

## Yann de Pierrefeu Diaries

1927-1938

3 boxes (1.5 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 815



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Marie Alphonse Leopold Jehan Tudor Dedons "Yann" de Pierrefeu was born in 1905, the eldest of four children born into a distinguished family and heir to a French marquise. After attending the Groton School and Harvard, Pierrefeu settled in Cape Ann, marrying Ellen Hemenway Taintor in 1930.

A dedicated, if idiosyncratic diarist, Pierrefeu left a large number of dense and often impenetrable volumes that can be part dream book, part imagination, and part quixotic engagement with the turbulent events of the 1930s. Laden with references to the Oz novels and replete with nicknames and apparently coded language, the diaries offer glimpses into Pierrefeu's social life and marriage, and his reactions to the Great Depression, national politics, history, and the growing crises in Europe and Asia.

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## Background on Yann de Pierrefeu

Born in Sewaren, N.J., on Sept. 27, 1905, Marie Alphonse Leopold Jehan Tudor Dedons "Yann" de Pierrefeu, was the eldest child of a distinguished family and heir to a French marquisate. Both of Pierrefeu's parents were remarkable. His father, Alain Dedons Marquis de Pierrefeu (1885-1915) was working as an engineer with US Steel in Chicago in 1914 when he was recalled to his native France to take a military commission, and was killed in action while serving with the Red Cross ambulance Corps in the spring 1915.

Elsa Tudor (1878-1967), Yann's mother, was the granddaughter of Boston's Ice King Frederic Tudor and a member of Boston's Brahmin class. Considered one of the "belles of Boston society" prior to her marriage in 1904, and a denizen of the social register, Elsa proved adept at shocking her staid peers, whether announcing that she would become a professional barefoot dancer, as she did in 1910, doing Red Cross work in France during the war, or exploring her talents as a poet and writer, a mystic, and a follower of "Eastern" religion. After the death of her husband, Elsa became an ardent pacifist, corresponding with Gandhi, representing the International Relations Committee of the Massachusetts Federation of Churches in Europe, and organizing a series of world youth tours after the rise of Hitler to spread "world peace through world trade."

Eccentric and intellectual, Yann studied at the Groton School and Harvard, although he may not have graduated from the latter, and he lived most of his adult life on or near the north shore of Boston, living variously at Beverly, Ipswich, and Rowley, as well as at the family's summer home in New Hampshire. A man of independent means, living off his inheritance and investments, Pierrefeu was a Republican by inclination, though he believed that his vote for Roosevelt in 1932 may have helped forestall a revolution. In Sept. 1930, he married Ellen Hemenway Taintor, the daughter of Charles W. and Caroline Tilestone Taintor of Back Bay, Boston. In typical fashion, the ceremony was held in the Unitarian Church in Manchester-by-the-Sea where Ellen's Pekinese "arrayed with neck bow of broad white satin ribbon" greeted guests in the receiving line "with short, snappy yelps and extended paw." The couple had one son, Alain.

Yann died in Hampton, N.H., on Mar. 11, 1965, and was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

## Scope of collection

Dense and often impenetrable, Yann de Pierrefeu's diaries are part dream book, part imagination, and part quixotic engagement with the turbulent events of the 1930s. At times literary and laced with references to the Oz books, Pierrefeu carries on a long conversation about his love for Margaret (Marguey or Margo) Gallatin and the sisters Charlotte and Ellen Taintor -- the latter of whom became his wife -- his social activities, reflections on history, and current affairs. Though by no means continuous, and not complete, the diaries offer glimpses into Pierrefeu's social life and marriage, and his reactions to the Great Depression, national politics, history, and the growing crises in Europe and Asia.

Although much of his writing is inaccessible due to Pierrefeu's use of semi-coded language and ornate references, he writes lucidly and often passionately about politics and emotion.

We are now in the era when Capitalism is in the balance and people look with favor on Socialism, and even Communism. This is the period when we are thinking about the Next War, and talking about the Five Year Plan, Hitler, and Japan. We anticipate a war in the Pacific, and consequently have our entire fleet on the West Coast. There is a distinct feeling that the power of initiative no longer rests with the U.S., but is abroad. We are not certain where this power is, but felt that it is across the water... (June 1, 1933)

To be sure, Pierrefeu did not always read events well:



Yann de Pierrefeu, ca.1935

I believe that Russia has returned to Capitalism. Stalin has definitely abandoned Communism, is the feeling that is paramount with me today. I think that Stalin is now without any ideas at all, having been thoroughly disillusioned with Communism. Therefore, I believe that he is ready to try anything else, even Capitalism. He is slowly becoming the champion of Capitalism in the place of the old-fashioned Capitalists (Fascists) who are becoming Communists. What it amounts to is that Russia is a great void today, where it was a country packed with energy until 1933. The land is open to people with initiative now... (June 25, 1938)

Four of the diaries were kept in bound octavo notebooks, with Pierrefeu sometimes using different colored ink for different purposes, with the remaining 56 diaries being kept in rougher fashion in small flipbooks. The collection also includes 54 small-format photographs of Pierrefeu, his wife and child, mostly taken at their home in Ipswich.

