

Etta McKay Gillis Papers PC.2062

Quantity: 2 fibredex boxes

Legal title and acquisition information: Gift by Friends of the Archives, 2013.

Arrangement: Chronological within series.

Abstract:

Etta McKay Gillis (1886-1971) was born near Laurinburg, Scotland County to Parthenon Jane McCall and Artemus McKay. The papers contain some one hundred and forty-nine letters, most of which are to Etta. The time frame of the letters includes the eras of the Great Depression and World War II.

Biographical Note and Scope and Contents Note:

Etta McKay Gillis (1886-1971) was born near Laurinburg, Scotland County to Parthenon Jane McCall and Artemus McKay. The time frame of the letters includes the eras of the Great Depression and World War II. The letters contain various exchanges about farm life; crops; sharecroppers; labor shortages; gas, sugar, etc. shortages; women's domestic endeavors such as gardening, canning, sewing; illnesses; community life; the United States' entry into World War II; training and lifestyles of servicemen; and college life for young women at Flora MacDonald College, etc. Etta was especially loyal to her extended family, but also to her alma mater, Flora MacDonald College, and to the Presbyterian Church.

Etta is revealed in the papers and letters as an independent woman who married around the age of fifty-two (circa 1938) to Angus James Gillis, a farmer of Raeford, Hoke County. She then found herself in financial straits when her husband died in 1941. She appears to have subsequently run the farm on her own, and managed with fewer resources than she had anticipated. As a whole, the letters reveal the values, economics, and relationships of a family that had become somewhat dispersed during the Great Depression and the World War II era. The letters indicate concerns with finances, illness, and other matters, yet show strong connections among family members within a family with long roots in rural Hoke, Scotland, and Cumberland counties.

Some noteworthy letters are those from Etta's brother, Arnold Artemus McKay, class of 1913, University of North Carolina, a former U.S. consul, Antofagasta, Chile, who had taught English at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis Md., and who during the World War II era was involved in teaching various schools and training of candidates for the Naval Academy and also military service (at then State College in Raleigh).

Other letters of interest are from Etta's young nieces. Even in turbulent economic times, they (some were college-age) were not reluctant to ask her for sewing assistance and contributions to their college expenses as a supplement to their part-time job earnings and to their parents' contributions (their parents were also under financial duress).

Additional noteworthy letters were from an elderly aunt living in Winston-Salem; two nieces at Flora MacDonald College; and a nephew, a recent graduate of State College, called into U.S. Army service. As a whole the letters reveal the values, economics, and relationships of a family that had become somewhat dispersed during the Great Depression and the World War II era. The letters are often frank and indicate concerns with finances, illness, and other matters, yet show strong connections among family members, in a family with long roots in rural Hoke, Scotland, and Cumberland counties.

Two aunts with whom Etta appeared to have a close relationship include Dora, apparently her deceased mother's sister, Dora McCall Stephenson, of Winston-Salem; and Maggie Wright (Mrs. R. L.) of Laurinburg, N.C.

Subjects:

Great Depression
Farming
Women—20th century—North Carolina
World War, 1939-1945

Personal Names:

Gillis, Etta McKay
McKay, Arnold Artemus
Gillis, Angus James
Geographical Names
Hoke County
Scotland County

Container List: PC.2062.1 and PC.2062.2

Note: Box PC.2062.1 is fully arranged. The second box, PC.2062.2 is not yet fully arranged but may be used as is. It consists of receipts and gin company tickets, form letters from the Presbyterian Church and Flora MacDonald College, statements, estate documents, high school, college, and wedding invitations and announcements, and miscellaneous material.

PC.2062.1 Contents:

Ltrr/sketches to/fr Etta McKay re Garden, 1917-1918 PC.2062.1
Letter to Etta McKay, 1925 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay, 1927 PC.2062.1
Ltrr to George H. McKay fr A.A.McKay, 1929 PC.2062.1
Letters from Etta McKay, 1929 PC.2062.1
Letter to Etta McKay, 1929 PC.2062.1
Letter to Etta McKay, 1930 PC.2062.1
Letter to A. J. Gillis, 1930 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay, 1931 PC.2062.1
Letter to Etta McKay, 1932 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay, 1933 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay, 1934 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay, 1935 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay, 1938 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1939 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, ca. 1939 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1940 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1941 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1942 PC.2062.1
Ltrr/card to John H. McKay fr A.A. McKay, 1942-1943 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1943 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1944 PC.2062.1
Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1945 PC.2062.1
Ltrr to A.A. McKay fr Sgt. Wm. A. McKay Jr., 1945 PC.2062.1

Letters to Etta McKay Gillis, 1946
Notes/cards to Etta McKay Gillis, 1947
Ltrr/note/card to Etta M.Gillis Blue, 1948

PC.2062.1
PC.2062.1
PC.2062.1

Arrangement and description by Fran Tracy-Walls