



## THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI RESEARCH CENTER-KANSAS CITY

K1158

Robert Ridenour Lester (1894-1997) Papers

1874-1997

36 folders, 17 scrapbook volumes, 20 books, oversize photographs

*Correspondence, photographs, ephemera, and some printed and published material related to Lester and the Ridenour Family. Seventeen scrapbook volumes depict travel in the U.S. and Europe, as well as Lester's involvement in France in WWI.*

### BIOGRAPHY:

Robert Ridenour Lester was born May 14, 1894 in Denver, Colorado, the son of John Calvin Lester (1860-1942) Vice-President of the Ridenour-Baker Grocery Company and Kate Louise Ridenour Lester, daughter of Peter D. Ridenour, one of the founders of Ridenour-Baker.

Upon his graduation from Princeton University in 1917, Lester joined the American Field Service (AFS) in Europe driving an ambulance for the French Army in the Balkans, where he was bombarded by German Aircraft. When the U.S. entered war he served as a naval aviator and flight instructor at Key West, FL, where he attained the rank of Lt. (J.G.). Returning to Kansas City in 1920 he was employed by the Ridenour-Baker Grocery Company, a firm founded by his grandfather, Peter D. Ridenour. In 1921 Lester made his first entry into the public warehouse business through the Mutual Transfer Company, a subsidiary of the Ridenour-Baker Company. In 1926, Lester accepted a position with the Fidelity National Bank and Trust Company in downtown Kansas City for which his father-in-law, Henry C. Flower was chairman, but the bank closed during the Depression in 1932. Later in the thirties, he helped liquidate the Ridenour -Baker Grocery Company, and from its assets formed the public warehousing firm, Kansas City Terminal Warehouse Company as its president. During and after World War II he greatly expanded the company along with its subsidiary trucking firm, Terminal Transit. He continued to operate the company until he was 84 years old when in 1979, he sold the business to Space Center, Inc., of St. Paul.

in 1922 Lester along with Ford Harvey, Howard Wehrle, Rogers Crittendon, and Simpson Yoemans founded Richards Field, the first commercial airport in Kansas City located on Blue Ridge Blvd, near Raytown, MO.

Lester had been a member of the Kansas City Country Club, the Kansas City Rotary Club, The University Club and The Early & Pioneer Naval Aviators Association.

On September 21, 1925 Lester married Ruth Flower (1899-1999) in Kansas City. She attended Barstow School, and in 1920 graduated from Vassar College. She was a former member of the Kansas City Country Club, the Kansas City Junior League, and The Society of Colonial Dames and had served on the boards of the Visiting Nurse Association, Women's Christian Association, Family and Children's Services, and Planned Parenthood. Her parents were Henry Corwin Flower (1860-1930) and Lida Carr Flower (1874-19??).

Robert R. Lester died at his home on September 11, 1997, age 103. Ruth Flower Lester also died at home on February 7, 1999, age 100.

#### PROVENANCE:

This collection was received from Virginia L. Buckner as accession KA1051 on December 3, 1999 and as KA1094 on August 4, 2000.

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#### PREFERRED CITATION:

Specific item; folder number; Robert Ridenour Lester (1894-1997) Papers (K1158); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-KC].

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## DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS:

The collection consists of materials related to Robert Lester and the Ridenour Family. It includes much correspondence, photographs, ephemera, and some printed and published material (including books on regional history). Seventeen scrapbook volumes depict travel in the U.S. and Europe, as well as Lester's involvement in France in WWI.

## INVENTORY:

**Box 001**

- Folder 1. Princeton Scrapbook loose photos
- Folder 2. Princeton Scrapbook misc.
- Folder 3. Notes at time of Bank Moratorium
- Folder 4. War records  
includes photos, clippings, and letter to Mrs. JC Lester (Kate)
- Folder 5. Obit and condolences for Robert R. Lester  
includes an obit. For Ruth Flower Lester
- Folder 6. Autobiography draft from Robert R. Lester
- Folder 7. Scrapbook nine loose items  
includes postcards from Paris, book of novelty matches, swim meet program 2/1915
- Folder 8. Misc. loose photos  
includes portraits of Peter D. Ridenour & Harlow W. Baker
- Folder 9. Scrapbook twelve loose photos
- Folder 10. Property deeds of Robert R. Lester
- Folder 11. Kansas City History clippings and letters
- Folder 12. Peter D. Ridenour & Sarah L. 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary party – 1908
- Folder 13. Robert R. Lester & Ruth Flower wedding memorabilia  
includes marriage service
- Folder 14. *In Memoriam*. The members of the class of 1916 who gave their lives in their country's service.
- Folder 15. Miscellaneous
- Folder 16. Letters to Kate L. Ridenour from friends and family  
1874-75, 1878-79, 1881-85, 1901
- Folder 17. Personal letters to Kate L. Ridenour  
1878-1884

