

The Burke Library Archives  
Union Theological Seminary

Finding Aid for

**John R. Gunn Papers, [1925]-1972**



Finding Aid prepared by:

Ruth Tonkiss Cameron, August 2005, revised with additions, October 2005

**Summary Information**

Creator: John R. Gunn, 1877 - 1956  
Title: John R. Gunn Papers  
Inclusive dates: [1925]-1972  
Bulk dates: [1925]-1972  
Abstract: Rev. Dr. John R. Gunn, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Wayne, 1917- 1927, and writer of the long running short sermon column in the Fort Wayne Journal- Gazette, 1925 -1956. Sermons continued to be both published and broadcast on radio for 15 years after his death; typescript short sermons, draft books and correspondence related to publication, copies of publications and biographical material.  
Size: 9 boxes, 5.5 linear feet  
Storage: Onsite storage  
Repository: The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Phone: 212-851-5612  
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## Administrative Information

Provenance: Leonard H. Gunn (son of John. R Gunn) and James R. Gunn, (grandson) donated these papers to the Burke Library Archives in 2003

Access restrictions: The collection is unrestricted.

Preferred Citation: Item/ folder title, series number, box number, folder number, John R. Gunn Papers, Burke Library Archives at Union Theological Seminary

## Biography

John R Gunn was born near the village of Camak, Georgia on August 2nd 1877 and graduated from Mercer University, Macon, Georgia in 1900. While he was an associate minister in Central Baptist Church in Atlanta he met Nellie P. Higgins and married her in that same church on June 26 1902. After attending Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, he held a sequence of pastorates in Baptist churches in Dalton, Macon, Madison and Atlanta, Georgia, at North Baptist Church on W 11<sup>th</sup> St in New York, NY, in Nashville, in Memphis, Tennessee, Fort Wayne, Indiana and Pleasant Lake, Indiana.

Morse Harrod, a physician from the First Baptist Church of Fort Wayne, heard John Gunn speaking at the American Medical Association in Nashville. Subsequently John Gunn was called to be Pastor at Fort Wayne and ministered there from 1917 to 1927. when he left giving the reason as his declining health. At the beginning of the U.S involvement in the First World War in 1917 he was the featured speaker for the community and this speech was later published. Later in life he was given the honorary title: Pastor Emeritus of First Baptist Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

On one occasion, William Jennings Bryan, three times presidential candidate and member of the House of Representatives, was due to visit the town on a very hot summer's day and Rev. Gunn was to give the speech of welcome and introduction. Unfortunately Bryan was an hour and a half late and the crowd was suffering. So Rev. Gunn's introductory speech of "Well, here he is!" went down well with all including with Bryan, who declared it to be the best introduction he had ever had!

The family story on the subject of Rev. Dr. Gunn leaving the church in 1927 relates that he had all his teeth extracted, but the dentist, one of his parishioners, accidentally lost the impressions taken for the production of replacement false teeth. The resulting teeth were so ill-fitting that they affected his speech and he retired from the pulpit in some distress. Rev. Dr John R. Gunn found another door opening and began publishing a newspaper column of daily devotionals, "A Short Sermon for Today" reaching many more people than he could have done from the pulpit.

This began in 1925 and ran for 36 years in the *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*. Sitting in his small bedroom, typing with two fingers, he demonstrated his unique talent in interpreting Christian thought in a condensed fashion which was fresh and exciting. It

was attractive to people of many faiths and remarkably timeless in its clarity. His life spanned turbulent and tumultuous times; he knew what it was to suffer personal tragedy and triumphs, as well as the failures and successes of the people to whom he ministered.

Following Charles Lindbergh's celebrated flight from the U.S. to France in 1927, the Gunn family relates that Lindbergh had agreed to take members of Congress as passengers to experience flight. Local Congressman David Hogg offered his place to John R. Gunn. However when Gunn arrived at the plane (possibly a ten seater Ford Tri-motor) he was told that no passenger seats were free. It was discovered that there was a vacant co-pilot seat, and, as Lindbergh had no objections, Gunn found that he was experiencing that flight sitting next to the famous pilot.

He continued to write his daily column for the rest of his life until his death on Thursday November 15, 1956 at the Georgia Baptist Hospital, Atlanta, Georgia. For a further 15 years after his death the column continued to appear in this newspaper repeating selected previously published sermons through the work of his daughter, Dorothy E. Gunn.

From 1964 – 76 through the work of his daughter, Nell G. Harper, his devotionals were also broadcast daily as radio mediations called, *Be Still and Know* by the Protestant Radio and Television Center of Atlanta (later renamed Day One) and were at one time carried by more than 2,000 stations. Through popular demand the recordings of these broadcasts became available on gramophone records and during the Vietnam War they were produced on audio cassettes for use on U.S. submarines.

In addition Rev. Dr. Gunn was the author of 8 published books of selected sermons in his lifetime (see below). Further volumes of sermons were published posthumously: *Triumph in love and marriage* in 1957 and *Good Morning, Lord – Devotions on the Hope and Glory* in 1977.

