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UMass Amherst Libraries 

# Alida Perreault Papers

1906-1957 (*Bulk:* 1928-1933)

2 boxes (1 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 808



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Alida Capistrant was the eleventh of twelve children in a large French-Canadian family in South Hadley, Massachusetts born on July 24, 1914. Her parents both immigrated from Québec in 1885. On September 30, 1895 they were married in South Hadley. The Capistrant family rented their home until 1912 when they purchased their first house in South Hadley. Alida had an active social life as a teenager and considered attending college or university, but did not pursue any further education until about 1943, when she studied at the Providence Hospital School of Nursing in Holyoke, Massachusetts. Two years later she married James Perreault and the couple had two children, a daughter, Marcia (Perreault) Matthieu and a son, David James Perreault. They lived in South Hadley until 2003, when they moved to Chandler, Arizona to be near their daughter. Alida Perreault died of complications from Alzheimer's disease on April 7, 2006, and James died in 2008. Both are buried in Saint Rose Cemetery in South Hadley next to Alida's family.

Alida's correspondence during her high school years (1928-1932) reveal a young woman with a substantial network of friends and family. The bulk of the collection consists of letters from several friends, including two potential romantic interests. Letters document daily activities, family happenings, and later Alida's interest in a career as a nurse and her leadership role in the South Hadley Women's Club.