- Folder 18. Letters to Kate L. Ridenour in school from her parents  
1880-1883
- Folder 19. Letters and postcard misc.  
1882, 1893, 1908, 1914
- Folder 20. Personal letters  
1887, 1894
- Folder 21. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents  
1895, 1910-1911, 1913, 1915-1916
- Folder 22. Kate Ridenour Lester's letters from Europe & translations of War  
and Peace by Henri Lavendan from *L'Illustration* and *Some  
Modern French Authors* written for the '81 Club
- Folder 23. Announcements of the death of Peter D. Ridenour – 1909
- Folder 24. Letters from Robert R. Lester to Parents from school  
1910
- Folder 25. Personal letters  
1910-1911, 1914
- Folder 26. Letters from Robert R. Lester to his parents from school  
Lawrenceville and Princeton, New Jersey. 1911-1912
- Folder 27. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents  
1911, 1913-1915
- Folder 28. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents from school, 1911-1913,  
1919, 1925  
includes letters to Katherine Lester, a letter to Mrs. JC Lester from  
Ruth Lester, a letter to Mrs. JC Lester from James Richardson  
headmaster at the Proso Preparatory school, and *The Favorite  
Calendar of Friendship* to Kate from Agnes

**Box 002**

- Folder 29. *Class Day Exercises, Lawrenceville, Class of 1912*
- Folder 30. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents from school  
1913-1915
- Folder 31. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents from school  
1915-1916
- Folder 32. Personal letters  
1918-1921, 1930
- Folder 33. Letters concerning an illness  
1925
- Folder 34. Letters and postcards misc.

- Folder 35. Letters to Ruth Flower Lester from Robert R. Lester concerns nose operation and trip to California. 1925-1926, 1934
- Folder 36. Robert R. Lester War Records: Europe  
Personal papers – passport, French papers, armband, S.S.  
Touraines passage list  
Newspapers (removed) *NY Times* Unrest after War, *KC Journal*  
American Legion Cemetery of Kansas City, *Salouika* papers as issued to the armies early in year 1917 (re-entry of US in war), *Journal Alsacien* Aug. 20, 1917  
Misc: movies program printed in four languages for “Salouika” 1917, plus others
- Scrapbook 1. World War I 1908, 1916-1917 (o/s wrapped)  
Albania; S.S. La Touraine; 1908 KC flood; Crockett, CA.; Coos Bay, Oregon; Les Vosages; Mollan; Alsace; Vieux Thann; Horfmansweilerkopf; Florina; Koritza, Albania; Kansas City to Los Angeles; Petrified Forest; Cañon de los Frijaloes; Mesa Verde; pictures of many different people
- Scrapbook 2. Princeton University  
includes class photo; memory and fellowship book (empty); Comparative Athletic Record; Campus photos; Lawrenceville, NJ school postcards; campus activities photos including sports; clippings on ice yacht accident, Woodrow Wilson (including inauguration photos); and the swim team.
- Scrapbook 3. Includes Officers Training Camp 1917; misc. people from girls school; camping trip
- Scrapbook 4. Postcards collected by Robert R. Lester 1902-1903
- Scrapbook 5. European Journey by Mrs. P.D. Ridenour and Ethel 1910; also includes Tour of Mr. and Mrs. P.D. Ridenour and Ethel in Mexico 1909
- Scrapbook 6. “Letters from Across the Sea” by Kate Ridenour Lester
- Scrapbook 7. “An Unknown Journey” by Harriet W. Baker, includes a pencil drawing of the author
- Scrapbook 8. 2 volumes July 1906 – Sept. 1906  
Dedicated to “The Two Who Were With Me” by Harriet Maker Munroe.  
A collection of letters concerning three on a tour (Harriet, John Munroe and a chaperone). Excellent descriptions of buildings, cities, includes postcards

