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Sarah J. Swift Papers

1890-1942

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A Quaker and philanthropist from Worcester, Mass., Sarah J. Swift was a noted supporter of Friends' missions in Palestine and Jamaica for over half a century. The wife of D. Wheeler Swift, an innovator in the manufacture of envelopes, Swift began to support the Friends' foreign missions by the 1890s, becoming a major benefactor of the Eli and Sibyl Jones Mission and girls' school in Ramallah and of the small Quaker mission at Buff Bay, Jamaica.

The Swift papers contain a thick series of letters from the Eli and Sybil Jones Mission in Ramallah, Palestine, documenting Quaker missionary activity there between 1890 and 1942, with a much smaller series of letters relating to the mission at Buff Bay, Jamaica. The missionaries' correspondence -- including circular letters to supporters and other letters addressed to Swift personally -- touches on school operations and local events in Palestine and Jamaica. Of particular note are letters discussing the work at Ramallah around the turn of the twentieth century and several letters discussing the hardships of wartime (and recovery

from war).

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Background on Sarah Swift

A Quaker and philanthropist from Worcester, Mass., Sarah J. Swift was a noted supporter of Friends' foreign missionary activity for over half a century. Born in North Dartmouth, Mass., on Nov. 16, 1846, Swift was the last of six children born to Isaac Rushmore Gifford (1787-1878), an investor in whaling, and his second wife Phebe (1803-1903). The deep attachment to the principles of the Society of Friends that Sarah inherited from her parents, both of whom were ministers associated with the Dartmouth Monthly Meeting, were strengthened by her education at the Friend's Boarding School in Providence, R.I.

On Dec. 26, 1872, at the age of 26, Sarah Gifford married Daniel Wheeler Swift, a Quaker from West Falmouth, Mass., and an innovator in the envelope making industry. Wheeler Swift had moved to Worcester in 1864 to work under James Greene Arnold, a pioneer in the industry. Ambitious and with an aptitude for mechanical things, he lured his brother Henry to join him in Worcester, and together the two began experimenting with improvements to the equipment they were using, developing their own designs and revolutionizing the industry in the process. Within a few short years, the brothers had secured a string of patents for innovations in envelope making, including for embossing valentine envelopes and, most importantly, for an inexpensive, high-volume envelope-folding machine (1871) and a self-gumming machine for sealing envelopes (1875). The Swifts became manufacturers themselves in 1884, and even though many of their patents were controlled by their previous employers, the firm of Logan, Swift, and Brigham Co., grew to become the largest envelop-making firm in the United States. By the end of the century, Swift had consolidated several companies into his own United States Envelope Company and was considered among Worcester's moneyed elite. He left an estate of nearly \$300,000 at his death in 1910.

Sarah Swift's philanthropic activities rose with her fortunes. Always possessed of a strong social conscience, she supported a range of causes, especially in education, and served on the Board of the Worcester Children's Friend Society and as Trustee of the Obadiah Brown Benevolent Fund, among other organizations. Within the Society of Friends, she served on the Permanent Board and School Committee of the New England Yearly Meeting, as an elder and Clerk in the Worcester Meeting, and on a full slate of committees, including the Finance Committee, Building Committee, Cemetery Committee, and General Care Committee.

Foreign missions, however, were a particularly favored cause for Swift, especially the missions and schools in Ramallah, Palestine (then Syria) and Buff Bay, Jamaica. In Ramallah, Swift became a primary benefactor of the school in 1869 by Eli and Sybil Jones, the aunt and uncle of the great Quaker writer Rufus M. Jones. Though never numbering more than five at a time, the missionaries there established a regular meeting, were involved in the work of translating, printing, and distributing Bibles, and most importantly, they maintained a girls' school (founded 1869) and Boys' Training Home (founded 1901 and opened in 1918) that continue to the present. The mission in Jamaica dates back to 1898, and included a school for instruction in domestic arts and home keeping for both Jamaican and East Indian girls.

Sarah Swift died on Nov. 20, 1942, and is interred at the Friends Cemetery in West Falmouth, Mass. A building at the girls' school in Ramallah was named in her honor.

Scope of collection

The Swift papers contain a thick series of letters from the Eli and Sybil Jones Mission in Ramallah, Palestine, documenting Quaker missionary activity there between 1890 and 1942, with a much smaller series of letters relating to the mission at Buff Bay, Jamaica. The missionaries' correspondence -- including circular letters to supporters and other letters addressed to Swift personally -- touches on school operations and local events in Palestine and Jamaica. Of particular note are letters discussing the work at Ramallah around the turn of the twentieth century and several letters discussing the hardships of wartime (and recovery from war). Among the handful of other letters in the collection is an excellent letter from M.M. Bailey from the American Friends Service Committee regarding his travels in post-World War I Germany with the intention of alleviating hunger in Europe.

