

A Finding Aid to the Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason Papers, 1883-1985, in the Archives of American Art

Sarah Haug

April 3, 2009

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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives of American Art

Title: Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason papers

Date: 1883-1985

Identifier: AAA.hervwiln

Creator: Hervey, Wilna, 1894-1979

Extent: 4.9 Linear feet

Language: English .

Summary: The papers of artist and silent film actress Wilna Hervey and her lifelong

companion painter Nan Mason date from 1883 through 1985 and measure 4.9 linear feet. The collection is comprised mostly of letters to Hervey and Mason from friends, colleagues, and Mason's father, Dan Mason, also a silent film actor. Also found are personal photographs and snapshots, Hervey's handwritten memoirs, as well as twelve folders of Dan Mason's

papers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason papers were donated to the Archives of American Art by Daniel Gelfand, a friend of Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason, in 2008.

Processing Information

The collection was processed by graduate intern Sarah Haug in March, 2009.

Preferred Citation

Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason papers, 1883-1985. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of the original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Wilna Hervey was born in 1894 and grew up in Far Rockaway, New York. She met Nan Mason (1896-1982), daughter of silent film actor Dan Mason, while on production of *The Toonerville Trolley* silent film comedies in 1920. They were lifelong companions until Hervey's death in 1979.

As a young woman in the late 1910s, Hervey took art lessons at the Art Students League in New York City, Winold Reiss' studio at 4 Christopher Street, New York City, and during the summer of 1918 in Woodstock, New York. In 1919, she joined the Betzwood Studios in Audubon, Pennsylvania to play the role of "The Powerful Katrinka" in *The Toonerville Trolley*, a series of silent films based on Fontaine Fox's comic strip. Co-star Dan Mason, who played the Skipper, took Hervey under his wing, and Hervey lived with the Masons while filming the series. After *The Toonerville Trolley* series ended in 1921, Dan and Nan Mason traveled to Hollywood to start a new company, and Wilna followed shortly after, taking the train across the country in early 1922. The new endeavor, *Plum Street Comedies*, began at the Paul Gerson Pictures Corporation in San Francisco and was based on *The Toonerville Trolley* series; the film crew included the young Frank Capra. The *Plum Street Comedies* were in production for only one year, 1922-1923.

Around 1919-1920, Hervey's father bought Wilna a small studio in Bearsville, New York. From 1922-1929 Hervey and Nan Mason split their time between painting and farming in Woodstock, New York, and pursuing acting while living with Dan Mason in California. In 1926-1927, the women traveled to Europe and North Africa together to see museums, art, and architecture.

After the death of Dan Mason in 1929, Hervey and Nan Mason made Bearsville their permanent home. Beginning in the late 1950s, Hervey and Mason began spending winters in Anna Maria, Florida and summers in New York. Hervey and Mason achieved success as artists in the 1960s - Hervey as an enamel painter, and Mason as a painter and photographer.

Wilna Hervey passed away in 1979, and Nan Mason died in 1982.

Sources consulted include "The Biggest Girl" by Joseph P. Eckhardt (http://faculty.mc3.edu/jeckhard/biggestgirlarticle/thebiggestgirl.html).

Scope and Content Note

The papers of artist and silent film actress Wilna Hervey and her lifelong companion painter Nan Mason date from 1883 through 1985 and measure 4.9 linear feet. The collection is comprised mostly of letters to Hervey and Mason from friends, colleagues, and Mason's father, Dan Mason, also a silent film actor. Also found are personal photographs and snapshots, Hervey's handwritten memoirs, as well as twelve folders of Dan Mason's papers.

Biographical materials include a personal narrative, notes on family history, newspaper clippings related to family, legal and financial records, and Wilna Hervey's notes on artwork.

