John Steinbeck's Letters Home
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Massive archive of nearly 400 letters and postcards written by John Steinbeck to his family over the course of 29 years

Provenance: from the estate of John’s sister, Mary Dekker Steinbeck.

The bulk of John’s correspondence, over 300 letters and postcards, is written to his younger and much-adored sister Mary. These span a sweeping 28 years, from 1937 up until Mary’s death in 1965.
The remainder of John’s letters are written to other family members, primarily his sisters Beth and Esther, Mary’s daughter Joan and her husband David Heyler. These letters continue up until 1966.

The majority of the letters and postcards are autographed, though roughly 93 are typed or typed and signed; including roughly 14 typed and sent in triplicate by John to his three sisters. The vast majority of John’s letters are accompanied by their original transmittal envelopes—over the years postmarks come from various locations such as New York City, Sag Harbor, California, Mexico, the Virgin Islands, Europe and more, detailing John’s life by location.

The condition varies, but most range from Near Fine to Very Good. A spreadsheet of the contents can be provided upon request for serious inquiries only please.
The archive additionally includes 165 pieces of communication from other family members mostly sent within the family and a small assortment of ephemera. The majority of these peripheral letters were sent by John’s second wife Gwyn Conger Steinbeck (m. 1943-1948) and third Elaine Steinbeck (m. 1950-1968) to Mary. These correspondences begin in 1940 when William (Bill) Dekker, a World War I pilot, sends his wife Mary a letter home. Bill would disappear in action over Italy in July, 1943, and John would detail his attempts he made overseas with his military correspondent connections to locate Bill in letters he sent Mary. The family letters stretch onward until 1997, nearly 30 years after John died, with letters from Elaine written to Joan and David.

Included in the assorted ephemera is a note from Mary to John’s editor and friend Pat Covici on the necessity of the title East of Eden, notes, two typescripts, seven snapshot photographs depicting John and several others on a boat and one depicting John in a yard being greeted by a dog. Several telegrams are present; including the one John sent to Mary relaying the news of the birth of his second son, John IV (June 12, 1946): “A BOY BOTH FINE 5 POUNDS 4 OUNCES. LOVE= JOHN”.

These letters portray a sweeping and intimate look at Steinbeck’s life, as told in his own words and the words of those closest to him, through deeply personal letters, covering his private and professional life during his most artistically productive years. He ranges over countless topics from the mundane minutia of daily life, such as stockpiling meat in his new
deep freeze to save a few pennies per pound should meat prices raise, to the profound—childhood memories, the births of his sons, the collapse of his marriage to Gwyn, his grappling with depression, mortality and much more. Despite John’s worldwide acclaim and success, winning both the Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes, his nostalgic thoughts often drift back to a green cliff overlooking the Carmel River of his youth.

He writes at length of his professional life, his work and milestones, from being a war correspondent, to novelist and playwright.

He expounds on the ups and downs of his writing process—from research, to starting new work, becoming frustrated and throwing work out, finishing work and starting again.

Collections of this magnitude and breadth regarding such a major American author are virtually unobtainable in the marketplace, with most material already held by institutions. Because this correspondence comes from family members, it offers a much more intimate and private look into the life of John Steinbeck than otherwise available. Despite his prolificacy, he never wrote an autobiography and these intimate letters offer insights available no other way.

Price on Request
New Orleans, La.

Jan 20, 1955

Dear Ines,

Please don't think I'm being rude, but I can't go back to New York. The business thing is more important. I think we should have some time to ourselves without the pressures of work. I've been working so hard that I'm feeling burned out. I'd like to spend some time with you, without the stress of business.

I've been thinking about the idea of spending some time together in New Orleans. Would you be interested in coming? We could stay at the Hotel Monteleone, which is a historic hotel located in the heart of the French Quarter. I've heard it's a beautiful place.

Please let me know if you're interested in coming to New Orleans. I'd love to spend some time with you there.

Best regards,

[Signature]
Dear Mary:

I have put off writing hoping that I would hear something. I am sorry. All I can say is that nothing that happened to Bill is as bad as waiting. I tried to get information and then got sent up on this last campaign into Italy and when I got back the whole damn of information was slightly disorganized. The town general Drum who commands the troop carriers is there and then I had to come back here and also he said he was going to the front. I don't know what happened. On the island I was down and been picked up for three weeks with the things do happen. I have a ridiculous idea of what really did happen something. Myself all sides. So that I don't want to worry. I wish you could go east and I wish you would let me go over here with a picture and I have said I will go. She is very good at the music. But I haven't heard whether it is possible.
Dear Mary:

Much business. Getting all things ready. We are going to have a big party on my birthday after the Red Cross party and a lot of people you know and quite a few you wouldn't like. Wish you were going to the last. We have a piano player coming and it will probably end up with hand dancing. In a way I am going to ring New York. I really don't.

We are up to see them on Saturday. It is full of hearts. The battle against learning is breaking down. He is the head of his class in mathematics and proud of his class in spelling. I am unkind of telling. He must have got that from you. I wish you got it from me.

Elaine is taking typing and French. I shall understand along with any guilty friends. Thankfully she studies it through. Wonder if Elaine stillcapable of learning anything.

Nothing is going well. My days are finally over Thursday. My phone I shall put for hope again. Do not call me. I am not at the office. Air mail.

We are by going to our friends. We will cry if at your mouth. Have a good time.

P.S. We are by going to our friends. We will cry if at your mouth.