

Guide to the Florence M. Larkin Papers, 1883-1974

Last Modified on 09/14/2021 1:12 pm CDT

Summary Information

Title: Florence M. Larkin Papers

Inclusive Dates: circa 1883-1974

Creator: Larkin, Florence M., 1889-1976

Call Number: Eau Claire Mss CL

Quantity: 11.9 c.f. (26 archives boxes and 5 flat boxes)

Repository: Housed at the Area Research Center, William D. McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; owned by the Wisconsin Historical Society, Library-Archives Division

Archival Locations: UW-Eau Claire McIntyre Library / Eau Claire Area Research Ctr.

Abstract: Extensive correspondence and personal papers of Florence Larkin of Eau Claire, Wis., together with smaller quantities of correspondence and papers of her husband and relatives in the Sullivan and Robertson families. The papers document Larkin's student years at Vassar College, teaching school in Wisconsin, New Jersey, and Michigan, work for the YMCA Women's Service in Europe during World War I, marriage to Edwin Larkin in her late forties, and active membership in the Eau Claire civic and arts communities. The correspondence is largely with suitors, friends, and family, particularly between Florence and her Aunt Mary Robertson who was her financial benefactor and confidant. The papers also include letters from her husband during his stateside World War II service; records of the Eau Claire Civic Music Association; scrapbooks; and diaries from her travels in Europe and America. Edwin's papers concern his Eau Claire law practice and the First Bank of Mondovi of which he was president. Other family members represented by files are Florence's parents, Florence D. and Anna McCarthy Sullivan; her brothers, Arthur G. and Eugene Sullivan; and her aunt and uncle, Mary and George W. Robertson.

Language: English

Search Terms/Subject Terms

- Eau Claire Civic Music Association (Wis.)
- First National Bank of Mondovi (Wis.)
- Miss Beard’s School for Girls (Orange, N.J.)—Faculty
- Vassar College—Students
- Lawyers—Wisconsin—Eau Claire
- Schools—Wisconsin—Ashland
- Women—Social Conditions
- Women—Wisconsin—Eau Claire
- World War, 1914-1918—War Work—Young Men’s Christian associations
- World War, 1914-1918—Women
- World War, 1939-1945—Personal Narratives, American
- Eau Claire (Wis.)
- Europe—Description and travel
- Larkin, Edwin J., 1906-1988
- Robertson, George W., 1845-
- Robertson, Mary A.
- Sullivan, Anna E., 1864?-1944
- Sullivan, Arthur G., 1885?-1954
- Sullivan, Eugene S.
- Sullivan, Florance D.

Biography/History

Florence Mary (Sullivan) Larkin was born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin on June 21, 1889 to Florance D. (F. D.) and Anna (McCarthy) Sullivan. She graduated from Eau Claire Central High School in 1905 and attended Vassar College from 1906 until her graduation in 1910. She also attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison from 1910 to 1911, taking postgraduate course work.

While Florence was at Vassar, her family moved to Ashland, Wis. where her father worked for Northern Pacific Railway. However, Florence continued to spend her summers in Eau Claire with her aunt and uncle, Mary and George Robertson (“Auntie” and “Unk”). The three Sullivan children, Arthur, Florence, and Eugene, were quite close to the Robertsons, and it appears that it was their aunt and uncle who paid for the three to attend college. Arthur and Eugene both became physicians and

shared a practice in Madison.

After her educational preparation, Florence began her teaching career at Ashland High School (1912-1915). Subsequent teaching posts included Miss Beard's School in New Jersey (1915-1917), Iron River, Michigan (1921-1922), and Riverside High School in Milwaukee (ca. 1922-1927). She also worked as a sales manager at Ingersoll Watches in New York City (1920-1921) and for the Curtis Publishing Company in Eau Claire (noted in 1931).

During World War I, Florence volunteered for overseas service as a part of the Women's Overseas Service League of the Y.M.C.A. From 1918 to 1919, she opened and had charge of a Y.M.C.A. social center (the Columbia Club) which was established to improve morale of American Navy men stationed at Plymouth, England. She also briefly served as a League secretary in Polch, Germany.

After her discharge, she spent some time in Iron River, Michigan which had been home to her parents since around 1915. F. D. was the general manager for the Iron River, Stambaugh, 8 Crystal Falls Street Railway Co. However in 1921, financial difficulties beset the family once again with the bankruptcy of the company. It is likely that F. D. and Anna went to live with son Arthur in Madison at that time.

Florence traveled extensively both in Europe and throughout the United States. In the early 1930's, she moved back to Eau Claire to live with her aunt. Although Florence had several beaux and suitors, she did not marry until she was in her late 40's. In 1938, she married Edwin J. Larkin, a prominent lawyer and Mondovi banker who was seventeen years her junior. The newlyweds lived in an Eau Claire apartment until 1941 when Aunt Mary Robertson died and left Florence her house at 210 Park Place.

During World War II, Edwin served stateside as an Air Force lieutenant while Florence was involved in American Red Cross volunteer work in Eau Claire. After the war, Edwin continued his law practice and became the president of First National Bank of Mondovi.