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## Family

### Massachusetts (West)

### Women

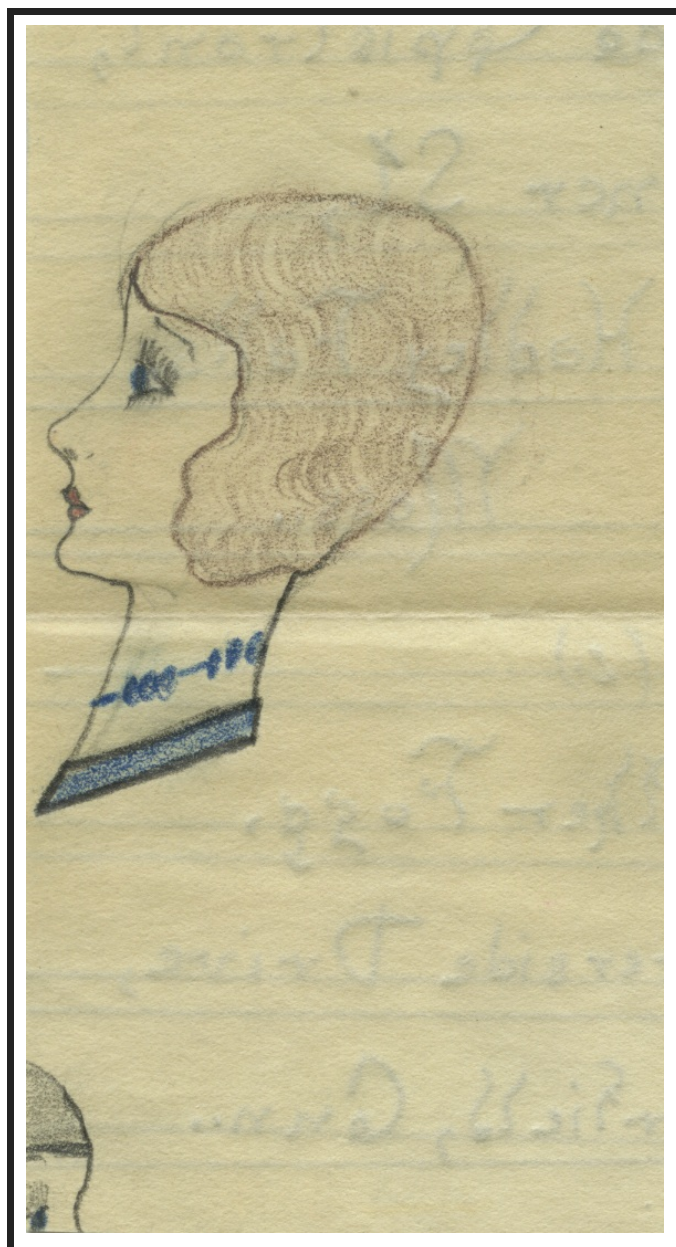
## Background on Alida Perreault

Born into a large French-Canadian family on July 24, 1914 in South Hadley, Massachusetts, Alida Rose Capistrant was the eleventh of twelve children. Her mother, Marie Alida Ratté, and father, Theodore Capistrant, each immigrated from Québec in 1885, though from separate towns. Her parents married on September 30, 1895 in South Hadley. The Capistrant family lived in the South Hadley Falls section of town, near the Connecticut River, and census records show the different homes they rented as their family grew. In 1912, the family purchased a house at 1 Warner St, around the corner from Theodore Capistrant's brother George and his family. The Capistrants enjoyed an extended family network of aunts, uncles, and cousins who lived all over New England. Several cousins lived in Biddeford, Maine, an area with a large Québécois community. Other family lived in Holyoke, Worcester, and Vermont. As members of nearby St. Patrick's Church, a Roman Catholic parish, Alida was involved in parish youth activities, including theater productions.

During her high school, Alida maintained a substantial network of friends and family. She exchanged romantic letters with two young men, William McEwan, attending the Williston Academy in Easthampton, Massachusetts, and Freddie Mitkiewicz, serving aboard the U.S.S. Memphis and U.S.S. Whitney in the U.S. Navy. Alida's adolescence was affected by several significant losses. Her older brother Alcide (1910-1928) died two months after breaking his neck in a diving accident at a local swimming hole. Her sister Emma (1902-1929) died the next year after a long illness. In 1933, her mother passed away, and Alida, as the only single daughter, was needed at home to care for her father and brothers.

After high school, she considered attending college or university, but did not pursue any further education until about 1943, when Alida studied at the Providence Hospital School of Nursing in Holyoke, Massachusetts. Around that time, she reviewed enlistment information for the U.S. Nursing Cadet Corps, which was created in 1943 to guarantee a sufficient domestic nursing workforce during World War II. As many nurses were leaving to join the war effort, domestic hospitals were in need of new staff. The first integrated uniformed U.S. Service Corps, the nursing cadets had their education paid for and committed to working for the duration of the war. By 1945, about 80% of the domestic nursing force was part of the Nursing Cadet Corps. It is not clear if Alida actually joined the Corps.

Alida married James G. Perreault, a young man also from South Hadley Falls in 1945. The couple lived at 1 Warner St, with Alida's father, who passed away in 1956. James worked for the National Blank Book Company in Holyoke. Alida served as president of the South Hadley Women's Club from 1953-1955, and remained involved with the club for over 51 years.



Sketch by Ether Fogg sent to Alida, 1927

Alida and James had two children. Their daughter, Marcia (Perreault) Matthieu, was born in 1946. She attended South Hadley High School, and received a M.A. in Geology. Their son, David James Perreault (1948-1976), died young from aortic valve disease. He was a computer operator for the American Pad & Paper Company of Holyoke and a graduate of Springfield Technical Community College. After retirement, Alida and James were active in the South Hadley Council on Aging, and Alida served on the Board of Directors. The couple lived in South Hadley until 2003, when they moved to Chandler, Arizona near their daughter. Alida died from complications of Alzheimer's disease on April 7, 2006. Her husband James died January 26, 2008. Their graves are in the Saint Rose Cemetery in South Hadley, next to Alida's parents and siblings.

## Scope of collection

The Alida Perreault Papers consist largely of correspondence sent to Alida throughout her life from family, friends, and romantic interests. The correspondence is entirely personal, save for the letters concerning the South Hadley Women's Club. As Alida was president of the club, those letters are largely formal invitations and responses to other women's clubs in neighboring towns. There is also an extensive selection of greeting cards, sent for Christmas, birthdays, and other holidays over the years. There is a small assortment of newspaper clippings about Alida, as well as other ephemera. One interesting set of correspondence is a selection of literature from prospective universities and colleges, sent in 1932 to Alida as a graduating high school senior. The documents provide insight into the typical opportunities offered to young women at the time.

