



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Miss America 1951 Papers

NMAH.AC.0888

Craig Orr and Abigail Fine

2006

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Miss America 1951 Papers
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0888
Date:	1910 - 2003
Extent:	4.5 Cubic feet (8 boxes)
Source:	Sports, Entertainment and Leisure, Division of, NMAH, SI Betbeze, Yolande
Language:	English
Summary:	Yolande Betbeze was crowned Miss America in September, 1950. During and after her reign she was influential in both the Civil Rights and Feminist movements. Her papers document her reign as Miss America, her life after Miss America, and the Miss America pageant itself.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated by Yolande Betbeze in 2005.

Separated Materials

The Division of Work and Industry, National Museum of American History holds artifacts related to this collection: the Miss America crown, scepter, and sash of 1950-1951, worn by the donor, and the Miss Alabama sash and Miss America ribbon of 1950-1951.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center, National Museum of American History

The Miss America 1943 [Jean Bartel] Photographs, 1943-1944 (AC0902)

Processing Information

Collection processed by Craig Orr, archivist and Abigail Fine (volunteer), supervised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist, 2006.

Preferred Citation

Miss America 1951 Papers, 1949-2000, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

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Biographical / Historical

Yolande Betbeze, Miss America 1951, was born in 1929 in Mobile, Alabama. Her mother was of Basque ancestry, so Yolande ended up with a foreign sounding name and dark European looks, quite different from the general populace of Mobile. Early on she aspired to become a famous opera singer, and took voice lessons throughout her teenage years. In 1949 she starred as Musetta in Puccini's *La Boheme*, through the Mobile Opera Guild.

In 1950, Yolande entered the Miss Mobile Beauty Pageant, hoping to win and continue to state and national levels to receive a scholarship to study voice in New York City, or even abroad. When she entered the pageant she gave her age as 21, but at her next birthday in late 1950 (presumably her 22nd) she confessed that she had lied about her age. Really, she was 20 when she entered the Miss America pageant, and this was her 21st birthday. She was crowned Miss Mobile, then Miss Alabama. In September 1950, she made her way to Atlantic City to compete for the title of Miss America. Newspapers in Alabama raved about her. Even journalists in the north predicted that Yolande would be crowned the next Miss America. In an interview, pageant director Lenora Slaughter says that from the moment she saw her she felt that Yolande would be crowned the next Miss America. During preliminaries, Yolande won first place in the swimsuit competition, while Miss Connecticut won first place in the talent competition. Nonetheless, Yolande wowed them with her singing. When she won the title of Miss America, her schedule quickly filled with singing engagements.

On September 9th, 1950, Yolande Betbeze was crowned Miss America. She became an overnight success due to her grace, poise, beauty, and talent. However, she had received an education at a convent school, and felt a bit squeamish about 'cheesecake poses' in a bathing suit. Every Miss America had done a swimsuit tour, even though it wasn't in their contracts that they must, and Yolande was expected to follow in their footsteps. But she wanted to be an opera star, not a pin-up girl, she declared. After winning Miss America, she refused to pose in a swimsuit unless she was going swimming.

The Catalina Swimwear Company, a sponsor of the Miss America pageant, did not like Yolande's stance on swimsuits. They contended that the Miss America pageant had become less focused on the beauty of the contestant and more on their talents and personality. They wanted to bring beauty back. They pulled their sponsorship and created a new pageant line which now includes Miss Universe, Miss USA, and Miss Teen USA. This pageant focuses only on the physical beauty of a competitor. Even today there is no talent portion, and even the interview portion has been diluted.

Another issue of the Miss America pageant involved the marriage of a Miss America. Though Yolande had no plans to marry, or even a boyfriend, the papers certainly wanted to know the details surrounding her love-life and ability to marry with the title Miss America. Yolande explained that she received an extra \$4000 for staying single throughout the year, but if she wanted to marry she could ask permission from the 18 pageant directors. "Wouldn't it be easier to wait a year?" she asked.