Florence continued her civic involvements which included her work with the Eau Claire Civic Music Association. In the 1940's she served as campaign chair and from 1950 to 1960 as president. Volunteer work with the Sacred Heart Hospital Auxiliary, GoodFellow Committee, Eau Claire Women's Club, League of Women Voters, and other Eau Claire civic groups occupied her time, as well as the couple's frequent trips to Europe.

Florence died in 1976 and Edwin in 1988. They are buried in Eau Claire's Forest Hill Cemetery.

Scope and Content Note

This is a particularly rich correspondence collection which primarily consists of the personal papers of a woman whose life did not follow traditional lines. Financially assisted by her wealthy aunt until well into her thirties, Florence was able to attend a prestigious women's college, travel extensively, and to pick and choose employment situations. She married late and the couple had no children. Her received and outgoing letters are long, detailed and rich in description of activities, events, thoughts,

and emotions. There is much correspondence from 1903 to 1935 with later correspondence tapering off dramatically. However, a notable exception is Edwin's war letters (1944-1945) to Florence which were written using the pseudonyms, "Suzy and Sean."

The collection also contains smaller quantities of papers for husband Edwin, parents F.D. and Anna, Aunt Mary and Uncle George Robertson, and brothers Arthur and Eugene. The bulk of their correspondence is among themselves and further documents family relations and provides several viewpoints on particular situations.

Little compiled information regarding the family's history is evident in the collection, and information about the family has been gleaned from the correspondence and scattered news clippings. Florence's incoming and outgoing correspondence has been kept together. Therefore, letters to Florence from Auntie will be found in Florence's incoming letters. However location of correspondence between other family members is not consistent and letters between Arthur and Auntie may either be with Arthur's outgoing correspondence or Auntie's incoming letters.

The collection has been divided into three series: FLORENCE M. LARKIN PAPERS, EDWIN LARKIN PAPERS, and PAPERS OF FAMILY MEMBERS.

Incoming and outgoing correspondence forms the bulk of the FLORENCE M. LARKIN PAPERS (1891-1974). Correspondence is with family, friends, suitors, and later, husband Edwin. There is a good deal of very personal and descriptive correspondence between Florence and her Aunt Mary ("Auntie"). Florence's correspondence consists of "Letters to," "Letters from," and "To Suzy, Love Sean" groupings which are each arranged chronologically by year. The "Suzy/Sean" correspondence consists of lengthy letters (1944-1945) written by Edwin to Florence each day during his stateside military service during World War II. Florence's regular letters home during her Vassar College years provide a glimpse of her collegiate experiences and social activities. Additionally, special note should be made of letters written home by Florence describing her experiences as a Y.M.C.A. volunteer in England during World War I and letters she received from military personnel whom she met during the war.

Records and ephemera relating to her World War I service provide additional research support in this area. Journals, notes, travel plans, and ephemera provide documentation regarding Florence's many European and other travels. Scattered materials relate to Larkin's educational and teaching careers. Included is a scrapbook from her college years which is an outstanding example of "scrapbooking" during that period and which has good exhibit potential.

Aside from her correspondence, there are only scattered materials to document Florence's numerous civic involvements. The exception is a significant body of records (1928-1970) relating to the Eau Claire Civic Music Association. These records include correspondence with performers, booking agents, and members; news clippings; brochures and programs relating to performances; scrapbooks; financial records; Larkin's notes; membership campaign materials; and miscellaneous items. These materials complement the records, 1952-1971, of the association itself (see Eau Claire Mss BW).

The series also contains a sampling of inspirational sayings and news clippings of practical advice (often about marriage and husbands) which Florence either kept individually or compiled into a scrapbook. Financial records, recipes and recipe books, a short diary (1935-1936) concerning her hospitalization over injuries received as a pedestrian, news clippings, presentations, scattered Eau Claire theater and concert programs, and miscellaneous materials complete the series. There is much within the collection with high display and exhibit potential.

Although there is some personal correspondence, the bulk of materials found in the EDWIN LARKIN PAPERS (1944-1972) relate to finances and include both personal and law client accounts for his law office. Letters written by Edwin to Florence have been filed with her papers. There is a nearly complete set of monthly reports (1960-1972) from the First National Bank of Mondovi which Larkin served as president. Scattered records relate to Larkin's military service and received correspondence is chiefly from his brother.

PAPERS OF FAMILY MEMBERS (1883-1928) consist of correspondence, occasional news clippings, and miscellaneous items of Anna (McCarthy) Sullivan, Florance D. Sullivan, Arthur G. Sullivan, Eugene Sullivan, Mary Robertson ("Auntie"), and George W. Robertson ("Unk"). Letters written by these individuals to Florence are found in her received correspondence. The series also includes Mary Robertson's receipts and invoices (1905-1911) for clothing and dry goods, groceries, and miscellaneous goods and services for the Eau Claire area.

Administrative/Restriction Information

Acquisition Information

Presented by Cindra Carson and Gregg Wilson, Eau Claire, Wis., 1989. Accession Number: M92-234

Processing Information

Processed by Gayle Martinson, June 1997.

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