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University Archives

UMass Amherst Libraries

## Politella Family Papers

1915-2004 (*Bulk:* 1938-1956)

2 boxes (3 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 885



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When Antonio Politella emigrated from Italy to Lawrence, Mass., in 1910, he joined an older half-brother Walter Pollano, but left behind his wife and infant son. Working as a pharmacist under Pollano, Politella was successful enough to reunite his family in 1919, and eventually raised a family of three, all of whom went on to earn undergraduate degrees at Massachusetts State College and dedicate their lives to education. The eldest child, Joseph ('33), served in the Army Air Corps during the Second World War, earned a PhD in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, and taught in eastern religions at Kent State University. Lillian ('42) became a French teacher, while Dario ('47), an aviator during the war, earned his doctorate at Syracuse and taught journalism at UMass Amherst for many years.

The Politella family collection contains correspondence received primarily by Lillian Politella ('42), the bulk of which reflects the impact on the war on both her family and college. Among the letters are dozens written by her brothers Joseph ('33) and Dario

('47) and friend Donald W. Cadigan ('39) while in the service, which are joined by an evocative series from their teacher and mentor, Ray Ethan Torrey. Torrey's letters in particular offer insight into Mass. State College during and after the war and are replete with news about acquaintances and complaints about liberals and current events.

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## Background on Politella family

As a young man 1910, Antonio Politella (1887-1937) left his new wife and infant son in Roccamonfina, Italy (Caserta Province), to settle in Lawrence, Mass., where his older half-brother Walter Pollano was enjoying the fruits of an immigrant's success. An ambitious man who had arrived in 1901, Pollano learned English while working in the mills and studied pharmacy on the side, and by 1909, he struck out on his own, establishing the Lawrence Street Drug and Chemical Company. For a brief period after his arrival, Politella worked in the mills, but joined his slightly older relative as a clerk and (later) assistant pharmacist. Both men were associated with the underground newspaper // *Purgante* and were supporters of the Bread and Roses strike of 1912, supplying striking workers with food, and for his efforts, Pollano earned the nickname "the priest of Lawrence Street."

Politella's fortunes rose enough by August 1919, that he was able to bring over his wife, Caterina Ionta, and their son, Giuseppe (Joseph). The couple immediately continued building their family with the arrival of daughter a Violet Lillian (1920-2015) and second son, Dario (1921-2003). Each of the Politella children graduated from Massachusetts State College and each made their career in education. Joseph (1910-1975) began college at Northeastern before joining the class of 1933 at Massachusetts State College. Under the influence of the charismatic botanist Ray Ethan Torrey, he discovered what would become a lifelong interest in Theosophy, mysticism, and "Eastern" religion, and he was encouraged on to graduate study at Amherst (MA, 1935) and the University of Pennsylvania (PhD, 1938). Like so many of his generation, Politella's infant academic career at Northland College was interrupted by the Second World War. Enlisting in the Army Air Corps in November 1942, he received a lieutenant's commission and was assigned to duty as a classification officer at stateside bases, with a short stay in Panama, earning promotion to Captain. He resumed his academic career in 1946, joining the faculty in Philosophy at Kent State (1946-1973). He was author of four books on mysticism, Buddhism, and Asian religion.

Violet Lillian (1920-2015) followed her brother to Mass State, studying French and graduating in 1942. Lillian taught at American Dependent schools in Japan during the mid-1950s and in schools in Ohio until her retirement in 1985. The youngest of the Politella children, Dario (1921-2003), began undergraduate studies at Calvin College and the Virginia Military Institute, but he too suspended civilian life for the demands of the military. Barely twenty years old, he was commissioned a lieutenant in March 1942 and served as a liaison pilot with the 808th Field Artillery Battalion, earning the Air Medal with oak leaf cluster. During a second stint in the military, he earned the Bronze Star as an aviator in the Korean War. Dario completed his undergraduate career at the University of Massachusetts in 1947, receiving a degree in languages and literature, and went on to earn a doctorate from Syracuse. The author of ten books and dozens of articles, landed on faculty at UMass Amherst, teaching journalism for over twenty-five years until his retirement in 1990.

## Scope of collection

The Politella family collection contains an interesting assemblage of materials associated with an Italian American family from Lawrence, Mass., three of whom studied at Massachusetts State College. About a third of the collection consists of correspondence received by Lillian Politella ('42) and reflecting the impact on the war on both her family and college. Among the letters are dozens written by her brothers Joseph ('33) and Dario ('47) and friend Donald W. Cadigan ('39) while in the service, which are joined by an evocative series from their teacher and mentor, Ray Ethan Torrey. Torrey's letters in particular offer insight into Mass. State College during and after the war and are replete with news about acquaintances and complaints about



Dario, Antonio, Lillian, and Joseph Politella in Amherst, ca.1930

liberals and current events and occasional references to their mutual interest in Theosophy. The most frequent correspondent, Dora B. Fearing, ran a boarding house where Torrey lived in the 1930s and 1940s.

In addition to a number of essays and book manuscripts by Joseph Politella on mysticism and Eastern religions, the collection includes rich photographic content, including a Politella family album from the 1930s and 1940s and two photo albums kept by Lillian Politella while teaching in an American dependent school in Nagoya, Japan (1955-1956).

## Inventory

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Dana (including North Dana)

1897-1964

Box 1: 1

Correspondence: Cadigan, Donald W.

1941-1985

Box 1: 1

Correspondence: Clark, C. C.

1961-1971

Box 1: 2

Correspondence: Fearing, Dora B.

1956

Box 1: 3

Correspondence: Fearing, Dora B.

1957

Box 1: 4

Correspondence: Fearing, Dora B.