Her year as Miss America was an eventful one. She traveled throughout the United States, the Bahamas, Mexico, France, and Italy. She met with Congressmen, foreign leaders, opera stars, and famous fashion designers. According to Lenora Slaughter, Yolande had the fullest schedule of any Miss America to that date. Everyone agreed that she had put class into the Miss America pageant.

After her reign, she was succeeded as Miss America by Colleen Kay Hutchins, originally Miss Utah. The two became friends and Yolande was in Colleen's wedding some years later. Yolande took up philanthropic causes—fighting for racial equality in the pageants, for instance. She also marched in civil rights demonstrations, participated in sit-ins, and marched in a feminist demonstration in Atlantic City. In 1954 she married a motion picture and television producer, Matthew Fox. They had one daughter before his death in 1964. After she was widowed, Yolande moved to Georgetown in the District of Columbia, where she lives to this day.

Scope and Contents

Scope and Content: This collection documents the life of Yolande Betbeze who reigned as Miss America 1951. Though the collection focuses heavily on the year of her reign from September 1950 to September 1951, it also includes information about her life before winning the Miss America pageant, the Miss Alabama and Miss America pageants of 1950, and her life post-Miss America. Visual imagery in the collection documents life and fashion in the 1950s through 2000. Newspaper articles offer evidence of the culture of the 1950s. This collection contains newspaper clippings, magazine articles, photographs, awards, and memorabilia of Miss America pageants throughout the twentieth century in the form of booklets, brochures, and paper dolls.

Series 1, Miss America Reign, 1950-1951, 1994, undated, includes newspaper articles, magazine articles, and awards from the House of Representatives, programs and brochures relating to Ms. Betbeze's activities as Miss America. All publicity articles—whether promotional or editorial—are included in this series. Betbeze traveled extensively during her reign, and her trips are documented here. Also included in this series are her visits to military installations, promotion of Miss America pageant sponsors, promotion of her own opera career, and most importantly her verbal attacks against the objectification of women in pageants while she wore the Miss America crown.

Subseries 1, Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1950-1951, undated,

includes newspaper clippings about Betbeze during her reign as Miss America, documenting nearly every event she attended and delving into her love life and home life. The clippings are arranged by month and year from September 1950 through September 1951. The newspaper articles from Betbeze's reign that are without a date are arranged by topic behind the dated clippings. This subseries also includes several articles published in magazines about Betbeze during her reign. The articles are arranged in chronological order by year behind the newspaper clippings.

Subseries 2, Awards, 1950, includes awards given to Betbeze by the House of Representatives after she was named Miss America in Atlantic City, as well as an award by the town of Chickasaw naming Betbeze an honorary citizen.

Subseries 3, Programs and Brochures, 1950-1951, includes mini-photo books of Betbeze from her reign as Miss America, as well as pageant programs from pageants she attended as Miss America. It also includes programs and brochures of events she attended and participated in as Miss America, such as her Coronation Ball and a Symphony in Fashion runway show. The materials are arranged with the photograph books first, followed by pageant programs, then programs from various events.

Subseries 4, Promotional Advertisements, 1950-1951, includes promotional advertisements for Nash Automobile, the Official Car Company of Miss America, and Everglaze Fabric. These advertisements are arranged in chronological order.

Subseries 5, Materials Related to Miss America Reign, 1950-1951, 1994, includes material relevant to Betbeze's reign as Miss America, such as her schedule book from September 1950 to September

1951 and a 1994 interview regarding her life, her reign, and her beliefs. The materials are arranged in chronological order by year.

Series 2, Post-Miss America Reign, 1951-2001, undated, documents Betbeze's life after her reign as Miss America through newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and Betbeze's copy of pageant judging guidelines for Miss America 1957. It also documents the changing view of women from the 1950s through the turn of the twenty-first century. Betbeze pursued a career in opera after Miss America, but this career ended with her marriage to Matthew Fox. Materials also relate to her marriage to Matthew Fox, her relationship with Cherif Guellal, her life in Georgetown in Washington D.C in the 1960s, and her participation in later Miss America pageants.