Hervey and Mason were friends with many artists and their correspondence includes letters from artists such as Albert Heckman, Georgina Klitgaard, Manuel Komroff, Leon Kroll, Doris Lee, Fred Dana Marsh, Henry Lee McFee, William Pachner, Caroline and Paul Rohland, Andrée Ruellan, Eugene Speicher, and Dorothy Varian. There are very few letters written by Hervey or Mason, and the correspondence is mostly personal in nature. There are over 250 letters from Elsie Speicher, wife of portrait artist Eugene Speicher. Correspondence to Dan Mason has been separated and is filed in a separate series.

Wilna Hervey wrote a a number of handwritten memoirs of her days in the *The Toonerville Trolley* film series. She had hopes of publishing these one day and worked with writer Karin Whiteley on the project. Although her memoirs were never published, Hervey and Whiteley wrote and compiled materials for the book. Included in the Memoir Book Production series are handwritten memoirs by Hervey chronicling her years prior to and during the 1920s (many of the handwritten memoirs have been typed by Karin Whiteley). It also includes research materials, such as two typed

synopses of *The Toonerville Trolley* scripts from Fontaine Fox's files, newspaper clippings, and playbills, seemingly intended to provide background and verification of the memoirs.

This collection also includes a few pieces of artwork; three small watercolor sketches by an unidentified artist, and a print by Edward Chavez.

Photographs are mostly snapshots of friends and family, life in Woodstock, New York and Anna Maria, Florida. Negatives originally housed in an un-postmarked envelope with a return address labeled "Betzwood Film Co.," appear to be from the filming of *The Toonerville Trolley*. In several of the negatives Wilna Hervey is dressed as The Powerful Katrinka, and in one negative Dan Mason is The Skipper.

The personal files of Dan Mason include letters from Hervey and Nan Mason, the bulk from their trip to Europe and North Africa in 1926-1927. This series also includes Dan Mason's own handwritten and typed memoirs, newspaper clippings, and financial records.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into six series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1916-1960 (Box 1; 5 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1890-1985 (Box 1-10, OV 13; 3.8 linear feet)
- Series 3: Memoir Book Production, 1883-1959 (Box 11, OV 13; 0.4 linear feet)
- Series 4: Artwork, 1961, undated (Box 11, OV 13; 2 folders)
- Series 5: Photographs, circa 1915 1982 (Box 12; 5 folders)
- Series 6: Personal Files of Dan Mason, 1919-1928 (Box 12; 0.4 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Women artists
Women painters

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

Heckman, Albert Klitgaard, Georgina, 1889-1977 Komroff, Manuel, 1890-Kroll, Leon, 1884-1974 Lee, Doris, 1905-1983 Marsh, Fred Dana, 1872-1961 Mason, Dan, 1853-1929 Mason, Nan, 1896-1982 McFee, Henry Lee, 1886-1953 Pachner, William, 1915-Rohland, Caroline Rohland, Paul, 1884-1953 Ruellan, Andrée, 1905-2006 Speicher, Elsie, d. 1959 Speicher, Eugene Edward, 1883-1962 Varian, Dorothy, 1895-1985

Occupations:

Actors -- New York (State) -- New York Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1916-1960

5 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series includes a personal narrative, notes on family history, newspaper clippings related to family, legal and financial records, and Wilna Hervey's notes on artwork.

Box 1, Folder 1	Personal Narrative, 1916
Box 1, Folder 2	Notes on Family, after 1955
Box 1, Folder 3	Legal and Financial Records, circa 1927-1960
Box 1, Folder 4	Notes on Artwork, 1960
Box 1, Folder 5	Clippings and Printed Material, circa 1931-1945

Series 2: Correspondence, 1890-1985

3.8 Linear feet (Box 1-10, OV 13)

Scope and Contents:

Correspondence is mostly personal letters and covers subjects such as personal matters, updates on the lives of Woodstock residents, and the careers of artist friends. Early correspondence highlights Wilna Hervey's film career and travels. Other than the letters written by Nan Mason to Wilna Hervey, there are very few letters in this series written by either Hervey or Mason.

