

Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers

MC 2

Finding aid prepared by Jessica Hoffman.

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Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center

2015 October 20

Table of Contents

Summary Information.....	3
Biography/History.....	4
Scope and Contents.....	5
Administrative Information.....	6
Related Materials.....	7
Controlled Access Headings.....	8
Collection Inventory.....	10
Series I: Correspondence.....	10
Series II: Writings.....	11
Series III: Other records.....	12

Summary Information

Repository	Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center
Creator	Kite, Elizabeth Sarah, 1864-1954
Title	Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers
Call number	MC 2
Date [bulk]	1890-1935
Date [inclusive]	1865-1954
Extent	1.1 linear feet (; 3 boxes)
Language	English

Language of Materials note Materials are in English and French.

Abstract Elizabeth Sarah Kite (1864-1954) was a teacher, social scientist, historian, author, and archivist. Born in Philadelphia to Quaker parents, Kite was educated at Westtown Boarding school and the Philadelphia Friends' Select School; and then studied extensively in Europe. In 1906, she converted to Catholicism, after her experiences with French Catholics. From 1909 to 1918, Kite was employed in the research laboratory at the Vineland Training School, and conducted research in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. She translated *Development of Intelligence in Children* and *The Intelligence of the Feeble-Minded* by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon (translation published 1916). She also researched and published on various historical topics, in particular the influence of French participation during the American Revolution, and served as the archivist for American Catholic Historical Society from 1932 to 1949. Kite became the first laywoman to receive an honorary doctorate of literature from Villanova

University in 1933. The Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers date from 1865 to 1954, with bulk dates of 1890 to 1935, and document the life and literary endeavors of Elizabeth Sarah Kite. This collection contains mostly correspondence, including Kite family letters, as well as ephemera, poems, research notes, autobiographical writings, and drafts and published copies of articles written by Kite.

Cite as:

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers (MC 2), Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center.

Biography/History

Elizabeth Sarah Kite (1864-1954), a teacher, social scientist, historian, author, and archivist, was born in Philadelphia to Quaker parents (James and Mary Anna [Bonwill] Kite), and had two older siblings (John Alban and Anna Huldah). The family moved to a farm in Chester Hill, Ohio (referred to as “Orchard Place” in this collection) in 1867, and ran a strict Quaker household. It was at Orchard Place that Kite was able to cultivate her lifelong interests in history (due to her father’s library) and botany (due to her wildflower garden). Kite’s childhood on the farm was clearly a happy one, punctuated by visits from her maternal aunt (Huldah Bonwill), who had been sent by the Committee on Indian Affairs of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends to work with Native Americans west of the Mississippi after the Civil War. According to Kite’s memoirs, Huldah had a significant impact on Elizabeth’s sense of social consciousness and “[opened] to me the outside world...”. In 1876, Kite was sent to Westtown Boarding School in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where most of the Kite family had been educated. Her time at Westtown was short (only two years), as she had trouble adjusting to the rigors of boarding school life. Soon after, she went to live in Philadelphia with her Aunt Huldah and attended the Philadelphia Friends’ Select School (a day Quaker school).

Kite taught in Philadelphia Quaker schools from 1886 to around 1892. During this time, Kite’s mother, sister, and brother passed away unexpectedly. In 1892, Kite accompanied her Aunt Huldah on a trip west. While on this trip, Kite took summer courses in botany and geology in Colorado Springs. In 1895, Kite traveled to Europe, where she studied in Germany and Paris until 1897. While in Europe, her sister’s husband and her brother’s wife both passed away, leaving Kite responsible for her five nieces and nephews, whose education she oversaw for the next few years (while she pursued her own education and teaching career). In 1904, Kite took her niece, Albanæ (her late brother John’s daughter; nicknamed

Bonnie), to be educated in England, while Kite continued her studies in London and Paris. While studying history at the Sorbonne, Kite became interested in the role that France played in assisting America during the Revolutionary War. This topic was one that she studied and wrote about extensively throughout her life.

