

C McVean, Ruby T. (1909-), Papers, 1937-1939
1661 .6 linear feet

RESTRICTED

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

The papers of Ruby T. McVean chronicle her experience as a legal secretary for the U.S. Housing Authority in Washington, D.C. during 1938 to 1939. The papers consist of correspondence to her family in Nevada, Missouri, diaries, and photographs.

DONOR INFORMATION

Ruby T. McVean donated her correspondence and diaries to the State Historical Society of Missouri on 11 August 1991 (SHS Accession No. 2850). She donated her photographs to the society on 29 November 1999.

RESTRICTION

Consult the reference staff for information about the restriction on this collection.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ruby Josephine Todd was born 21 July 1909, in Adrian, Missouri. Her mother died when she was five years old, and thereafter she lived with her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. J.D. Todd. She graduated from Adrian High School and Cottey Junior College, Nevada, Missouri, and attended Central Missouri State Teachers College in Warrensburg and Huff's Business School in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1931 she began working for Ewing, Ewing & Ewing, Attorneys-at-Law, the Legal Department of the Farm and Home Savings Association, in Nevada, Missouri. She remained as a legal secretary at Ewing, Ewing & Ewing until 1938, when she accepted an appointment to the Civil Service as a Senior Stenographer within the Department of Interior, U.S. Housing Authority, Legal Department. Miss Todd moved to Washington, D.C. in January 1938 and lived there until March 1939. She resided at Walbridge House, 1759 R Street NW. She transferred to a Department of Labor office in Kansas City in March 1939 and worked there until she married John Frasier McVean (pronounced McVane) in 1947.

In 1989 Mrs. McVean, whose father and grandfather were physicians, established the first family and community medicine scholarship fund at the University of Missouri-Columbia Medical School. The Western Historical Manuscript Collection holds the medical account books of her father, Thomas Britt Todd (C2221) and the papers of her half-brother, Thomas M. Todd (C3790).

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Ruby T. McVean Papers consist of correspondence written by Mrs. McVean during the years 1938-1939, while she lived in Washington, D.C. and Kansas City. The papers also include diaries that she kept for each of those years and photographs from her time in Washington, D.C. The papers are arranged into three sections: **Correspondence**, **Diaries**, and **Photographs**.

The **Correspondence** section is organized chronologically and covers January 1938 through August 1939. Most of the correspondence is either addressed to her father, Dr. Thomas B. Todd, her aunt, Mrs. Eugene Phelps (“Aunt Dixie”), or her grandmother, Mrs. J.D. Todd (“Mother”). Mrs. McVean frequently wrote to her family while she lived in Washington, D.C., sometimes as often as four times a week. The main topics in her correspondence are family and friends, work, entertainment, and sightseeing. No letters exist for December 1938, when Mrs. McVean returned home for the holidays, and correspondence is sparse after she moved to Kansas City in February 1939.

Other family members often mentioned in the letters include Fred F. Todd (“Uncle Fred”), his wife (“Aunt Sue”) and daughter Beverly. Fred F. Todd was the only brother of Thomas Britt Todd and Mrs. Eugene Phelps. Also mentioned is the firm of Ewing, Ewing & Ewing, which was composed of Lee B. Ewing, his sons Boyd, Lynn, and Bob, and Gilbert Carter. Prewitt Ewing, the nephew of Lee B. Ewing, worked in Washington, D.C. during 1938-1939 and studied law at Georgetown University.

Mrs. McVean often wrote about her work at the U.S. Housing Authority. Most passages address activities within her office only, but some pertain to the U.S.H.A. and government work more broadly.

While in Washington, D.C., Mrs. McVean regularly attended movies, plays, and concerts. She also visited many sights in and around the nation’s capital, and she took sightseeing trips to New York City and Atlantic City—all of which are extensively documented in her letters home.

Included in this section are four picture postcards. One is a color, souvenir foldout postcard from Atlantic City, circa 1938. Also included are two letters and two postcards written by Mrs. Eugene Phelps when she visited Mrs. McVean in April 1938. Enclosed newspaper clippings have been photocopied for conservation purposes.

The **Diaries** section contains two daily planners in which Mrs. McVean recorded her thoughts during 1938 and 1939. The diaries supplement the correspondence in that they help to better reflect the author’s perspective on certain dates. Her day-to-day moods are usually evident, and although her writing is rarely uninhibited, the passages often clarify her relationships with acquaintances and family members. A few passages are partially or entirely written in shorthand. The back of the 1938 diary contains addresses, poems, account figures, and photography information.

The **Photographs** section contains pictures that Mrs. McVean took in Washington, D.C. and surrounding areas. The pictures were originally in a photo album that was photocopied for preservation purposes and is at the end of this section. The photos are numbered in the same order as they were arranged in the photo album.

The pictures portray, often in striking fashion, many Washington, D.C. landmarks. They include the Capitol, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Supreme Court Building, Pan American Union, Federal Reserve Building, Washington National Cathedral, Memorial Bridge, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Griffith Stadium, and the Tidal Basin. Of particular note is a photo of the Austrian Embassy taken 13 March 1938, shortly after Germany’s takeover of Austria. The Nazi flag can be seen hanging from the embassy’s flagpole. Also featured are photos of Monticello, Mount Vernon, Robert E. Lee’s mansion at Arlington, the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, and St. Thomas Church in Washington, D.C., where President Franklin Roosevelt regularly attended

services. The original photo of the church's exterior was donated to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, NY; the WHMC holds a copy negative.

The only item in the collection that is dated before 1938 is a photo of the exterior of Walbridge House, which is labeled as being shot in July 1937. This is one of the few photos in the collection that Mrs. McVean did not take. She entered several of her pictures in contests and also submitted them to various publications. The Stix, Baer and Fuller, and John Peck and Company department stores purchased her night scenes of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument and Capitol.

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- f. 4 Correspondence, 7 April-27 April 1938
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- f. 6 Correspondence, 14 June-16 July 1938
- f. 7 Correspondence, 20 July-20 August 1938
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