Notable correspondents include artists and friends Albert Heckman, Georgina Klitgaard, Manuel Komroff, Leon Kroll, Doris Lee, Fred Dana Marsh, Henry Lee McFee, William Pachner, Caroline and Paul Rohland, Andrée Ruellan, Eugene Speicher, and Dorothy Varian. There are over 250 letters from Elsie Speicher, wife of portrait artist Eugene Speicher. The bulk of Elsie Speicher's correspondence is from the months of November - March; between April to October each year the Speichers were usually in Woodstock with Hervey and Mason. Speicher occasionally sends correspondence from friends in common, notably Louise Lindin, Daphne Mattson, Caroline Rohland, Jean Rosen, and Andrée Ruellan.

Early correspondence from Karin Whiteley concerns a project to publish Hervey's memoirs (which were never published). Whiteley's correspondence also includes numerous enclosed newspaper clippings regarding Dan Mason's acting career. Additional correspondence from Karin Whiteley regarding the memoirs is located in Series 3: Memoir Book Production, 1883-1959. Other items of interest in this series includes a letter from Robert Pollack (1918) that includes a Smileage Book (movie coupons from the Military Entertainment Service), a New York City subway ticket, and caricatures drawn by Wilna Hervey, illustrated letters by cartoonist John Striebel, and occasional snapshots of artists and friends. Correspondence to Dan Mason from Hervey and Nan Mason has been separated and is filed with the other personal files of Dan Mason in Series 6, 1919-1928.

This series also includes correspondence that was neither written by Hervey or Mason, nor sent to them. It may be that the letters were sent to Hervey and Mason as enclosures in other correspondence. Such correspondence is arranged at the end of this series as Miscellaneous Collected Correspondence.

See Appendix for list of selected correspondents in Series 2.

Arrangement:

Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by the correspondent's last name and then chronologically within folders; undated letters are located at the end of the folder. Correspondents with fewer than five letters are filed by last name in folders labeled alphabetically. Letters from unidentified correspondents are filed at the end of the series.

Appendix:
Selected
Correspondents

in Series 2:

Adams, Kenneth M.: 1955 Antenucci, Margaret: 1961 Arndt, Paul Wesley: 1976

• Baumann, Mag and George: 1964, 1970

Bellows, Emma: 1948-1958

Bentley, John W. (Jack): 1922, 1931

Bettels, Kathryn: 1926

Blanch, Lucile and Arnold: 1931, 1955
Booth, Jean Bellows: 1945-1978
Cannon, Eleanor Rixson: 1950-1954

Capra, Frank: 1935, 1973
Carlson, Margaret: 1958
Cator, Bruce: 1948-1959
Cator, Eleanor: circa 1924

