

C Keeley, Mary Paxton (1886-1986), Papers, 1830-1983
848 7.25 linear feet, 3 audio cassettes

PARTIALLY DIGITIZED in World War I collection

This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri. If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

INTRODUCTION

Papers of the first woman graduate of the University of Missouri, School of Journalism, in 1910. She was active as a journalist, teacher, playwright, poet, fiction writer, and photographer. Material includes correspondence; diaries; manuscripts for Keeley's articles, fiction, and poetry; clippings; audio cassettes; and photographs.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Keeley Papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Mary Paxton Keeley on 11 November 1976 (Accession No. 4022). Contact reference staff for information on Subsequent additions. The papers are part of the National Women and Media Collection.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary Gentry Paxton Keeley was born on 2 June 1886 in Independence, Missouri, to John Gallatin Paxton and Mary Neil Gentry. She attended the University of Missouri and became the first female graduate of the University of Missouri, School of Journalism in 1910. From 1910 to 1911 she worked for the *Kansas City Post*. In 1918 and 1919, she served with the Y.M.C.A. Canteen Service in France. Upon her return she married Edmund Burke Keeley and they settled in Virginia. Their only child, John Gallatin Paxton Keeley, was born in 1921. Edmund Keeley died in 1928.

After her husband's death, Keeley returned to Missouri to work as a home economics extension agent and attended graduate school at the University of Missouri, where she completed a master's degree in journalism in 1928. The same year she published *River Gold*, a children's book. In 1929 she became the journalism instructor at Christian College, now Columbia College, and the founder of *The Microphone*, the student newspaper. During her tenure she also taught creative writing and wrote and published several plays, many of which were performed locally. Although she retired from teaching in 1952, she continued to write articles for the *Kansas City Star* and to edit the *Missouri Alumnus*. She helped co-found the Columbia Art League in 1959 and was a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma, Theta Sigma Phi, and Kappa Tau Alpha. She was also the recipient of the Alumni Citation Award from the School of Journalism. Mary Paxton Keeley died on December 6, 1986, at 100 years of age.

In the fall of 2002 the Columbia Public Schools dedicated the Mary Paxton Keeley Elementary School on Park de Ville Drive.

During her lifetime Keeley befriended many celebrated Missourians, including Bess and Harry Truman, Orrick Johns, Homer Croy, Charles G. Ross, Tom McAfee, and Rose Wilder Lane.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

These papers chronicle Keeley's life and career as a journalist, teacher, and writer. The papers are divided into five series: **Correspondence**, **Diary**, **Literary**, **Audio Recordings**, and **Graphic Arts**.

The **Correspondence** series, the largest series of the collection, dates from 1830 to 1983 and contains information on family and friends, literary endeavors, World War I, current events, and miscellaneous subjects. The material is arranged chronologically with the undated correspondence at the end. Of particular importance is the sixteen-year correspondence with her nephew, William C. Paxton, 1966-1982, wherein Keeley not only addresses local and national news items from a journalist's point of view, but also includes jingles and ditties related to current events and reminiscences about her family, friends, and careers. Noted correspondents include Bess Truman, Rose Wilder Lane, J.C. Penney, Tom McAfee, and Orrick Johns.

The **Diary** series is comprised of Keeley's personal thoughts and writings from 1914 to 1977. The diaries, arranged chronologically, record her daily events, financial transactions, ambitions, and accomplishments for the year. Many of the volumes are incomplete and no diaries exist for the years 1947 to 1968. Keeley's 1937 diary is unique and of particular interest, since it documents in great detail, the meticulous planning and subsequent building of her house at 1111 Porter Street, Columbia, Missouri.

The **Literary** series has been divided into seven sections: publications, miscellaneous, poetry, plays, fiction, non-fiction, and speeches. Included are articles, books, reprints, book reviews, manuscripts, newspaper clippings, certificates, publication reports, and illustrations.

The **Audio Recording** series is comprised of audio cassettes and transcripts for interviews done by Keeley in 1967, 1974, and 1977. The 1967 interview only consists of the transcript with no cassette available. The 30 October 1974 interview, conducted by Frank Mackaman, focuses on Keeley's childhood in Independence, her family, interest in writing, the women's liberation movement, and friendship with Bess and Harry Truman. The final interview, conducted on 7 April 1977 by Mary Clark, discusses Orrick Johns, poet, writer, and editor of the literary magazine, the *Mirror*.

The **Graphic Arts** series consists of photographs, postcards, book illustrations, and drawings. Many of the photographs are of Keeley, John Gallatin Paxton Keeley, and members of the Gentry and Paxton families. A collection postcards and photographs from Keeley's World War I experience in the vicinity of Langres, France, 1918-1919, is also located in this series. Many of the miscellaneous photographs were taken by Keeley and are organized by topic: children, women, men, and miscellaneous.

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