

S0668 Perris, Ben, Letters, 1917-1919

1 Folder

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

Ben Perris' son, Arnold Perris, chairman of the UM-St. Louis Department of Fine Arts from 1970-1976, donated his father's papers on January 12, 2003.

Ben Perris was born February 22, 1886 in Cleveland, OH. He died April 10, 1973 in Philadelphia, PA. He attended Case School of Applied Science in Cleveland, Ohio, later known as Case Tech, now Case-Western Reserve University. He completed four years in electrical engineering, but his degree was withheld because he refused to attend the required chapel service. Both his brothers, however, earned degrees at Case. One of his first positions was with General Electric Company in Schenectady, New York. He married Mae Cinda Van Sise in Cleveland in 1908. They had three children, Elizabeth, Marjorie (Schenkelberger/Sawdey) and Arnold.

In 1917, when the United States joined England and France in World War I, Mr. Perris at age 31 enlisted in the American Expeditionary Forces, despite being married with two children. At Fort Leavenworth he attended officer training and was commissioned a first lieutenant in the army. He was assigned to the 30th Army Engineers in France in the new field of chemical warfare. His unit later became the First Gas Regiment. In June 1918 he was captain of Company B, and was subsequently awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* for skill and valor. His observations of life in the Army, of the French and the English, and his admonishments to his two young daughters at home (Arnold was born later), form this collection, with official papers from the War Department and the French army. Some of the letters were published in a local newspaper in Lakewood, Ohio at the time. In one battle he suffered in a poison gas attack, and was hospitalized even as the war ended. He was discharged in June 1919 at Camp Sherman (Ohio) and returned home to Lakewood.

Perris' second marriage was to Marianne Spidell of Cleveland, Ohio. At midlife, when he entered the new field of industrial management with Stevenson, Jordan and Harrison (New York), a forerunner of the now familiar consulting giants. He earned a CPA (Pennsylvania) and combined this field with his engineering methods. He was regularly engaged to evaluate the efficiency of the entire structure of large corporations, such as Scott Paper Company, Campbell Soup, and Pratt-Whitney.