While in England in 1906, after encounters with Catholics in France, Kite converted to Roman Catholicism. She would remain a devout Catholic for the rest of her life. By 1909 Kite had returned to the United States and began working in the research laboratory of the Vineland Training School in Vineland, New Jersey. The Vineland Training School specialized in the education of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and was one of the first facilities to conduct formal research in the field of mental deficiency in the United States. Kite performed field research in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, specifically on the “Pineys,” which were a group of people who were alleged to be “feeble minded” due to their inbreeding and isolated lifestyle. Her work informed a book on the Kallikak family (a large and well-known family of so-called “Pineys”), published by Henry H. Goddard, and also directly influenced the state’s treatment of its mentally disabled residents. During this time, she also translated into French two volumes by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon entitled *Development of Intelligence in Children* and *Intelligence of the Feeble-minded*. It was also during this time that her own scholarship of the French involvement in the American Revolution flourished. Between 1909 and 1918, Kite published eight books on the subject, including such notable figures as General Lafayette, Pierre Beaumarchais, and Pierre Charles L’Enfant. The year 1933 brought two prestigious recognitions: a Cross of the Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur from the French government, and an honorary doctorate in literature from Villanova University.

From 1932 to 1949, Kite served as the archivist for the American Catholic Historical Society in Philadelphia. She passed away in 1954 at the age of 89 in Wilmington, Delaware, and is buried at the Friends Burial Ground in Philadelphia.

Bibliography

Scanlon, Jennifer, and Shaaron Cosner. *American Women Historians, 1700s-1990s: A Biographical Dictionary*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996. Google Books. Web. 14 Oct. 2015.

Women’s Project of New Jersey, Inc. *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women*. Ed. Joan N. Burstyn. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997. Google Books. Web. 14 Oct. 2015.

Scope and Contents

The Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers date from 1865 to 1954, with bulk dates of 1890 to 1935, and document the life and literary endeavors of Elizabeth Sarah Kite. This collection contains mostly correspondence, including Kite family letters, as well as ephemera, poems, research notes, autobiographical writings, and drafts and published copies of articles written by Kite. Counted among her published works found in these files are *The Catholic Part in the Making of America, 1565-1850*, as well as works from *Commonweal* and *The Ecclesiastical Review*. A few materials concerning the American Catholic Historical Society

in Philadelphia representative of her duties as the archivist are also included. Researchers should note that administrative notes about this collection indicate that a personal diary was part of the collection, but was not present at the time of processing; and that, as per a note from the American Catholic Historical Society in the collection, an envelope of Kite family photographs was removed from the collection—these photographs can be found in the photograph collection (“Individuals—Secular,” 100.2.2, Kite, Sarah Elizabeth).

This collection is divided into four series: “I. Correspondence, 1865-1954,” “II. Writings, 1909-1950,” and “III. Other records, 1835-1950.”

Series “I. Correspondence” dates from 1865 to 1954 and documents the relationships between various members of the Kite family. Included here are letters from Kite to her family; letters to Kite from Kite’s parents (James and Mary Anna Kite), paternal grandfather (John Letchworth Kite), siblings (John Alban and Anna Huldah Kite), nieces and nephews (Albanae, Joshua, James, Saint Alban), colleagues, and acquaintances in Europe (mainly France); letters from Kite’s paternal grandfather to his sister, children, and grandchildren, and from Kite’s parents to their children. Kite is referred to alternatively as “Tante,” “Matuti,” or “Matutina” in letters from her nieces and nephews; as “Lizzie” in letters from Kite’s parents and siblings; and Kite signs her own letters as “Lizzie” or “Bessie.” Correspondence from the Kite family is written in the Quaker “plain style” and uses Quaker dates in the “new style”. A significant portion of the letters to Catholic acquaintances (priests, nuns, etc.) in Europe are in French and have not been examined closely or translated by the processor. This series is arranged chronologically.

Series “II. Writings” dates from 1909 to 1950 (with bulk dates of 1930 to 1945) and is comprised of articles (typescript and published copies) and autobiographical writings by Kite. Included in this series are articles written for the *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society* and *The French American Review*, as well as her *Catholic Part in the Making of America, 1565-1850*, which was used in Catholic schools. The autobiographical writings offer a detailed and intimate look into Kite’s life as well as the history of the Kite family. This series is arranged chronologically.

Series “III. Other records” dates from 1835 to 1950 (with bulk dates of 1900 to 1930) and documents Kite’s literary and scholarly endeavors; her personal life, interests, and faith; and her research activities. Included here are miscellaneous clippings, pieces of correspondence, research materials, transcriptions, notes, poems, ephemera, and awards that Kite received during her career. This series is arranged chronologically.

This collection documents Kite’s relationship with her family, her literary and scholarly endeavors, philanthropic efforts to aid Catholic clergy abroad, and faith as a devout Catholic convert. It would be of particular interest to scholars of the Quaker Kite family in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Nantucket, and the Catholic Church in France following World War I.