Cator, Thomas Vincent: 1928-1929

- Chavez, Edward and Jenne: 1950-1952
- Clark, Susan: 1960-1966
- · Clement, Jean: 1931, undated
- Currie, Bruce: 1946, circa 1951-1952
- De La Vergne, Gladys Hurlbut: 1959, undated
- Eddy, Ruth: 1934-1959
- Ganso, Emil and Nina: 1933
- Gonzales, Betty (Mrs. Boyer Gonzales): 1959
- Gonzales, Nell (Mrs. Boyer Gonzales): 1936
- Harris, Alexandrina (Allie): 1926, 1931, 1959
- Harrison, Jenny (Mrs. Birge Harrison): 1941, 1945
- Heckman, Albert and Florence: 1949-1964
- Hervey, Anna: 1908-1922
- Hervey, W.R.: 1913-1925
- Hervey, Wilna: circa 1919-1961
- Hitzig, William M.: 1940-1972
- Holt, Percy W.: 1923-1930, 1953
- Karoly: 1939
- Kesselring, Joe and Charlotte: 1949-1952
- Klitgaard, Georgina: 1933, 1974, undated
- Komroff, Odette and Manuel: 1945-1978
- Kroll, Leon: 1939, 1963
- Laufman, Beatrice (Mrs. Sidney Laufman): 1970
- Lee, Doris: 1950-1953
- Lindin, Louise (Mrs. Carl Lindin): 1936-1968
- Loederer, Richard: 1923-1924
- Magafan, Ethel: 1957
- Marsh, Fred Dana: 1948-1952
- Mason, Dan: 1921-1929
- Mason, Nan: 1919-1921
- Mattson, Henry and Daphne: 1931-1959
- McFee, Aileen (Mrs. Henry Lee McFee): circa 1928-1936
- McFee, Henry Lee: 1931-1936
- Mearns, Hughes and Fagley: 1942, circa 1952-1960
- More, Edna (Mrs. Hermon More): 1930-1943
- Pachner, Lorraine "Zombie" (Mrs. William Pachner): 1949-1978
- Pachner, William: circa 1950-1975
- Petersham, Maud and Miska: circa 1930s-1959
- Pollock, Muriel "Mollie" (Donaldson): circa 1916-1959
- Rheinish, Arthur: 1920-1921
- Rohland, Caroline Speare: 1926-1960
- Rohland, Paul: circa 1931, 1935
- Rosen, Jean (Mrs. Charles Rosen): 1936-circa 1961
- Rosen, M. (Mrs. Charles Rosen): 1924-1927
- Rosen, Polly: before 1959
- Ruellan, Andrée (Mrs. John Taylor): 1943-1977
- Search, Frederick Preston: 1933
- Shore, Henrietta: 1933
- Smith, Georgine Wetherell: 1951-1953
- Speicher, Charles: 1931-1945
- Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher): 1926-1959
- Speicher, Eugene: 1935-1961

• Striebel, Fritzi (Mrs. John H. Striebel): 1946-1978

Striebel, John H.: 1961Summers, D.: 1952-1961

• Summers, Pauline "Paul": 1952-1961

Varian, Dorothy: 1954-1977Webster, Florence: 1954, 1978

• Weston, Brett: 1958

Weston, Edward: 1935, 1951Whiteley, Karin: 1945-1981

Box 1, Folder 6	A-B, 1922-1976
Box 1, Folder 7	Booth, Jean Bellows, 1945-1978
Box 1, Folder 8-9	C, 1928-1975 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 10	Cannon, Eleanor Rixson, 1950-1954
Box 1, Folder 11	Cator, Bruce, 1948-1959
Box 1, Folder 12	Cator, Eleanor, circa 1924
Box 1, Folder 13	Clark, Susan, 1960-1966
Box 2, Folder 1	D-F, 1939-1975
Box 2, Folder 2	Eddy, Ruth, 1934-1959
Box 2, Folder 3	G, 1933-1968
Box 2, Folder 4	H, 1926-1975
Box 2, Folder 5	Heckman, Albert and Florence, 1949-1964
Box 2, Folder 6-8	Hervey, Anna, 1908-1922 (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 9	Hervey, W.R., 1913-1925
Box 2, Folder 10	Hervey, Wilna, circa 1919-1961 (includes draft letters)
Box 3, Folder 1	Hitzig, William M., 1940-1972
Box 3, Folder 2	Holt, Percy W., 1923-1930, 1953
Box 3, Folder 3	I-K, 1921-1974

Box 3, Folder 4	Komroff, Odette and Manuel, 1945-1978
Box 3, Folder 5	L, 1923-1970
Box 3, Folder 6-7	Lindin, Louise (Mrs. Carl Lindin), 1936-1968 (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 8	M, circa 1924-circa 1972
Box 3, Folder 9	Marsh, Fred Dana, 1948-1952 (includes pen sketches)
Box 3, Folder 10	Mason, Dan, 1921, 1923
Box 3, Folder 11	Mason, Dan, 1924
Box 4, Folder 1	Mason, Dan, 1925 (includes newspaper clippings; oversized material housed in OV 13)
Box 4, Folder 2	Mason, Dan, 1926
Box 4, Folder 3	Mason, Dan, 1927
Box 4, Folder 4	Mason, Dan, 1928-1929
Box 4, Folder 5-6	Mason, Nan, 1919-1921 (2 folders; includes pen sketches)
Box 4, Folder 7	Mattson, Henry and Daphne, 1931-1959 (includes color pencil drawing)
Box 4, Folder 8	McFee, Aileen (Mrs. Henry Lee McFee), circa 1928-1936
Box 4, Folder 9	Mearns, Hughes and Fagley, 1942, circa 1952-1960
Box 4, Folder 10	N-P, 1918-1934
Box 4, Folder 11	Pachner, Lorraine "Zombie" (Mrs. William Pachner), 1949-1978
Box 5, Folder 1	Pachner, William, circa 1950-1975
Box 5, Folder 2	Petersham, Maud and Miska, circa 1930s-1959
Box 5, Folder 3-4	Pollock, Muriel "Mollie" (Donaldson), circa 1916-1959 (2 folders)
Box 5, Folder 5	R, 1920-before 1959

