUISITION AND APPRAISAL

Provenance and Acquisition

This collection was purchased from Charles Apfelbaum Rare Manuscripts and Archives in 1996.

Accrual of Records

No additions are expected.

PROCESSING AND OTHER INFORMATION

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Thai Jones (GSAS 2013). Finding aid written by Thai Jones in October 2007.

Descriptive Rules Used

Finding aid adheres to that prescribed by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*

Encoding

Finding aid written in English.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Name of Collection; Box and Folder; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

Subject Headings

These papers have been indexed in the Columbia University Library online catalog using the following terms. Those seeking related materials should search under these terms.

Advertising, Newspaper
Audit Bureau of Circulations
Globe and Commercial Advertiser (New York)
Newspaper publishing--United States--History
Newspapers
Newspapers--Accounting
Newspapers--Circulation
Newsprint industry
Publishers and publishing --United States--Biography
Rogers, Jason, 1868-1932

Series I: Correspondence, 1892-1958

Box 1

- F. 1 Correspondence--Personal, 1892-1951
- F. 2 Correspondence--Incoming, 1912-1917
- F. 3 Correspondence--Incoming, 1918
- F. 4 Correspondence--Incoming, January--June, 1919
- F. 5 Correspondence--Incoming, July 1919-1928

Box 2

- F. 1 Correspondence--Outgoing, 1915-1929
- F. 2 Correspondence--Jason and Walter, 1922-1931
- F. 3 Correspondence--Kansas City Journal-Post, 1927-1928
- F. 4 Correspondence--Walter Rogers, 1915-1958

Series II: Writings, 1915-1930

Subseries II.1: Published Writings, 1915-1920

- F. 5 *Graphic Commercial Survey*, 1915-1916
- F. 6 *Newspaper Data Books*, 1916-1920

Box 3

- F. 1 *Newspaper Efficiency*, 1917
- F. 2 *Newspaper Advertising*, 1917
- F. 3 *Newspaper Making*, 1919
- F. 4 *Fundamentals of Newspaper Building*, 1919
- F. 5 *The "Little Black Book,"* 1920

Subseries II.2: Unpublished Writings, 1925-1931

- F. 6 *The Real Story of Advertising*, undated
- F. 7 Notes for *America's Outstanding Newspapers*, 1925
- F. 8 *Selling Through Newspaper Advertising*, ca. 1925

Box 4

- F. 1 *Selling through Newspaper Advertising--Notes*, ca. 1925
- F. 2 *Selling Through Newspaper Advertising--Typescript*, ca. 1925
- F. 3 *Selling Through Newspaper Advertising --Typescript*, ca. 1925
- F. 4 *Starting A Newspaper*, 1929-1930
- F. 5 *Plan For Buying Advertising*, 1930
- F. 6 *Balanced Production and Controlled Distribution*, 1930-1931

Subseries II.3: General Writings, 1916-1930

Box 5

- F. 1 "Again Cape Cod," undated
- F. 2 *Advertisers' Weekly*, ca. 1923-1927
- F. 3 Harvard Advertising Awards, 1925
- F. 4 Business Writings, 1916-1929
- F. 5 Kansas City Journal-Post Editorials, 1928
- F. 6 Advertising Writing, ca. 1930

Series III: Advertising Campaigns, 1912-1930

- F. 7 Advertising the Advertiser, 1912-1913
Advertising the Advertiser--Correspondence, 1912-1913

Box 6

- F. 1 Advertising the Advertiser--Scrapbook, 1913
F. 2 Advertising the Advertiser--Scrapbook, 1912-1913
F. 3 Advertising the Advertiser--Scrapbook, 1913
F. 4 Associated Newspapers, 1912-1913

Box 7

- Gilt Edge List, 1912-1914
F. 1 Gilt Edge List--Correspondence, July 1913
F. 2 Gilt Edge List--Correspondence, August 1913-January 1914
F. 3 Gilt Edge List--Documents, 1913
F. 4 Home Study Course Campaign, 1914
F. 5 Anti-Stephens Bill Campaign, 1914-1919
F. 6 Pure Food Directory, 1914-1916
F. 7 Bedtime Stories Club, 1915
F. 8 Evening Newspapers, 1916
F. 9 Closer Cooperation, 1918

Box 8

- F. 1 Direct Route to the Greatest Market, 1919
F. 2 League of Nations, 1919
F. 3 Newspaper Valuation, 1919-1921
F. 4 Anti-Income Tax Evasion, 1921-1922
F. 5 Pittsburgh Plate Glass and Campbell Soup Company, 1925-1930
F. 6 Regional Advertising, 1929-1930

Series IV: *The Globe*, 1910-1924

- F. 7 Business Documents, 1910-1922
F. 8 Special Advertising Edition, 1915
F. 9 Format Critique, 1916
F. 10 Individual Issues, 1917-1923

Box 9

- F. 1 *America's Oldest Daily Newspaper*, 1918
125th Anniversary Issue, 1918
F. 2 125th Anniversary Issue, 1918
F. 3 Correspondence--125th Anniversary Issue, 1918
F. 4 Last Issue, 1923
F. 5 Clippings--Death of *The Globe*, 1923
F. 6 Clippings--Frank Munsey, 1924-1926
F. 7 A Newspaper Like the Old *Globe*, 1924

Series V: Newspaper Business, 1874-1948

Subseries V.1: Newspaper Associations, 1910-1948

Box 10

- Audit Bureau of Circulations, 1911-1927
F. 1 Audit Bureau of Circulations--Correspondence, 1911-1927
F. 2 Audit Bureau of Circulations--Clippings, 1913-1931
F. 3 Audit Bureau of Circulations--Business Documents, 1910-1948

- F. 4 Audit Bureau of Circulations—Typescripts, undated
F. 5 Press Associations, 1913-1929

Subseries V.2: Newspaper Research, 1874-1932

- F. 6 Advertisements, 1874-1929
Chicago Daily News, 1888-1932
F. 7 Appraisal of *Chicago Daily News*, 1888-1932
F. 8 Clippings--Victor Lawson, 1925
F. 9 Clippings--Journalism, 1916-1930

Box 11

- F. 1 International Paper Co. vs. Jason Rogers, 1917-1918
F. 2 Print Paper Crisis, 1916-1921
F. 3 Sound Merchandising Bill, 1918-1919
F. 4 Pressman's Strike, 1919-1920
F. 5 Barbour's Reference Rate Service, 1921-1922
F. 6 Advertising Maps, 1925-1929
F. 7 Business Publications, 1928-1931
F. 8 Clippings--Henry Ford, 1927-1930

Series VI: Personal, 1825-1971

Subseries VI.1: Jason Rogers, 1825-1951

Box 12

- F. 1 Clippings--Biographical, 1894-1951
F. 2 Jason Rogers Photo, ca. 1920
F. 3 Contracts, 1917-1930
F. 4 Clippings-Reviews, 1918
John Dillingham, 1825-1929
F. 5 John Dillingham Will, 1825
F. 6 Clippings--John Dillingham, 1908-1929
F. 7 Expense Journal, 1900-1925
F. 8 Jason Rogers Inc., 1924

Subseries VI.2: Walter Rogers, 1919-1971

- F. 9 Schooling, 1919-1927
F. 10 Classical High School Yearbook, 1934
F. 11 Military Records, 1935-1971
F. 12 Engineering and Patents, 1939-1942
F. 13 Walter Rogers Photo, ca. 1945
F. 14 *Who's Who in the East*, 1952-1954
F. 15 Typescript--Captain Baker, 1971

Bibliography, 1918-1922

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