The collection documents an extended French-Canadian family network that traversed the U.S. and Canada border. Discussions of visits between family and friends reveal information about travel, social visiting patterns, and the role of correspondence in maintaining family ties over long distances. As the collection consists largely of letters from a young woman's adolescence, the content shows language, topics of conversation, and interests of a teenager in the early 1930s. The cards and letters from friends and suitors offer a picture of social norms for young adults.

Letters, notes, and postcards to Alida Capistrant are from friends and family, ranging in date from 1924 to 1941, and contain small, daily moments and conversations that reflect growing up, childhood friendship, and the strength of familial ties. Letters detail the death of Alida's grandmother and her sister Emma, summer boyfriends (i.e. Billy, Everett), Alida's homesickness during an extended vacation, and favorite pastimes.

Esther Fogg is Alida's most prolific correspondent from 1926-1933. A childhood friend from Fairfield, Connecticut, she provides frequent updates on her daily life, sometimes multiple times a week. The letters of Edna and Raymond Grenier, and Aurore A. Nadeau span the years 1930 to 1932, and include several greeting cards. All of the letters are sent from Biddeford, Maine, except for two which are sent from Berthierville, P.Q. A notable item in the collection is an event program written in French from Saint-Joseph College sent by Raymond while he was attending the college.

William McEwan, one of Alida's romantic interests, expresses his desire to see Alida, to receive a photograph of her, and for her to write him long letters. Bill describes his life at the Williston Academy and the school's soccer, track, and basketball teams, as well as an extracurricular soccer team called the Worthington Pumps. He also includes short poems, witty phrases, and frequent mentions of his love for her.

The content of letters from Freddie A. Mitkiewicz, Alida's second romantic interest, focus on his life aboard the USS Memphis, and then the USS Whitney, periodically mentioning the gun exercises the crew practices, and the places he visited, including Panama, the Perlas Islands, Guantanamo Bay and Hawaii. He briefly speculates that he will see armed conflict with Japan, and notes that most of the men on board have similar views. In addition to the Navy, he talks about his feelings for Alida.

Alida Capistrant's contributions to the South Hadley Women's Club, in particular her leadership role as president, are well documented in letters between various women's clubs in Western Massachusetts and invitations to club events.

Other materials include an assortment of greeting cards and newspaper clippings, which shed some light on Alida Capistrant's interests. She was very active socially, from acting in plays, to hosting a girls' bicycle team in her home, to traveling. Her religious loyalty and tolerance in her married years are both evident in the clippings.

A small collection of papers from the Walsh family of Ware, Massachusetts are included in this collection. The connection between the Walsh family letters and the bulk of the collection is unclear. The Walsh family papers are all addressed to a Jane O. Walsh or a Jennie O. Walsh. As these are addressed concurrently and to the same address, it is difficult to tell if Jennie and Jane are the same person or not. The letters are from friends and family as well as from a few businesses and organizations. These materials also include receipts for products including a fur coat (purchased in 1920), New York Life Insurance Company dividend slips from the early 1920s (and one from 1928), and a collection of correspondence from the Tilton Seminary (now Tilton School) of Tilton, New Hampshire. Starting in 1921, Jennie O. Walsh's son Gordon Walsh attended the school as a boarding student. This correspondence includes letters from both the principal of the school and his secretary and are mostly focused on recruiting Gordon to the school in 1921 and his first semester there in late 1921.

Finally, other seemingly unrelated materials include two handwritten real estate deeds for property in Brooklyn dated 1906,

several sales letters from the Shepard Stores in Boston, a travel brochure from upstate New York, a religious poem, and several documents.

## Inventory

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Correspondence: colleges and universities

1932

Box 1: 1

Includes letters and promotional materials from Bay Path Institute, Katherine Gibbs School, and Bryant-Stratton College.

Correspondence: family and friends

1924-1927

Box 1: 2

Rathay, Florence: Letter (Pawtucket, R.I.)