Subseries 1, Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1952-2001, undated, includes newspaper clippings and magazine articles about Betbeze after her reign as Miss America. They document her relationships, lifestyle, causes, and career. The clippings are arranged chronologically by year. The magazine articles are arranged chronologically by decade behind the newspaper clippings.

Subseries 2, Miss America Activities, 1957, comprises of Betbeze's copy of judging guidelines from the 1957 Miss America Pageant. It includes a schedule of events and the judging criteria for each woman, illustrating the changing perception of women in the United States of America from the 1950s through the twenty-first century.

Series 3, Photographs, 1950-2000, undated, documents Betbeze's life from the 1940s to the turn of the twenty-first century. It includes several photographs from her childhood and teen years. The majority of the series focuses on her reign as Miss America, including photos of her travels, glamour photos, publicity photos, and candid shots. It also includes photographs of Betbeze after her reign. There are negatives for several of the photographs. Photographs are arranged by topic.

Subseries 1, Pre-Miss America Reign, 1949-1950, contains Betbeze's life as a teenager and the Miss Alabama pageant. The photographs are arranged by topic.

Subseries 2, Miss America Reign, 1950-1951, undated, provides visual evidence enhancing the printed materials in the other series. It includes photographs of Betbeze's travels throughout the United States, Europe, Mexico, and the Caribbean. It also includes glamour photographs, candid shots, and publicity events that she attended as Miss America. There are a few photographs of her in a swimsuit. The photographs are arranged by topic.

Subseries 3, Post-Miss America Reign, 1951-2001, includes photographs of Betbeze in later life, especially at Miss America pageants in the 1990s. The photographs are arranged by topic.

Series 4, Materials Related to Miss America Pageants, 1910-2003, undated, documents the institution of the Miss America Pageant and its development throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. It includes memorabilia from Atlantic City, the pageants, and Miss America advertisements. It includes official pageant yearbooks and correspondence to Betbeze regarding the seventy-fifth anniversary of Miss America, including a booklet about the pageant. It also includes *Miss America Through the Looking Glass* (1985), a book documenting the Miss America Pageant from its inception to the 1980s.

Subseries 1, Official Pageant Yearbooks, 1946-2003, comprises of Official Pageant Yearbooks. They illustrate the changing fashions and culture surrounding the pageant. They are arranged in chronological order by year.

Subseries 2, Miss America Memorabilia, 1910-2001, undated, consists of memorabilia of the Miss America Pageant and Atlantic City. The materials include a package for a hairnet from the 1920s, advertisements using the Miss America label for Lucky Strike cigarettes, sheet music for the Miss America and Miss Alabama official songs, *Miss America Through the Looking Glass*, various stickers advertising

the pageant and Atlantic City, Miss America paper dolls, cards and postcards. The memorabilia is arranged in chronological order by year.

Subseries 3, Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Miss America, 1995, includes correspondence between pageant directors and Betbeze regarding the seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Miss America Pageant, as well as a brochure about the pageant. The materials are arranged by type; first is the correspondence regarding the seventy-fifth anniversary, then the brochure advertising Miss America.

Series 5, Yolande Betbeze Personal Papers, 1949-1999, undated, documents life behind-the-scenes through telegrams and letters from friends and fans, invitations and Betbeze's schedule book as Miss America. It includes magazine articles and newspaper clippings from her pre-Miss America years, and the layout of an interview she gave in 1994.

Subseries 1, Personal Correspondence, 1950-1995, undated, consists of personal letters between Betbeze and her friends, including Lenora Slaughter, the head of the Miss America Pageant when Betbeze was Miss America. It also includes fan-mail and autograph requests. The correspondence is arranged chronologically by year.

Subseries 2, Telegrams, 1950-1951, consists of telegrams that Betbeze received as Miss America. They consist of well wishes for her reign, birthday, and Christmas. The telegrams are arranged chronologically by year.

Subseries 3, Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1949-1950, consists of newspaper clippings and magazine articles saved by Betbeze. They include reviews of her performance as Musetta in *La Boheme* in Mobile in 1949 and articles about Matthew Fox. The clippings are arranged chronologically by month and year. The magazine articles are arranged by year behind the newspaper clippings.

