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Clinton T. Brann Papers

Digital

1891-1963

5 boxes (1.5 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 594



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In 1918, Clinton Melville Tilman Brann, a dentist by training, served with in the 17th Field Artillery of the American Expeditionary Forces in France, a unit cited for gallantry in five critical engagements of the First World War. During his time overseas, Brann maintained an intense correspondence with Rhea Oppenheimer, despite fears that their different religious (he Presbyterian, she Jewish) and family backgrounds would prove an obstacle. After demobilization, Brann returned home and on Sept. 17, 1919, married Rhea. He went on to build a successful practice in dentistry in Iowa, raising a son and daughter. Clinton Brann passed away on Sept 8, 1961, in Orlando, Fla., with Rhea following on December 29, 1987 in Winter Park, Fla.

In two regards, the Brann collection presents an unusual glimpse into families affected by the First World War. First, Brann's letters home offer a sense of his unusual role in the service, as a junior officer and dentist, and second, his letters are marked by his unusual relationship with Rhea Oppenheimer and their concerns over the future prospects for a mixed marriage. The collection also includes a wealth of photographs of the Branns' life together, a family scrapbook, and a handful of mementoes and miscellaneous documents.

See similar SCUA collections:

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Background on Clinton Brann

Born in Knoxville, Iowa, in 1891, Clinton Brann was building a career as a dentist when he was drafted into the 17th Field Artillery of the American Expeditionary Forces in 1917. Deployed to France in the spring 1918, leaving behind his fiancée, Brann provided dental care to front line troops during several of the major campaigns of that year, including the Aisne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne, and Lorraine offensives, spending some time in the trenches himself, earning himself promotion to Captain and an appointment in the Army Dental Corps. For seven months after the Armistice, his regiment remained in Europe as part of the occupation forces, and it was not until the early summer 1919 that Capt. Brann finally returned home to resume his increasingly complicated life.

While overseas, Brann began seriously courting a second woman, Rhea Oppenheimer. Although the two fretted constantly how their families would react to the prospect of a mixed marriage -- he was Presbyterian, she was Jewish -- and worried whether they could ever have a future together, they persisted. By October 1918, their epistolary relationship had grown to the point that Clinton broke off his prior engagement and the couple pressed their families to approve of their plans to marry. When announcing his intentions to his mother, Brann explained that any objections "will do no good whatever," while Rhea took pains to ease tensions with her future mother-in-law, confessing her love for Clinton. Their tactics seem to have worked. Martha Brann replied to say that she had no objection to their union, assuring Rhea she would "make a great Presbyterian," and three months after Brann returned home in the summer 1919, the couple wed with the blessings of both families.

Brann went on to become a successful dentist, eventually becoming President of the Iowa State Dental Society in 1940. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he returned to active duty with the Army, finally retiring in 1948 with the rank of Colonel. The Branns had two children, Barbara (born March 19, 1922) and Vincent born Feb. 19, 1927). Clinton Brann died in 1961 at the age of 70, and was survived by Rhea by twenty-six years.

Scope of collection

In two regards, the Brann collection presents an unusual glimpse into families affected by the First World War. First, Brann's letters home offer a sense of his unusual role in the service, as a junior officer and dentist, and second, his letters are marked by



Clinton Brann, ca.1919

his unusual relationship with Rhea Oppenheimer and their concerns over the future prospects for a mixed marriage. The collection also includes a wealth of photographs of the Branns' life together, a family scrapbook, and a handful of mementoes and miscellaneous documents.

Brann's letters to Rhea while in France (hers to him have not survived) are peppered with personal anecdotes and veiled news, but above all with a young man's desire to return home to see his love. The anguish both felt over what they perceived to be the futility of pursuing a relationship is palpable throughout, as is their deep longing for one another.

Series descriptions

Series 1. World War I

1917-1922

16 folders

Clinton Brann wrote regularly to his wife while serving with the 17th Field Artillery during the First World War, and it appears that Rhea saved most, if not all, of his correspondence. His letters were filled with passionate longing, humorous asides, and good-natured teasing (Clinton seemed to especially enjoy teasing Rhea about all of the French and American girls he met while stationed near the Front), though he occasionally ventures into deeper reflections on the war. His letters provide a small window into what life was like for a junior medical (dental) officer, a very different experience than for many men on the Front, and insight into a time when a difference in creed was considered a significant obstacle.

Series 2. Rhea Oppenheimer Brann

1902-1986

7 folders

Items collected by Rhea Brann, representing artifacts of forty years of her life before and after marriage. The items include an address book, class yearbook, the register from Clinton's memorial service, and materials relating to their wedding.