Box 5, Folder 6	Rheinish, Arthur, 1920-1921
Box 5, Folder 7	Rohland, Caroline Speare, 1926-1933 (includes pencil sketch)
Box 5, Folder 8	Rohland, Caroline Speare, 1934-1940 (includes two negatives)
Box 5, Folder 9	Rohland, Caroline Speare, 1942-1951 (includes two photographs of Paul Rohland)
Box 5, Folder 10	Rohland, Caroline Speare, 1952-1960, undated
Box 6, Folder 1	Rosen, Jean (Mrs. Charles Rosen), 1936-circa 1961
Box 6, Folder 2-3	Ruellan, Andrée (Mrs. John Taylor), 1943-1977 (2 folders)
Box 6, Folder 4-5	S, 1922-1970 (2 folders; includes illustrated letter by John Streibel)
Box 6, Folder 6	Smith, Georgine Wetherell, 1951-1953
Box 6, Folder 7	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1926-1935
Box 6, Folder 8	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1936
Box 6, Folder 9	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1938-1940
Box 6, Folder 10	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1941
Box 7, Folder 1-2	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1942 (2 folders)
Box 7, Folder 3-6	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1943 (4 folders)
Box 7, Folder 7-9	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1944 (3 folders)
Box 8, Folder 1-4	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1945 (4 folders)
Box 8, Folder 5	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1946
Box 8, Folder 6	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1947-1948

Box 8, Folder 7	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1949
Box 8, Folder 8	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1950
Box 9, Folder 1	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1951
Box 9, Folder 2	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1952
Box 9, Folder 3	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1953-1954
Box 9, Folder 4	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), 1955-1959
Box 9, Folder 5	Speicher, Elsie (Mrs. Eugene Speicher), circa 1926-1959
Box 9, Folder 6	Speicher, Eugene, 1935-1961
Box 9, Folder 7-8	Striebel, Fritzi (Mrs. John Striebel), 1946-1978 (2 folders)
Box 10, Folder 1	T-Z, 1924-1978
Box 10, Folder 2	Varian, Dorothy, 1954-1977
Box 10, Folder 3-4	Whiteley, Karin, 1945-1981 (2 folders)
Box 10, Folder 5	Identified by First Name, A-J, circa 1923-1971
Box 10, Folder 6	Identified by First Name, M-Z, circa 1916-1972
Box 10, Folder 7	Unidentified Sender, circa 1926-1962
Box 10, Folder 8	Miscellaneous Collected Correspondence, 1890-1985
Oversize 13	Oversized Correspondence

Series 3: Memoir Book Production, 1883-1959

0.4 Linear feet (Box 11, OV 13)

Scope and Contents:

Wilna Hervey intended to publish memoirs of her days involved in *The Toonerville Trolley* films. Included in this series are handwritten memoirs chronicling her years prior to and during the 1920s (many of the handwritten memoirs have been typed by Karin Whiteley and are also located in this series).