Arrangement

The collection is divided into five series.

Series 1: Miss America Reign, 1950-1951, 1994, undated

Subseries 1.1, Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1950-1951, undated

Subseries 1.2, Awards, 1950

Subseries 1.3, Programs and Brochures, 1950-1951

Subseries 1.4, Promotional Advertisements, 1950-1951

Subseries 1.5, Materials Related to Miss America Reign, 1950-1994

Series 2: Post Miss America, 1952-2001, undated

Subseries 1, Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1952-2001, undated

Subseries 2, Miss America Activities, 1957

Series 3: Photographs, 1950-2000, undated

Subseries 3.1, Pre-Miss America Reign, 1949-1950

Subseries 3.2, Miss America Reign, 1950-1951, undated

Subseries 3.3, Post Miss America Reign, 1951-2001

Series 4: Materials Related to Miss America Pageants, 1910-2003, undated

Subseries 4.1, Official Pageant Yearbooks, 1946-2003

Subseries 4.2, Miss America Memorabilia, 1910-2001, undated

Subseries 4.3, Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Miss America, 1995

Series 5: Yolande Betbeze Personal Papers, 1949-1999, undated

Subseries 5.1, Personal Correspondence, 1950-1995, undated

Subseries 5.2, Telegrams, 1950-1951

Subseries 5.3, Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1949-1950

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Beauty contestants
Beauty contests -- United States

Types of Materials:

Advertisements -- 20th century
Awards
Clippings -- 20th century
Interviews
Letters (correspondence) -- 20th century.
Magazines (periodicals) -- 20th century
Paper dolls
Photographs -- 1950-2000
Programs

Names:

Sports, Entertainment and Leisure, Division of, NMAH, SI

Container Listing

Series 1: Miss America Reign, 1994, 1950 - 1951

Subseries 1.1: Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, , 1950 - 1951

Box 1, Folder 1	1950 September, 1862
Box 1, Folder 2	1950 September
Box 12, Folder 1	1950 September
Box 1, Folder 3	1950 October, undated
Box 12, Folder 2	1950 October, 1900, 1910-1915
Box 1, Folder 4	1950 November
Box 1, Folder 5	1950 December, 1910-1925, 1930s
Box 1, Folder 6	1950, 1950
Box 1, Folder 7	1951 January, 1950
Box 1, Folder 8	1951 February, 1950
Box 1, Folder 9	Miss America and the Azalea Trail, 1951 February, 1950
Box 1, Folder 10	1951 March, 1950
Box 1, Folder 11	1951 April, 1950
Box 1, Folder 12	1951 May, 1950
Box 1, Folder 13	Trip to France, 1951 May, 1950s
Box 1, Folder 14	Trip to Italy, 1951 May, 1960s
Box 1, Folder 15	1951 June, 1950
Box 1, Folder 16	Trip to Mexico, 1951 June, 1950
Box 1, Folder 17	1951 July, 1950
Box 2, Folder 1	1951 August, 1950
Box 2, Folder 2	Miss America and Sgt. Moore, 1951 August, 1951
Box 2, Folder 3	1951 September, 1952

Box 2, Folder 4	As Miss America, 1950-1951, 1953
Box 2, Folder 5	Miss America Photographs from Newspapers, 1950-1951, 1953
Box 2, Folder 6	Miss America and Fashion, 1950-1951, 1953
Box 2, Folder 7	Miss America on Television, 1950-1951, 1953
Box 2, Folder 8	Miss America Visits the Military, 1950-1951
Box 2, Folder 9	Miss America and Opera, 1950-1951
Box 2, Folder 10	Miss America Crowns, Judges, 1951
Box 2, Folder 11	1951
Box 12, Folder 5	1950-1951
Box 2, Folder 12	undated
Box 2, Folder 13	Magazine Articles, 1950-1951

Subseries 1.2: Awards, 1950 - 1950

Box 2, Folder 14	Ribbons and Awards from the House of Representatives, 1950
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Subseries 1.3: Programs and Brochures, 1950 - 1951, 1950 - 1951