1958

Box 1: 5

Correspondence: Fearing, Dora B.

1959-1960

Box 1: 6

Correspondence: Goding, Stowell

1943-1945

Box 1: 7

Correspondence: Hager, Fanny A. (Army Nursing Corps)

1943-1944

Box 1: 7

Correspondence: Mitchell, H. B. (Theosophical Society)

1942

Box 1: 7

Correspondence: Politella, Dario

1944-1945

Box 1: 8

Correspondence: Politella, Joseph

1940-1956

Box 1: 9

Correspondence: Putala, Eugene

1956

Box 1: 10

Correspondence: Torrey, Ray Ethan

1941-1947

Box 1: 11

Correspondence: Torrey, Ray Ethan

1951-1955

Box 1: 12

Correspondence: Wood, B. B.

1940-1941

Box 1: 13

Grocer's Manual [Radio Foods]. Lawrence, Mass.: M. J. Caplan Co.

1936

Box 1: 14

Photograph album: Politella family (Lawrence, Mass.)

1928-1948

Box 2:

Photograph album: Politella, V. Lillian (Nagoya, Japan)

1954-1955

Box 2:

Photograph album: Politella, V. Lillian (Nagoya, Japan), Number 2

1954-1955

Box 2:

Photograph album: Politella, V. Lillian (Nagoya, Japan)

1955-1956

Box 2:

Photographs: Dalai Lama visit to Ann Arbor, Mich.

1979

Box 1: 15

Photographs: Miscellaneous

ca.1915-1957

Box 1: 16

Photographs: Politella, Antonio

ca.1930

Box 1: 17

Photographs: Politella, Caterina and son Joseph

ca.1914

Box 1: 18

Photographs: Politella, Dario

1939-2003

Box 1: 19

Photographs: Politella, Joseph

1921-1973

Box 1: 20

Photographs: Politella, V. Lillian

ca.1938-1960

Box 1: 21

Photographs: Politella, V. Lillian at Middlebury language School

1941

Box 1: 22

Photographs: Politella, V. Lillian in Mexico

1946

Box 1: 23

Photographs: Politella, V. Lillian (snapshot packets)

1948

Box 1: 24

Photographs: Politella, V. Lillian (snapshot packets)

1949-1950

Box 1: 25

Photographs: Politella, V. Lillian in Nagoya, Japan

1956

Box 1: 26

Photographs: Politella, V. Lillian

1981-2004

Box 1: 27

Politella, Ellen Sue: Extracts from "Sue's journal"

1975

Box 1: 43

Politella, Ellen Sue: Lab course in Christianity

1979

Box 1: 28

Politella, Ellen Sue: Offprints of articles

1964

Box 1: 29

Politella, Joseph: Ephemera (includes obituaries)

1968-1980

Box 1: 30

Politella, Joseph: Sermons

1948

1 item

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons

1949

4 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons

1950

1 item

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons

1952

3 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons

1953

2 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons

1955-1957

2 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons

1958-1959

3 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons (undated): A-C

undated

4 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons (undated): D-E

undated

3 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons (undated): F-I

undated

5 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons (undated): L-O

undated

5 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Sermons (undated): R-W

undated

6 items

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Buddhism: A philosophy of the spirit and a way of the eternal. Iowa City: Crucible

1966

Box 1: 31

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Buddhist mysticism with eastern and western comparisons [p.181-326 only]

ca.1964

3 folders

Box 1: 32

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Fragments

ca.1955

Box 1: 34

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Glossary of philosophical terms

ca.1964

Box 1: 34

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Hinduism, its scriptures, philosophy, and mysticism. Iowa City: Crucible

1966

Box 1: 34

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Introduction to philosophy (with Maurice Baum)

ca.1964

Box 1: 35

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Mysticism and the mystical consciousness illustrated from the great religions

1964

Box 1: 36

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Mysticism and the mystical consciousness in world religions

1964

Box 1: 37

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Mysticism and the mystical consciousness in world religions, Chapter 2

1964

Box 1: 38

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Offprints of articles

ca.1964

Box 1: 39

Politella, Joseph: Writings: "Principles of Taoist meditation," Newsletter-Review 2:2

1967

Box 1: 40

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Seven Religions of the World, Part 2: Judaism, Islam, Christianity

1961

Box 2: 41

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Seven Religions, A philosophical and religious interpretation. Part 1: The Religions of India and China

1961

Box 2: 42

Politella, Joseph: Writings: Taoism and Confucianism. Iowa City: Crucible

1967

Box 2: 43

Politella, V. Lillian: Ephemera

ca.1939-1993

Box 2: 44

Politella, V. Lillian: Newspaper clippings

1941

Box 2: 45

Saint Teresa of the Little Flower

undated

Box 2: 46

Scrapbook: Politella, V. Lillian

1933-1939

Box 2:

Washington Buddhist, vol. 1:3, 3:5, 4:1-2, 5:3

1969-1974

4 items

Box 2: 47

Writings: "Vanity, the deep-rooted, and humility, the foundation of a new life

ca.1955

Box 2: 34

Writings: Andrews, Donald A., "Living in an atomic age"

1948

Box 2: 34

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Gift of Norma E. Porras, Nov. 2015.

### Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Dec. 2015.

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use (More information )

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Buddhism--Study and teaching

Hinduism--Study and teaching

Massachusetts State College--History

Massachusetts State College--Students

Mysticism

Theosophy

World War, 1939-1945

### Contributors

Politella Family [main entry]

Torrey, Ray Ethan, 1887-1956

### Genres and formats

Photograph albums

Photographs

Scrapbooks

### Link to similar SCUA collections

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Photographs

Religion

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World War II



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