1924 July 06

Rathay, Florence: Letter (Brooklyn, N.Y.)

1924 Aug 10

Automobile travel.

Rathay, Florence: Letter

1924 Oct 25

Vaccination.

Rathay, Florence: Letter (St. Johnsbury, Vt.)

1925 May 11

Vaccination.

Rathay, Florence: Letter (St. Johnsbury, Vt.)

1925 Aug 13

Death and burial.

Rathay, Florence: Letter (St. Johnsbury, Vt.)

1925 Aug 29

Life insurance letterheads.

Lane, Ruth: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)

1926 May 24

Dance recitals.

Rathay, Florence: Letter (Pawtucket, R.I.)

1927 Feb 7

Capistrant, Melida: Letter (South Hadley, Mass.)

1927 July 29

Nadeau, Rita: Letter (South Hadley, Mass.)

1927 Aug 7

Sunday school picnics.

Capistrant, Melida: Letter (South Hadley, Mass.)

1927 Aug 1

Isabelle: Letter (South Hadley, Mass.)

1927 Aug 7

Sunday school picnics, courtship.

Rathay, Rose: Letter (Worcester, Mass.)

1927 Oct 11

Emma Capistrant.

Correspondence: family and friends

1928-1930

Box 1: 3

Emmert, Hilde: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)

1928 June 28

Emmert, Hilde: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)

1928 Aug 16  
Rock, Ernie: Letter (Groton, Conn.)  
1928 Aug 22  
Ocean Beach (Conn.), clambakes.

Emmert, Hilde: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)  
1928 Oct 9  
Postmarked from Holyoke High School.

Emmert, Hilde: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)  
1929 Jan 8  
Emmert, Hilde: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)  
1929 Mar 14  
Fires (Elmwood, Mass.)

Rathay, Florence: Letter (Pawtucket, R.I.)  
1929 June 25  
Rathay, Florence: Letter (Worcester, Mass.)  
1930 Feb 2  
Pearl Dionne.

Emmert, Hilde: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)  
1930 May 19  
Rathay, Florence: Letter (Worcester, Mass.)  
1930 May 28  
Pearl Dionne.

Pinet, Marie Louise: Letter (Seine-et-Oise, France)  
1930 July 13  
Pen pals.

Emmert, Hilde: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)  
1930 July 22  
Courtship.

Mary: Postcard (Milford, Conn.)  
1930 Aug 4  
Dionne, Pearl: Letter (New York, N.Y.)  
1930, Sept 21  
Emma Capistrant, death and burial; postmarked from Knickerbocker Hospital.

Rathay, Rhea: Letter (North Grafton, Mass.)  
1930 Oct 19  
Correspondence: family and friends  
1931  
Box 1: 4  
Rathay, Florence: Letter (Worcester, Mass.)  
1931 Feb 24  
Pearl Dionne.

Grenier, Alice: Letter (Orange, Calif.)  
1931 Apr 19  
Orange trees; postmarked from Sisters of Nazareth Convent.

Capistrant, Agnes and Harvey: Letter (Mount Vernon)  
1931 May 20  
Grenier, Alice: Letter (Orange, Calif.)  
1931 July 5  
Signed Sister Huberta; postmarked from Sisters of Nazareth Convent.

Capistrant, Melida: Letter (Holyoke, Mass.)  
1931 July 17  
Rathay, Florence: Letter (Worcester, Mass.)

1931 Aug 26  
Rathay, Florence: Letter (Worcester, Mass.)  
1931 Sept 23  
Pearl Dionne.

Rathay, Florence: Letter (Worcester, Mass.)  
1931 Oct 5  
Wedding invitation.

Correspondence: family and friends  
1932-1941  
Box 1: 5  
Albina: Letter (New York, N.Y.)  
1932 Apr 15  
Broadway Theatre; postmarked from Lenox Hill Hospital.

Albina: Letter (New York, N.Y.)  
1932 May 9  
Social service and race relations; postmarked from Lenox Hill Hospital.