**Box 003**

- Scrapbook 9. Colorado Mountain Scenery Trip July – Sept. 1908.  
Estes Park; Garden of the Gods; Washington DC;  
Richmond, VA; Apalachicola, Fla.
- Scrapbook 10. European Trip  
Italy America Students Tour 1921 – Ruth Flower’s diary of
- Scrapbook 11. Unidentified photos
- Scrapbook 12. 1912 photos of:  
England; Marken, Germany; Geneva, Switzerland;  
Lucerne; and Mount Pilatus
- Scrapbook 13. Kansas City Transit Terminal in Wyandotte County,  
Kansas and Wichita Warehouse Co., Inc. in Wichita,  
Kansas
- Scrapbook 14. First Aviation Meet in the United States held at Squantum,  
Mass.  
1910 photos and postcards  
1918-1919 Airforce photos  
1925 Family photos
- Scrapbook 15. *The Brides Book*
- Scrapbook 16. *Wedding Gifts*
- Scrapbook 17. *Baby’s Kingdom*

## OVERSIZE FLATBOX (in office)

Robert Ridenour Lester’s 1916 Diploma Princeton University.  
(mounted on board)

Annual Picnic, Ridenour-Baker Grocery Co., Kansas City, MO  
Aug. 5, 1922, Dallas Park. Anderson Photo. Panoramic.

“Old Fashioned Minstrels” F.F.O.G. Picnic, Aug. 4, 1924.  
Anderson Photo. Panoramic.

Ridenour-Baker Barnstormers, 1925 Old fashion Minstrels,  
F.F.O.G. Picnic, August 1, 1925. Anderson Photo

Freshman Year Prom. E.L. Wolven, photographer, Feb. 1917.  
Vassar College. (“Flower” written on verso, probably Ruth Flower)

Senior Prom, Vassar College. E.L. Wolven, photographer, 1920

Large group of female students dressed in white, holding 1920  
banner. (Ruth Flower is probably included in this group from  
Vassar ?)

Large group of female graduates in robes with 1920 banner.  
(possibly Vassar, possibly Ruth Flowers)

Moon Vale Farm in the Ozarks near Lebanon, Mo. It belonged to Henry C. Flower in 1920's. Photo of residence.

Mounted photograph of the Ridenour-Baker Bragdon Mer.Co. building ca. 1890's

Interior office photographs. (Possibly Ridenour-Baker Grocery Co.) 1897 (2 photos mounted)

Mounted photograph of the Ridenour-Baker Grocery Co. building ca. 1912. [East bldg. was completed in Fall of 1911. Two more stories were added to the East Bldg. when older west bldgs. were replaced in 1915] [933 Mulberry]

OVERSIZE PANORAMIC PHOTOGRAPHS (in office)

F.1 Ambulance Company No. 239

**Books and Publications**

1916 Princeton Yearbook

Kansas City Social Register – 1944

Lang, Gladys T. *Choice Menus for Luncheons and Dinners*. 1929

*The Princeton Bric-a-Brac* – 1917

*Tried and Choice Recipes*. Kansas City, MO: Kellogg-Baxter Printing Co.

*Kansas City in Caricature*, by Howard Bartling, 1912

*Frontier Community*, by A. Theodore Brown, 1963

*Pioneer Days in Kansas*, by Richard Cordley, 1903

*Queen City of the Trails: Independence*, by Mrs. Harvey R. Fullerton

*The Kansas Memorial – A Report of the Old Settlers' Meeting*, by Charles S. Glead, 1880

*Aviation History in Greater Kansas City*, edited by Historic Aviation Magazine

*Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, vol. X, 1907-1908

*Action before Westport 1864*, by Howard Monnett, 1964

*As I Remember*, by Phyllis Patterson

*The Overland Stage to California*, by Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley, 1901

Sunset Hill: First Fifty Years

Souvenir Book of Kansas City

*Gazetteer and Directory of the State of Kansas*, 1870

*The Commerce and the Community*, 1948

Robert R. Lester Autobiography, 1990