Thanks to the <http://facinglife.net/> web site, Rev. Gunn's remarkable sermons are now available on the Internet, where some of the radio broadcasts are also available as downloadable MP3 files. His legacy continues to extend to the next generation of outstanding ministers for the church, thanks to Jim and Grace Gunn's generous support of an FTE Ministry Fellowship.

### **Books of sermons by J R Gunn**

<i>At Jesus' feet</i> , Anderson Printing Co., 1908	Series 4 box 1 f2
<i>One hundred three-minute sermons</i> , Geo. H. Doran, 1927	Series 4 box 1 f3
<i>One hundred more three-minute sermons</i> , Doubleday & Doran, 1929	Series 4 box 1 f4
<i>A Lamp unto my feet</i> , Ray Long & R. R. Smith, 1932	Series 4 box 1 f5
<i>Snapshots from the Gospels</i> , Revell, 1933	Series 4 box 1 f6
<i>Facing life</i> , Light and Hope Publications, 1948	Series 4 box 1 f7
<i>The Battle of Christendom</i> , Light and Hope Publications, 1948	Series 4 box 1 f8
<i>Bulwark never failing</i> , Richard R Smith publisher Inc., 1955	Series 4 box 2 f1

*Triumph in love and marriage*, Baker, 1957, published, but uncirculated because of many printer errors.

<i>Good Morning, Lord – Devotions on the Hope and Glory</i> , 1977	Series 4 box 2 f2
<i>The Business of Living</i> , ms, unpublished.	Series 3 box 1 f10
<i>Speaking of Preachers and Preaching</i> , ms, unpublished.	Series 3 box 1 f11
<i>Yes, God cares</i> ms, unpublished.	Series 3 box 1 f 6

## Collection Scope and Content Note

The majority of the collection of papers of John R. Gunn consists of typescript carbon copies of short sermons written for publication as newspaper columns. The top copies were sent to the *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* for publication. The sermons are mainly single page, some with annotations and are based for the most part on texts from the New Testament. It is thought that the sermons published in book form during John R. Gunn's life were mostly based on Old Testament texts. Possibly the carbon copies for these sermons were supplied to the book publishers and not retained. The sermons, reproduced in books, also appear on the facinglife.net website (see above).

Copies of sermons retyped by his daughters remain arranged in files of republished and broadcast sermons during the years 1967 – 72. The papers also include correspondence with publishers, draft ms and proposals in the years following John R. Gunn's death, as well as copies of publications (print and broadcast) and collections of biographical materials.

The collection is divided into three series:

### **Series 1: Short sermons : New Testament, (3 boxes, 1.5 linear ft.)**

This series contains typescript short sermons, produced for the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette, with bulk dates of between 1925 and 1956. They remain in their original order arranged by the books of the Bible, but within that division are left as they were filed and not arranged by chapter or verse.

Occasional papers from a later date, which are paginated as though from a book ms, remain interfiled as they were found.

**Great care must be taken in handling these documents as the paper is acidic and most items are extremely fragile.**

### **Series 2: Short sermons published and broadcast, 1967 – 72, (2 boxes, 1.0 lin.ft.)**

Series 2 contains short sermons arranged in A-Z order of title, many of which are retyped and annotated with the years in which they were republished or were broadcast.

### **Series 3: Book proposals and mss, 1956 – 77 (1 box, 0.5 linear ft.)**

The third series contains correspondence and book proposals from John R. Gunn's daughters: Dorothy E. Gunn and Nell G. Harper. Three typescript book manuscripts from John Gunn are also to be found.

**Series 4: Books and Published Sermons, 1908- 77 (2 boxes +1 OS box, 2.25 lin.ft. )**

In this series are copies of both the books published in John R. Gunn's lifetime and publications after his death (some in photocopy). In addition there are copies of some of the *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* columns, an individually published early sermon and an audio CD of some of the broadcast sermons.

***Please note: All folders from Series 4 Box 2 and Series 5 box 1 are contained in the same box.***

**Series 5: Biographical materials (1 box, 0.25 linear ft. )**

Series 5 contains a remarkable collection of biographical information on John R. Gunn and his wife, Nell, compiled by James R. Gunn. It consists of photocopies, transcribed items, electronic files on CD and photographs.

**Processing**

When the Burke Library acquired John R. Gunn's papers, an attempt was made to maintain the original order imposed on the collection during its use before donation to the archives. Folded materials were flattened. Fragile and acidic materials were interleaved with acid free paper. Unstable items were enclosed in Mylar. Staples and metal clips were removed. All materials were placed in acid-free folders.