Box 2, Folder 15	Photo books, 1950-1951
Box 2, Folder 16	Exposition Textile Internationale, 1951
Box 2, Folder 17	Miss Hammond Pageant Program, 1951
Box 2, Folder 18	Miss Arkansas Pageant Program, 1951
Box 2, Folder 19	Steel Pier Souvenir Program, 1951
Box 2, Folder 20	Football Program, 1951
Box 10, Folder 2	Coronation Ball Programs, 1950
Box 10, Folder 3	Symphony in Fashions Program, 1950
Box 11, Folder 1	Miss America Press Book, 1951

Subseries 1.4: Promotional Advertisements, 1950 - 1951

Box 2, Folder 21	Everglaze Fabric Advertisements, 1950
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Box 10, Folder 4 Nash Automobile Advertisements, 1950

Box 12, Folder 3 Everglaze Fabric Advertisement, 1951

Subseries 1.5: Materials Related to Miss America Reign, 1994 - 1994, 1950 - 1951

Box 2, Folder 22 Schedule Book, 1950-1951

Box 2, Folder 23 Interview, 1994

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Series 2: Post Miss America Reign, 1951 - 2000

Subseries 2.1: Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1952 - 2001

Box 3, Folder 1	October, 1951
Box 3, Folder 2	December, 1951
Box 3, Folder 3	1952
Box 3, Folder 4	Trip to Mexico, February 1953
Box 3, Folder 5	"Beauty and the Bandit," April 1953
Box 3, Folder 6	1953-1959
Box 3, Folder 7	1960-1972
Box 3, Folder 8	1980s-1990s
Box 3, Folder 9	2000s
Box 3, Folder 10	Undated
Box 3, Folder 11	1950s
Box 3, Folder 12	1960s
Box 3, Folder 13	1986
Box 11, Folder 4	New York Mirror Magazine, 1957

Subseries 2.2: Miss America Activities, 1957 - 1957

Box 3, Folder 14	Pageant Judging Guide Book, 1957
Box 10, Folder 6	Original Judging Booklet, 1957

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Series 3: Photographs, 1950 - 2000

Box 10

Subseries 3.1: Pre- Miss America Reign, 1949 - 1950

Box 10

Box 6, Folder 1 Pre-Pageant Life

Box 6, Folder 2 Portraits

Subseries 3.2: Miss America Reign, 1950 - 1951

Folder O/S Photograph of All Contestants, 1951

Box 11, Folder 2 Glamour Photographs, 1950

Box 11, Folder 3 Picturegram, 1951

Box 12, Folder 4 Glamour Photograph, 1950

Box 6, Folder 3 Pageant Preliminaries for Talent, Evening Gown and Swimsuit Competition,
1950 September

Box 6, Folder 4 Miss America Coronation, 1950

Box 6, Folder 5 Pageant Photographs, 1950 September

Box 6, Folder 6 Pageant Parade, 1950

Box 7, Folder 1 Parades, 1950-1951

Box 7, Folder 2 Orange Bowl Centerpiece, 1951

Box 7, Folder 3 Nash Automobile, 1950-1951

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Yolande Betbeze, Miss America 1951, wearing crown, standing in front of
1951 Nash automobile [photoprint]

1 Item (10" x 8".)

[Image\(s\): \[Yolande Betbeze, Miss America 1951, wearing crown, standing
in front of 1951 Nash automobile \[photoprint\].](#)

The subject wears a long evening gown and holds a scepter. Photographer
unidentified?

In box 7, folder 3.

Unrestricted research use on site by appointment.

Silver gelatin on paper.