## Inventory

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diaries

1927-1938

60 items

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1927

1 vol. ; 368p.

Box 1: 1

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1928

1 vol. ; 368p.

Box 1: 2

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 Jan. 14-Feb. 14

Box 1: 3

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 Jan. 1-Dec. 31

Box 1: 3

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 Feb. 18-Mar. 29

Box 1: 3

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 Apr. 12-May 12

Box 1: 3

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 May 4-June 22

Box 1: 4

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 Nov. 11-28

Box 1: 4

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 Nov. 30-1931 Jan. 22

Box 1: 4

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1930 Dec. 31-1931 Feb. 4

Box 1: 4

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1931

Box 1: 5

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1931 Jan. 23-May 4

Box 1: 5

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1931 May 7-Dec. 1

Box 1: 5

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1931 May 12-June 13

Box 1: 5

Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1931 June 15-Sept. 8

Box 1: 5

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1931 Sept. 29-Oct. 28

Box 1: 5

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Feb. 5-Mar. 3

Box 1: 6

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Apr. 13-May 12

Box 1: 6

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 May 12-28

Box 1: 6

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 May 29-July 1

Box 1: 6

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Jul 10-Aug. 23

Box 1: 6

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Aug. 25-Sept. 17

Box 1: 7

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Sept. 18-Oct. 4

Box 1: 7

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Oct. 5-11

Box 1: 7

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Oct. 19-25

Box 1: 7

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Oct. 26-Nov. 10

Box 1: 7

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Nov. 29-Dec. 19

Box 1: 7

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1932 Dec. 20-1933 Feb. 15

Box 1: 7

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1933 Feb 16-Mar. 23

Box 2: 1

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1933 Mar. 25-May 11

Box 2: 1

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1933 May 12-June 27

Box 2: 1

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1933 Oct. 4-Nov. 19

Box 2: 2

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1933 Nov. 20-Dec. 27

Box 2: 2

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary  
1933 Dec. 28-1934 Mar. 2

Box 2: 2

Pierrefeue, Yann de: Diary

1934 Mar. 5-Apr. 2  
Box 2: 3  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1934 Apr. 2-June 7  
Box 2: 3  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1934 June 8-July 26  
Box 2: 3  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1934 July 27-Oct. 2  
Box 2: 4  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1934 Oct. 3-11  
Box 2: 4  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1934 Oct. 12-Dec. 7  
Box 2: 4  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1934 Dec. 8-1935 Jan. 6  
Box 2: 4  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935  
1 vol. ; 368 + [16]p.  
Box 2: 5  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935 Jan. 7-Mar. 22  
Box 2: 6  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935 Mar. 23-May 14  
Box 2: 6  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935 May 15-June 27  
Box 2: 6  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935 June 28-Sept. 11  
Box 2: 6  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935 Sept. 12-Oct. 18  
Box 2: 7  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935 Oct. 19-Nov. 8  
Box 2: 7  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1935 Nov. 8-1935 Jan. 22  
Box 2: 7  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1936  
1 vol. ; 368 + [16]p.  
Box 2: 8  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1936 Jan. 22-Mar. 3  
Box 3: 1  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1936 May 26-July 5  
Box 3: 1  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1936 July 7-Aug. 13  
Box 3: 1  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary

1936 Aug. 14-Oct. 16  
Box 3: 2  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1936 Oct. 17-Nov. 18  
Box 3: 2  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1936 Dec. 22-Jan. 28  
Box 3: 2  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1937 Jan. 28-Mar. 7  
Box 3: 3  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1937 Mar. 8-Apr. 9  
Box 3: 3  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1938 Sept. 10-Nov. 26  
Box 3: 4  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Diary  
1938 Nov. 11-1938 Mar. 17  
Box 3: 4  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Letter and invitations  
1927  
ALS, 3 invitations  
Box 3: 5  
Pierrefeu, Yann de: Photographs  
1935  
Box 3: 6

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Benjamin Katz, Mar. 2014.

### Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Mar. 2014.

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use (More information )

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Depressions--1929  
Dreams  
Ipswich (Mass.)--History  
Marriage  
Pierrefeu, Ellen Taintor

### Contributors

Pierrefeu, Yann de [main entry]

### Genres and formats

Diaries  
Photographs

### Link to similar SCUA collections

Massachusetts (East)  
Photographs



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