Inventory

Bailey, M. M.

1920

1 item

Box 1: 1

Friends School (Providence, R.I.): Appeal for funds

1900-1901

2 items

Box 1: 2

Jamaica: Coney, James A.

1941

1 item

Box 1: 3

Jamaica: Historical sketch of Friends' Jamaica Mission

ca.1921

1 item

Box 1: 4

Jamaica: Published material

1905

2 items

Box 1: 5

Jamaica: Singh, Marion Balby

1939

1 item

Box 1: 6

Jamaica: Swift, H. Alma

1918

1 item

Box 1: 7

Jamaica: Vincent, Charles S.

1939-1940

7 items

Box 1: 8

Jamaica: Vincent, Charles S.

1941-1942

10 items

Box 1: 9

Jamaica: White, Mary E.

1941

4 items

Box 1: 10

Published material

1901-1903

3 items

Box 1: 11

Ramallah: Abdoo, Sultany

1900

1 item

Box 1: 12

Ramallah: Aydelotte, Phoebe S.

1902

1 item

Box 1: 13

Ramallah: Bailey, Hannah J.

1902

3 items

Box 1: 14

Ramallah: Bailey, Moses

1920

1 item

Box 1: 15

Ramallah: Boys' Training School

1901

3 items

Box 1: 16

Ramallah: Crossman, George L.

1902
1 item
Box 1: 17
Ramallah: Eli and Sybil Jones Mission letters
1890-1898
3 items
Box 1: 18
Ramallah: Fox, Marshall D.
1940
1 item
Box 1: 19
Ramallah: Gabriel, Katie
1941
1 item
Box 1: 20
Ramallah: Grant, Almy C.
1903
1 item
Box 1: 21
Ramallah: Grant, Elihu
1918
1 item
Box 1: 22
Ramallah: Hadley, Ross W.
1918
1 item
Box 1: 23
Ramallah: Hussey, Timothy B.
1902-1910
6 items
Box 1: 24
Ramallah: Jones, Alice W.
1910-1941
10 items
Box 1: 25
Ramallah: Jones, Marion
1911
2 items
Box 1: 26
Ramallah: Kelsey, A. Edward and Marion
1917-1922
6 items
Box 1: 27
Ramallah: Kelsey, A. Edward and Marion
1939
16 items
Box 1: 28
Ramallah: Kelsey, A. Edward and Marion
1940
19 items
Box 1: 29
Ramallah: Kelsey, A. Edward and Marion
1941 Jan.-June
11 items
Box 1: 30
Ramallah: Kelsey, A. Edward and Marion
1941 July-Dec.
10 items
Box 1: 31

Ramallah: Kelsey, A. Edward and Marion

1942

12 items

Box 1: 32

Ramallah: Kelsey, Irving

1902

1 item

Box 1: 33

Ramallah: Metcalfe, Edna M.

1911

1 item

Box 1: 34

Ramallah: Published material

1901-1907

2 items

Box 1: 35

Ramallah: Rosenberger, A.

1910-1911

4 items

Box 1: 36

Ramallah: Rowntree, Wilfrid and Della D.

1896-1899

7 items

Box 1: 37

Ramallah: Rowntree, Wilfrid and Della D.

1900

3 items

Box 1: 38

Ramallah: Rowntree, Wilfrid and Della D.

1901-1902

12 items

Box 1: 39

Ramallah: Rowntree, Wilfrid and Della D., 'Does Missionary woprk pay?'

1902

1 item

Box 1: 40

Ramallah: Swift, Sarah J. (drafts sent)

1901-1902

12 items

Box 1: 41

Ramallah: Swift, Sarah J. (drafts sent)

1903-1904

8 items

Box 1: 42

Ramallah: Swift, Sarah J. (drafts sent)

1904-1905

20 items

Box 1: 43

Ramallah: Totah, Khalil

1919

3 items

Box 1: 44

Ramallah: Totah, Khalil and Eva

1939-1941

5 items

Box 1: 45

Ramallah: Totah, Selim

1920

2 items

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Part of the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends Records, April 2016.

Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Aug. 2016.

Bibliography

On Sybil Jones, founder of the mission in Ramallah, see *Notable American Women*, vol. 3.

An obituary for Sarah Swift appears in the *Falmouth Enterprise* (Nov. 27, 1942): 9

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

Jamaica--History--20th century

Missionaries--Jamaica

Missionaries--Palestine

Palestine--History--20th century

World War, 1914-1918

World War, 1939-1945

Contributors

Swift, Sarah J. [main entry]

Eli and Sybil Jones Mission (Ramallah, Palestine)

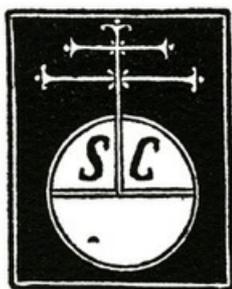
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