

F. Gerald Ham, Compiler, Records regarding Kirtanananda Bhaktipada Swami (Keith Gordon Ham) A&M 3830

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1948-2011



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West Virginia and Regional History Center

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Biographical / Historical

Kirtanananda Bhaktipada Swami (6 September 1937 - 24 October 2011) was born Keith Gordon Ham in Peekskill, New York to Marjorie (Clark) and the Reverend Francis Gordon Ham, a Baptist minister. In 1959, Bhaktipada graduated from Maryville College magna cum laude and received a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to pursue a doctorate in American history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Bhaktipada remained at North Carolina for three years before dropping out of school in 1961 due an alleged "sex scandal" involving an undergraduate student, Howard Morton Wheeler, who became a lifelong partner.

Bhaktipada moved to New York City where in 1966 he met A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). This religious movement is more commonly termed "Hare Krishna" and is a denomination of Hinduism. Bhaktipada become Bhaktivedanta's student and devotee, and later became an influential leader in the movement himself. Bhaktipada purchased land near the town of Moundsville in Marshall County, West Virginia. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the land was developed as the community of New Vrindaban with Bhaktipada as its spiritual leader.

Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban were the source of many controversies, both internally and externally. Bhaktipada was expelled by ISKCON in 1987 and New Vrindaban itself was also expelled the following year. Bhaktipada was indicted by a federal grand jury in 1990 on charges of mail fraud and racketeering. Although he was initially found guilty, his conviction was vacated on account of prejudicial testimony. A re-trial commenced in 1996 and was settled with a plea bargain. Bhaktipada served time in jail from 1996 until 2004. He moved to India in 2008, where he later died after a period of illness at age 74.

Scope and Contents

Records regarding Kirtanananda Bhaktipada Swami (Keith Gordon Ham), a founding member and leader of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) or "Hare Krishna" religious movement. Most of the material in the collection regards his involvement with the community of New Vrindaban in Marshall County, West Virginia and the controversies and legal problems that arose during his term of leadership there. The collection also contains biographical information regarding Bhaktipada, Hare Krishna associated publications, and other material.

Keywords

Marshall County (W. Va.)

Hare Krishnas

Bhaktipāda, Swami, 1937-2011

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, 1896-1977

New Vrindaban (Commune)

International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Description of Subordinate Components

Series 1. Biographical Information (regarding Kirtanananda Bhaktipada Swami, also known as Keith Gordon Ham)

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193253

Unit Date 1948-2011 and undated

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 1-7 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series contains material regarding the life of Kirtanananda Bhaktipada Swami (Keith Gordon Ham) and includes two drafts of a biography written by Henry Doktorski with comments by F. Gerald Ham; a personal account of Bhaktipada's battle with polio; records from various schools that Bhaktipada attended, including a letter regarding his dismissal from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; invitations, photographs, and other material regarding Bhaktipada's fiftieth birthday celebration; and material regarding his final illness and death.

Series 2. Correspondence

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193254

Unit Date 1948-2004

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 8-10 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series contains correspondence, including correspondence between Bhaktipada and his parents, the Reverend Francis and Marjorie Ham; between Bhaktipada and his older brother F. Gerald Ham and his wife, Elsie; and miscellaneous correspondence.

Series 3. Newspaper Clippings

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193255

Unit Date 1978-2004

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 11-12 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series contains clippings of newspaper articles regarding Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban. The majority of the clippings concern Bhaktipada's trial and re-trial for mail fraud and racketeering charges. Other subjects include tensions between New Vrindaban and its neighbors, allegations against Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban, and other Hare Krishna communities in the United States.

Series 4. Magazine Articles

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193256

Unit Date 1980-1994

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 13-14 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series contains four magazine articles regarding Bhaktipada, New Vrindaban, and the Hare Krishna religious movement, including "Dial Om for Murder", the 1987 Rolling Stone article that was later expanded into the book "Monkey on a Stick."

Series 5. Prabhupada's Palace of Gold

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193257

Unit Date 1979-1980

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 15 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series contains pamphlets and newspaper and magazine clippings regarding "Prabhupada's Palace of Gold," built at New Vrindaban.

Series 6. International Society for Krishna Consciousness ("Hare Krishna")

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193258

Unit Date 1964-2002

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 16-20 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series regards the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) or "Hare Krishna" movement and its members. Contains material regarding A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, the founder of ISKCON, including brochures, publications, advertisements and a pamphlet containing essays authored by Bhaktivedanta. The series also contains opinion pieces regarding Bhaktipada's trial and conviction, transcripts of Bhaktipada's meetings with devotees during his term in prison, and miscellaneous material.

Series 7. Publications

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193259

Unit Date 1966-2010

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 21-22 (Folder)

Mixed Materials 2 (Box)

Container 1-8 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series contains books and serial publications associated with ISKCON, the Hare Krishna movement, Bhaktipada and/or New Vrindaban. Serial publications include "Back to the Godhead" (1966-1985); "Brijabasi Spirit" (1977-1978); "Sri-la Bhaktipada" newsletters (1996-2010); and various publications of the League of Interfaith Devotees (1999).

The series also contains six books, including: Bhaktipada, Kirtanananda Swami. *Christ and Krishna: the Path of Pure Devotion*. Moundsville, WV: Bhaktipada Books, 1985. Bhaktipada, Kirtanananda Swami. *Divine Conversation*. Visakhapatnam: Andhra Printing and Binding Industries, 2004. Bhaktipada, Kirtanananda Swami. *Eternal Love: Conversations with the Lord in the Heart*. Moundsville, WV: Bhaktipada Books, 1985. Bhaktipada, Sri-la Kirtanananda Swami. *A Devotee's Handbook for Pure Devotion*. Visakhapatnam: Andhra Printing and Binding Industries, 2004. Bhaktipada, Swami. *Joy of No Sex*. Moundsville, WV: Palace Publishing, 1988. Bhaktivedanta, A. C. Swami Prabhupada. *Search for Liberation*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1981.

Series 8. Manuscript

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/193260

Unit Date circa 1966

Mixed Materials 2 (Box)

Container 9 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

This series contains the manuscript of a story by Howard Wheeler titled "A Bear, A Lion." Correspondence accompanying the manuscript describes it as a loosely autobiographical account of Bhaktipada and Wheeler's experiences after leaving UNC Chapel Hill.