Capistrant, Agnes: Letter (Yonkers, N.Y.)  
1932 July 11  
Pearce, M. C.: Letter (Wolfboro, N.H.)  
1932 July 19  
Everett: Letter (Portsmouth, N.H.)  
1939 July 11  
Golf.

Capistrant, Agnes and Harvey: Letter (White Plains, N.Y.)  
1939 Oct 26  
Hogan, Edythe: Letter (Boston, Mass.)  
1941 July 15  
Esplanade, women employees.

Correspondence: Fogg, Esther  
1926-1927  
Box 1: 6  
Correspondence: Fogg, Esther  
1928-1929  
Box 1: 7  
Correspondence: Fogg, Esther  
1930  
Box 1: 8  
Correspondence: Fogg, Esther  
1931  
Box 1: 9  
Correspondence: Fogg, Esther  
1932-1933, undated  
Box 1: 10  
Correspondence: Grenier, Edna  
1930-1932  
Box 1: 11  
Letter (Biddeford, Me.)  
1930 Sept 13  
Letter (Biddeford, Me.)  
1930 Sept 26  
Letter (Biddeford, Me.)  
1930 Dec 19  
Envelope only.

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)  
1931 Feb 3

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Apr 22

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 July 15

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Sept 28

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Dec 22

Envelope only.

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Feb 4

Correspondence: Grenier, Raymond

1930-1932

Box 1: 12

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1930 Aug 25

Letter (Berthierville, P.Q.)

1930 Sept 18

Letter (Berthierville, P.Q.)

1930 Oct 3

Program: Saint Joseph College

1930 Oct 21

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Jan 20

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Feb 11

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Apr 14

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 June 17

Christmas greeting card (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Dec 22

Christmas greeting card

undated

Correspondence: McEwan, William

1929

Box 1: 13

Letter (Camp Holyoke, Mass.)

1929 Aug 2

Letter (Camp Holyoke, Mass.)

1929 Aug 8

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1929 Oct 14

Written from Williston Academy.

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1929 Oct 18

Written on Williston Academy stationery.

Christmas greeting card

1929 Dec 21

Correspondence: McEwan, William

1930

Box 1: 14

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1930 Feb 7

Written from Williston Academy.

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1930 Feb 24

Written from Williston Academy.

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1930 Mar 5

Written on Williston Academy stationery.

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1930 Apr 5

Written on Williston Academy stationery.

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1930 Apr 28

Written on Williston Academy stationery.

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1930 May 20

Written from Williston Academy.

Letter (Easthampton, Mass.)

1930 July 1

Written from Williston Academy.

Correspondence: Mitkiewitz, Freddie A.

1931 Jan-June

Box 1: 15

Letter (Boston, Mass.)

1931 Jan 14

Letter (Panama City)

1931 Feb 14

Letter (Perlas Islands)

1931 Mar 6

Letter (Guantanamo Bay)

1931 Apr 2

Letter (Newport, R.I.)

1931 June 13

Written aboard the U.S.S. Memphis

Correspondence: Mitkiewitz, Freddie A.

1931 Sept-Dec

Box 1: 16

Letter (Newport, R.I.)

1931 Sept 2

Written aboard the U.S.S. Memphis

Letter

1931 Sept 20

Written on U.S.S. Memphis letterhead.

Letter

1931 Nov 8

Written on U.S.S. Memphis letterhead.

Letter (Boston, Mass.)

1931 Dec 28

Written aboard the U.S.S. Memphis.

Correspondence: Mitkiewitz, Freddie A.

1932

Box 1: 17

Letter

1932 Apr 14

Written aboard the U.S.S. Whitney.



Letter (San Diego, Calif.)  
1932 Aug 20  
Written aboard the U.S.S. Whitney.

Correspondence: Nadeau, Aurore A.  
1930-1931

Box 1: 18

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1930 Sept 10

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1930 Oct 23

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1930 Dec 9

Greeting card (Biddeford, Me.)

1930 Dec 20

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Feb 14

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Apr 13

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 May 11

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 July 8

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1931 Sept 4

Correspondence: Nadeau, Aurore A.

