

Gettysburg College
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special collections

Guide to MS-293: Gillilan Family Letters



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections and College Archives

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Summer 2022

MS-293: Gillilan Family Letters

*Processed by Jesse Cromer, Carly Jensen, Merlyn Maldonado Lopez, Diane Werley Smith '73 Interns
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Size

1 box, 0.5 Cubic Feet

Location

Special Collections

Dates

Inclusive: 1909-1945

Bulk: 1909-1910

Provenance

Purchased from Between the Covers Rare Books, Inc.

Biographical Note

Lewis Gillilan (1891-1942) worked as a stagecoach driver during the early 1900's. Later in his life, he worked as a farmer and within a telephone and telegram company. He married Ellen Benson in 1910 despite both of their parent's objections to their relationship. They went on to have five children: Robert, Lois, Marjorie, Elizabeth and Parnel. Lois Gillilan went on to study medicine in Michigan, Amsterdam, and Aberdeen during the late 1930's.

Historical Note

By the late 1890's, automobiles were becoming increasingly accessible in the United States, so it is notable that Lewis Gillilan still worked as a stagecoach driver a decade later.

World War II officially began on September 1, 1939 when Adolf Hitler invaded Poland. As Lois Gillilan travelled to Amsterdam in August of 1939 to study medicine, she witnessed the anxious atmosphere present in Europe in the lead up to the Nazi occupations occurring across Europe. She travels from Amsterdam to Aberdeen, Scotland before the invasion of Poland, during which journey she encounters many people fleeing the soon to be occupied territories.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains approximately 90 letters written by various members of the Gillilan family, including Lewis, his parents, wife, and children. The bulk of the letters are written by Lewis between 1909 and 1910, but there is also a significant amount written by his daughter, Lois, in 1939. These letters provide insight into the life of a stagecoach driver and a young woman studying medicine in Europe during the rise of the Nazi party, amongst other things. Many of the early letters also depict Lewis and Ellen navigating their personal relationship as it was contested by their families.

All of the letters in this collection have been transcribed and the transcriptions are housed within the S Drive Student Folders. A few of the letters are available on GettDigital in the Virtual Reading Room.

Subjects

Correspondence, Stagecoach, World War II

Series Description

This collection is divided into 5 Series. **Series 1:** Letters from Lewis, **Series 2:** Letters from Ellen, **Series 3:** Letters from Lois and Robert, **Series 4:** Letters from Lewis' parents, **Series 5:** Misc. Mail. Inside each series, letters are arranged chronologically.

Box list

1-0 Finding Aid and letter transcriptions, June – October 1910

Series I: Letters from Lewis Gillilan

- 1-1 March-August 1909
- 1-2 September-October 1909
- 1-3 February-June 1910
- 1-4 June-July 1910
- 1-5 August 1910
- 1-6 September-October 1910
- 1-7 Undated

Series II: Letters from Ellen Benson

- 1-8 June-July 1910

Series III: Letters from Lewis Gillilan's Children

- 1-9 Letters from Lois and Robert Gillilan

Series IV: Letters from Lewis Gillilan's Family

- 1-10 Letters from Lewis' mother and brother

Series V: Misc. Mail

- 1-11 Wedding announcement from 1910
- Letter from Lewis in 1920
- Condolence Letter from Dot and Fred in 1942
- Letter from Aaron Brown to his mother in 1945
- Baby announcements from 1970's

Related Collections

MS – 228: Veis Family Letters

MS – 211: Earman Family Letters from WWII

Contact Information

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