This series also includes research materials such as typed synopses of two *Toonerville Trolley* scripts copied from the files of Fontaine Fox, correspondence with sketches from Fontaine Fox to Dan Mason, "The Little Folks Paper," published in 1891, playbills, writings and notes from unidentified sources, an indenture of deed, a deed of trust by Thomas Vincent Cator, newspaper clippings and advertisements. Within the series is one oversized drawing from an unidentified artist, undated.

The majority of the correspondence is to Hervey from Karin Whiteley (additional correspondence from Karin Whiteley regarding the memoir is located in Series 2: Correspondence, 1890-1985). Correspondence also includes Hervey's contract with The Paul Gerson Pictures Corporation dated 1922, and typed and handwritten writings by Dan Mason.

Arrangement: Items are arranged in original order.

Box 11, Folder 1-3	Memoir Writings by Wilna Hervey, circa 1956-1957 (3 folders)
Box 11, Folder 4-5	Research Materials, 1883-circa 1976 (2 folders)
Box 11, Folder 6-7	Correspondence, 1956-1959 (2 folders)
Box 11, Folder 8	Artwork by Unidentified Artist, undated (Oversized material housed in OV 13)
Oversize 13	Oversized Artwork

Series 4: Artwork, 1961, undated

2 Folders (Box 11, OV 13)

Scope and This series includes three small watercolor sketches by unidentified artist, and a print by Edward

Contents: Chavez

Box 11, Folder 9 Watercolor sketches by unknown artist, undated

(3 sketches)

Box 11, Folder 10 Print by Edward Chavez, 1961

(Oversized, housed in OV 13)

Oversize 13 Oversized Artwork

Series 5: Photographs, circa 1915-1982

5 Folders (Box 12)

Scope and Contents:

Photographs in this series are mostly snapshots of friends and family, life in Woodstock, New York and Anna Maria, Florida. Black and white snapshots contain photos of unidentified costumed people at an outdoor party, Wilna Hervey gardening, Elsie and Eugene Speicher, Charles Rosen, Nan Mason and Wilna Hervey in Italy in 1926, and of a home in a forested setting. Color snapshots are of gardens, beach scenes, and unidentified women. Negatives were originally found in an unpostmarked envelope with a return address labeled "Betzwood Film Co." and include six negatives of people on a boat, including Wilna Hervey and Dan Mason. Twenty-one negatives appear to be from a camera shoot for the *Toonerville Trolley* films. In several of the negatives Wilna Hervey is dressed as The Powerful Katrinka, and in one negative Dan Mason is The Skipper.

Box 12, Folder 1	Black and White Snapshots, circa 1915 - 1960
Box 12, Folder 2	Color Snapshots, circa 1950-1982
Box 12, Folder 3-4	Negatives, circa 1920-1921 (2 folders)
Box 12, Folder 5	Negatives from Georgina Klitgaard, 1933

Series 6: Personal Files of Dan Mason, 1919-1928

0.4 Linear feet (Box 12)

Scope and Contents:

The personal files of Dan Mason include correspondence to Mason, Mason's own handwritten and typed memoirs, newspaper clippings, and financial records mostly related to the death of his wife, Millicent Mason in 1919. The bulk of the correspondence is written by Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason, and chronicles their trip to Europe and North Africa in 1926-1927, as well as their close relationship with Dan Mason. Correspondence also includes a few family snapshots.

Arrangement:

Correspondence is arranged alphabetically and then chronologically. Memoirs, financial records, and newspaper clippings are arranged chronologically.

Box 12, Folder 6-7	Correspondence from Nan Mason, 1926 (2 folders)
Box 12, Folder 8	Correspondence from Nan Mason, 1927 January
Box 12, Folder 9	Correspondence from Nan Mason, 1927 February-1928
Box 12, Folder 10	Correspondence from Wilna Hervey, 1926-1927
Box 12, Folder 11	Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1922-1927
Box 12, Folder 12	Envelopes, 1924-1928
Box 12, Folder 13-15	Memoirs, circa 1920s (3 folders)
Box 12, Folder 16	Financial Records, 1919-1927
Box 12, Folder 17	Newspaper Clippings, circa 1924-1926