1932

Box 1: 19

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Jan 14

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Apr 25

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Apr 25

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 July 12

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Oct 7

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Nov 8

Letter (Biddeford, Me.)

1932 Dec 21

Greeting card

undated

Correspondence: South Hadley Women's Club

1954

Box 1: 20

Letter: Agawam Women's Club

1954 Jan 5

Letter: American Home Day

1954 Feb 2

Letter: Holyoke Women's Club

1954 Feb 10

Letter: Agawam Women's Club

1954 Oct 10

Letter: 14th District Presidents Club

1954 Oct 10

Letter: Chicopee Falls Women's Club

1954 Oct 21

Letter: Sanborn, Martha (Mrs. Harry Sanborn)

1954 Oct 30

Letter: Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs

1954 Nov 2

Letter: Northampton Women's Club, Inc.

1954 Nov 2

Letter: Chicopee Falls Women's Club

1954 Nov 8

Letter: Helen and Benjamin

1954 Nov 11

Letter: Ramapogue Women's Club

1954 Nov 12

Letter: White, Bette

1954 Nov 16

Letter: Western Massachusetts Women's Club

1954 Nov 29

Correspondence: South Hadley Women's Club

1955-1957

Box 1: 21

Letter: Wilbraham Women's Club

1955 Jan 1

Letter: Chicopee Falls Women's Club

1955 Jan 18

Letter: West Springfield Women's Club

1955 Feb 7

Letter: South Hadley Falls Women's Club

1955 Feb 23

Letter: Hilltop Friends for Forgotten Patients

1955 Mar 9

Solicitation for Northampton State Hospital.

Letter: Beattie, Nellie

1957 May 2

Invitation to attend the Silver Jubilee reunion of the Class of 1932.

Correspondence: United States Cadet Nurse Corps

1943

Box 1: 22

Includes letters and recruitment materials from the U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps.

Deeds: Reeve, James A.

1906

Box 1: 23

Includes 2 copies of real estate deeds for lots in Brooklyn, N.Y. (under the names of Jennie Hastings and Louise P. Reeve), handwritten note and tax payments mailed to James A. Reeve.

Ephemera

1922-1923

Box 1: 24

Includes handwritten prayer, advertisements for The Shepard Stores (Boston, Mass.), and card with a printed statement, and a clipping from a brochure about the Ausable Chasm.

Greeting cards: birthdays

1924-1939

Box 1: 25

Greeting cards: birthdays

1924-1939

Box 2: 1

Greeting cards: birthdays

1924-1939

Box 2: 2

Greeting cards: Christmas

1927-1930

Box 2: 3

Greeting cards: Christmas

1931

Box 2: 4

Greeting cards: Christmas

1932, undated

Box 2: 5

Greeting cards: other occasions

1929-1943

Box 2: 6

Newspaper clippings

1937, 1953, undated

Box 2: 7

Includes clippings about trips Alida Capistrant took, parties she co-hosted or attended, local plays and other events.

Walsh family: correspondence

1919-1929

Box 2: 8

Walsh family: New York Life insurance policies

1919-1929

Box 2: 9

Walsh family: Tilton School

1921-1927

Box 2: 10

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Danielle Kovacs, 2014.

### Processing Information

Processed April 2014 by Simmons GSLIS West students: Ines Arrubla, Jen Bolmarcich, Micha Broadnax, Beth Carron, Jason Fuller, Zachary Giroux, Kenny Ramos, Mark Umstot, and Adrienne Zimmerley.

### Language:

English

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Family--Massachusetts--History

High school students--Massachusetts

Memphis (Cruiser)

Perreault, Alida

South Hadley (Mass.)--History

Williston Northampton School (Easthampton, Mass.)

### Contributors

Perreault, Alida [**main entry**]

Fogg, Esther

McEwan, William

Mitkiewitz, Freddie A.

### Genres and formats

Correspondence

Greeting cards

Invitations

## Link to similar SCUA collections

Family

Massachusetts (West)

Women



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