Local Numbers

AC0888-0000001.tif (AC Scan)

Names: Betbeze, Yolande
Miss America Pageant
Nash Motors Company

Topic: Automobiles -- 1950-1960
Beauty contestants
Beauty contests -- United States
Crowns
Evening gowns

Box 10, Folder 5	Yolande Betbeze with Nash Automobile, 1950
Box 7, Folder 4	Trip to Washington D.C, Visiting Senator Boykin, September, 1950
Box 7, Folder 5	21st Birthday
Box 7, Folder 6	Trip to Nassau, 1951
Box 7, Folder 7	Trip to France, 1951
Box 7, Folder 8	Azalea Trail, 1951
Box 7, Folder 9	Visiting the Military, 1951
Box 7, Folder 10	Meeting Pauline Gugelyk, Empress of Detroit, 1951 July
Box 8, Folder 1	Betbeze With Miss Washington, 1951
Box 8, Folder 2	Fashion Show, 1951
Box 8, Folder 3	A Lobster Meal, undated
Box 8, Folder 4	Mobile Cotton, undated
Box 8, Folder 5	Trip to Cuba, undated
Box 8, Folder 6	Trip to Mexico, 1951
Box 8, Folder 7	Visit to Yale, undated
Box 8, Folder 8	Betbeze as Miss America, 1950, 1951
Box 8, Folder 9	Betbeze with Miss America 1952, Colleen Kay Hutchins, 1951
Box 8, Folder 13	Negatives
Box 9, Folder 1	Public Appearances and Radio,
Box 9, Folder 2	Dinner and Dancing,

Box 9, Folder 3 Unidentified

Subseries 3.3: Post Miss America Reign, 1951 - 2000

Box 8, Folder 10 Visiting All-American Football Team,

Box 8, Folder 11 Other Miss Americas and Miss "States"

Box 8, Folder 12 Later in Life

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Series 4: Materials Related To Miss America Pageants, 1910 - 2003**Subseries 4.1: Official Pageant Yearbooks, 1946 - 2003**

Box 3, Folder 15	1946, 1950, 1951, 1957
Box 3, Folder 16	1977, 1980, 1981, 1982
Box 3, Folder 17	1983, 1984, 1985, 1986
Box 3, Folder 18	1987, 1988, 1989, 1990
Box 4, Folder 1	1991, 1993, 1994
Box 4, Folder 2	1995, 1996
Box 4, Folder 3	1999, 2003

Subseries 4.2: Miss America Memorabilia, 1910 - 2001

Box 4, Folder 4	Atlantic City Booklet,
Box 4, Folder 5	Human Hair Net,
Box 4, Folder 6	Lucky Strike Advertisement,
Box 4, Folder 7	Miss America Cards, Lucky Strike Cigarettes,
Box 4, Folder 8	Miss America Sheet Music,
Box 4, Folder 9	Pageant Programs,
Box 4, Folder 10	Pageant Programs,
Box 4, Folder 11	Pageant Programs,
Box 4, Folder 12	"Miss America Through the Looking Glass" booklet,
Box 4, Folder 13	Miss Alabama Pageant Book,
Box 4, Folder 14	Miss Alabama Picture,
Box 4, Folder 15	Miss America Schedules,
Box 4, Folder 16	Miss America Postcards, Cards,
Box 10, Folder 1	Miss America Paper Dolls,
Box 4, Folder 17	Miss America Pageant Tickets,
Box 4, Folder 18	Miss Alabama Publication,

Box 4, Folder 19 "Miss Alabam" Sheet Music,

Box 4, Folder 20 Miss America Stickers,

Subseries 4.3: Seventy-fifth Anniversary Miss America Materials, 1995 - 1995

Box 5, Folder 1 Correspondence,

Box 5, Folder 2 Brochures,

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Series 5: Yolande Betbeze Personal Papers, 1949 - 1999

Subseries 5.1: Personal Correspondence, 1950 - 1995

Box 5, Folder 3	Letters and Invitations,
Box 5, Folder 4	1950-1967
Box 5, Folder 5	1980-1989
Box 5, Folder 6	1990-1994
Box 5, Folder 7	1995
Box 5, Folder 8	Undated

Subseries 5.2: Telegrams, 1950 - 1951

Box 5, Folder 9	1950
Box 5, Folder 10	1950-1951
Box 5, Folder 11	1950-1951

Subseries 5.3: Newspaper Clippings and Magazine Articles, 1949 - 1950

Box 5, Folder 12	1949
Box 5, Folder 13	March, 1950
Box 5, Folder 14	1950 July and August
Box 5, Folder 15	Magazine Articles,

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