Series 3. Clinton Brann

1891-1961

6 folders

Materials relating to Clinton Brann's military service and career in dentistry, as well as genealogical information. Also included are a few mementoes collected by Brann, including an Iron Cross brought home from the war.

Series 4. Photographs

1893-1995

9 folders

The photographs in Series 4 are organized in two distinct groups. First is the "Early Marriage Album", which document Clinton and Rhea Brann's life together before approximately 1940. These include family photographs and a few pictures taken in Europe during the First World War. The second set of images, mostly snapshots, document the Branns' life after 1940. Also included is a series of postcards sent home from France during the war, and a few photographs from the 1990s, documenting the family home and the graves of Clinton's parents.

Series 5. Scrapbook

1940s

1 item

An oversized bound volume, Rhea's scrapbook contains a typically wide variety of items, including photographs, newspaper clippings, and other small keepsakes. Among other items is a commencement program for Brann's daughter, Barbara, when she graduated from Grinnell College in 1944. Among the recipients of an honorary degree that day was Senator, soon to be Vice President, Harry S. Truman.

Inventory

Series 1. World War I

1917-1922

16 folders

Brann, Clinton letters to/from Martha Brann

1918-1919

Box 1: 1

Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea

1917-1918 July

Box 1: 2
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1918 Aug.

Box 1: 3
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1918 Sept.

Box 1: 4
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1918 Oct.

Box 1: 5
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1918 Nov.

Box 1: 6
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1918 Dec.

Box 1: 7
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1919 Jan.

Box 1: 8
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1919 Feb.

Box 1: 9
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1919 Mar.

Box 1: 10
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1919 Apr.

Box 1: 11
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1919 May

Box 1: 12
Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea
1919 June

Box 1: 13
Brann, Rhea letters to/from Martha Brann
1919

Box 1: 14
Misc. Letters and Postcards
1918-1922

Box 1: 15
Realia (Brann's dog tag as 1st Lieutenant, D.O.R.C.; Iron Cross)
1918

Box 3
Series 2. Rhea Oppenheimer Brann
1902-1986
7 folders
Address Book
1986

Box 1: 16
Autograph Book
1902

Box 1: 17
"The Girl Graduate"
1911

Box 2: 1
Memorial Book for Clinton Brann
1961

Box 2: 2
News clippings

1917-1961

Box 2: 3

Papers

1915-1982

Box 2: 4

Wedding

1919

Box 2: 5

Series 3. Clinton Brann

1891-1961

6 folders

American College of Dentistry: Certificate of membership

1940

OS 4

Iowa State Dental Society: Certificate of appreciation

1940

OS 4

Legal records

1891-1961

Box 2: 6

Military records

1917-1948

Box 2: 7

Professional records

1937-1945

Box 2: 8

Realia (key chain pendant from Eli Brann, 1902; fraternity pins)

ca.1902-1915

Box 3

Series 4. Photographs

1893-1995

9 folders

Early Marriage Album

1893-1916

Box 2: 9

Early Marriage Album

1920-1922

Box 2: 10

Early Marriage Album

1927-1928

Box 2: 11

Rhea and Clinton Brann Early Marriage Album

1930-1940

Box 3: 1

Postcards and Misc.

1917, 1995

Box 3: 2

Unbound

1940-1942

Box 3: 3

Unbound

1944-1953

Box 3: 4

Unbound

1954-1959

Box 3: 5

Unbound (Photocopies)

1940-1959

Box 3: 6

Series 5. Scrapbook
1940s
1 item
Scrapbook
1940s
OS 4

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

The Clinton Brann collection was donated from the Vincent C. Brann estate, along with Vincent C. Brann's Papers.

Digitized content

The World War I correspondence and other materials have been digitized and may be viewed online through SCUA's digital repository, Credo.

Processing Information

Processed by Micah Schneider, March 2009.

Related Material

See also the papers of Vincent Brann (FS 094), Clinton's son and a Professor of Theater at UMass Amherst.

Language:

English

Acknowledgments

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Copyright and Use (More information)

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Search terms

Subjects

Courtship.
Dentists--Iowa.
United States. Army--American Expeditionary Force.
World War, 1914-1918--Medical care.

Contributors

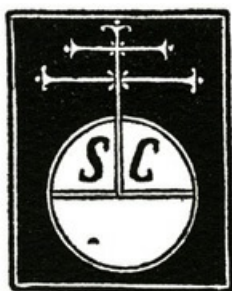
Brann, Clinton. [main entry]
Brann, Rhea Oppenheimer.

Genres and formats

Photographs.
Scrapbooks.

Link to similar SCUA collections

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Photographs
World War I



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