## Contents list

### **Series 1: Short sermons : New Testament**

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	1	Matthew, 1-14
1	1	2	Matthew, 18 - 25
1	1	3	Mark
1	1	4	Luke
1	1	5	John
1	1	6	Acts
1	1	7	Romans
1	2	1	1 Corinthians
1	2	2	2 Corinthians
1	2	3	Galatians
1	2	4	Ephesians
1	2	5	Philippians
1	2	6	Colossians
1	2	7	1 Thessalonians
1	2	8	2 Thessalonians
1	2	9	1 Timothy
1	2	10	2 Timothy
1	3	1	Titus
1	3	2	Philemon
1	3	3	Hebrews
1	3	4	James
1	3	5	1 Peter
1	3	6	2 Peter
1	3	7	1 John
1	3	8	Jude
1	3	9	Revelations

### **Series 2: Short sermons published in Journal-Gazette & broadcast, 1967- 72**

(A-Z by title of sermon)

2	1	1	A
2	1	2	B
2	1	3	C
2	1	4	D
2	1	5	E - F
2	1	6	G
2	1	7	H - I
2	1	8	J - K
2	1	9	L
2	1	10	M

**Series 2: Short sermons published and broadcast, 1967 – 72 (Cont'd)**

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
2	2	1	N – O
2	2	2	P – Q
2	2	3	R
2	2	4	S
2	2	5	T
2	2	6	U – V
2	2	7	W - Y
2	2	8	Sermons by theme: Abundance - Work, in A-Z order
2	2	9	Sermons: Patriotic
2	2	10	Sermons: Special days file
2	2	11	Sermons marked "for column", [1970-1]

**Series 3: Book proposals and Mss, 1956 - 77**

3	1	1	Sermons "to consider for book", selected by Dorothy E Gunn and Nell G Harper, 1972
3	1	2	Typescript of book of sermons selected by Dorothy E Gunn and Nell G Harper, 1972
3	1	3	Sermons: selected to be considered by publisher [1970?]
3	1	4	Sermons with no Bible text
3	1	5	Sermons from original file marked "do not use [in 1970 book?]", includes some retyped sermons and scripts for broadcast, [1964 - 9]
3	1	6	Yes, <i>God cares</i> , by John R Gunn, ms notes, drafts and typed ms of book for publication, 1956
3	1	7	Correspondence, 1970 - 1: D. E. Gunn and publishers with enclosures; D. E. Gunn/N. G. Harper and readers/listeners seeking J.R. Gunn's books.
3	1	8	Sermons sent to publishers, originals and copies, 1970
3	1	9	Miscellaneous photocopies of published sermons, obituary, poetry.
3	1	10	<i>The Business of Living: Friendly Counsel from The Proverbs</i> , by John R. Gunn, original typescript ms, 110p, [194?]
3	1	11	<i>Speaking of Preachers and Preaching</i> , by John R. Gunn, original typescript ms, 120p, plus 19p from other drafts, [194?]

**Series 4: Books and Published Sermons, 1908 - 77**

4	1	1	<i>America's Place in the World War</i> , sermon delivered by John R. Gunn, Fort Wayne, Ind., Feb 17, 1918, pamphlet
4	1	2	List of books by John R. Gunn <i>At Jesus Feet</i> , Anderson, 1908, bound photocopy
4	1	3	<i>One Hundred Three-Minutes Sermons</i> , Doran, 1927

**Series 4: Books and Published Sermons, 1908 – 77 (Cont'd)**

4	1	4	<i>One Hundred More Three-Minute Sermons</i> , Doubleday Doran, 1929, bound photocopy
4	1	5	<i>A Lamp unto My Feet</i> , Long & Smith, 1932, bound photocopy
4	1	6	<i>Snapshots from the Gospels</i> , Revell, 1933, bound photocopy
4	1	7	<i>Facing Life</i> , Light & Hope, 1948
4	1	8	<i>The Battle of Christendom</i> , Light & Hope, 1948

**Please note: All folders from Series 4 Box 2 and Series 5 box 1 are contained in the same box**

4	2	1	<i>Bulwark Never Failing</i> , Richard Smith, 1955
4	2	2	<i>Good Morning Lord</i> , Baker 1977
4	2	3	<i>Be Still and Know</i> , Rev. John R. Gunn, produced for The Presbyterian Church, <a href="http://www.facinglife.net">www.facinglife.net</a> , audio CD of sermons broadcast, 6.29.1964 – 7.26.1964
4	OS box 1		159 short sermons in columns from <i>Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette</i> , 1947 – 1972 [Bulk 1950s], photocopies (Outsize box)

**Series 5: Biographical materials**

5	1	1	Collection of scanned and transcribed source documents of biographical material compiled by John R Gunn on CD Mac OSX software version 10.3.9 Biographical material on John R Gunn, compiled by James R. Gunn: Brief biography by James R Gunn; <i>Testimony of My Faith and Trust</i> . Transcript of message from John R Gunn to his family, 1955; Copy of entry for JRG in <i>Baptist Biography</i> , pp180 - 186 Photographs
5	1	2	<i>John R. Gunn: A great and good man</i> , information assembled by James R. Gunn, June 27, 2002
5	1	3	<i>Baptist Biography</i> , edited by B. J. W. Graham, vol.3, Index Printing Co, Atlanta, 1923
5	1	4	Biographical material on Nell H. Gunn, compiled by James R. Gunn: Brief biography by James R Gunn; Transcript of Childhood memories by Nell H. Gunn Remarks by Nell H. Gunn, [1961] Photograph