Administrative Information

Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center

2015 October 20

Finding aid prepared by Jessica Hoffman.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

Copyright restrictions may apply. Please contact the Archives with requests for copying and for authorization to publish, quote or reproduce the material.

Custodial History note

Accession number 1990.002

Existence and Location of Copies note

Digital reproductions of the Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers are available at: <http://digital.library.villanova.edu/Collection/vudl:246243>

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers, Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

Separated Materials note

Researchers should note that administrative notes about this collection indicate that a personal diary was part of the collection, but was not present at the time of processing; and that, as per a note from the American Catholic Historical Society in the collection, an envelope of Kite family photographs was removed from the collection—these photographs can be found in the photograph collection (“Individuals—Secular,” 100.2.2, Kite, Sarah Elizabeth). Additionally, an issue of the *Training School Bulletin*, which contains a short memorial piece about Kite after her death, was removed from this collection and placed in the printed materials collection (P018.353).

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia. American Catholic Historical Society .

Form/Genre(s)

- Clippings
- Correspondence
- Manuscripts
- Postcards
- Religious poetry

Geographic Name(s)

- France
- Philadelphia (Pa.)

Personal Name(s)

- Geoffroy, Theophile, 1870-1946
- Kite (Cope), Anna Huldah, -1888
- Kite, James, -1917
- Kite, John Alban, -1891
- Kite, John L. (John Letchworth), 1798-1878
- Kite, Mary Anna, -1889

Subject(s)

- Catholic Church
- Catholic theological seminaries--France--Bethelainville
- Catholic women
- Conversion

- Quakers
- Westtown Boarding School

Series I: Correspondence

Collection Inventory

Series I: Correspondence, 1865-1954.

	Box	Folder
Kite family correspondence, 1865-1877, undated.	1	1
Correspondence from family to Elizabeth, 1872-1889, 1921, 1929-1941, undated.	1	2
Kite family correspondence, 1877, 1883, 1909, 1954, undated.	1	3
Kite family correspondence, 1878-1889, undated.	1	4
Correspondence from Elizabeth to family, 1884-1886, 1889, 1891, 1894, 1897, 1907, 1925, undated.	1	5
Correspondence from various acquaintances abroad, 1908, 1920, 1921, 1926, 1927, 1929-1934, undated.	1	6
Correspondence from various others, 1916, 1917, 1924, 1930, 1933-1934, undated.	1	7
Correspondence from Theophile Geoffroy, 1920-1924.	1	8
Correspondence from Soeur St. Gabriel, 1920-1927.	1	9
Correspondence regarding French seminaries and publication in the <i>Ecclesiastical Review</i> , 1921 January-March.	1	10
Correspondence from Mary Eliza Starbuck, 1921, undated.	1	11

Series II: Writings

Correspondence from Sister Rose Benedicta (including two photographs), 1927, 1929, 1930.	1	12
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Correspondence from Elizabeth to unknown recipients, undated.	1	13
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Series II: Writings, 1909-1950 (Bulk, 1930-1945) .

	Box	Folder
Published writings, including <i>Records of the American Catholic Historical Society</i> , 1909, 1928, 1932, 1934, undated.	1	14
Manuscript and published copy of "From Twilight into Day", 1916.	2	1
Manuscript, "Short Biographical Notice of the Life of our Late Lamented Lydia Bassett Kite", circa 1930.	2	2
Published writings, including <i>The French American Review</i> and <i>Catholic Part in the Making of America</i> , 1931, circa 1936, 1948, 1950.	2	3
Manuscript versions of various articles, circa 1936, undated.	2	4
Manuscript copies of various writings, notes, and transcriptions, circa 1930s, undated.	2	5
Reprints of articles publishing in <i>The Picket Post</i> , circa 1945.	2	6
Manuscript of autobiography, pages 1-148, undated.	2	7
Manuscript of autobiography, pages 149-409, undated.	2	8
Additional autobiographical writings, undated.	2	9

Series III: Other records

Series III: Other records, 1835-1950 (Bulk, 1900-1930) .

	Box	Folder
Newspaper clippings from <i>The Catholic Herald</i> and others, 1835, 1837.	2	10
Correspondence, postcards, and various notes, 1878, 1907-1909, 1920, 1930, undated.	2	11
Awards, including from the Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur, 1912, 1923, 1933, 1945.	3	1
Apostolic benediction and plenary indulgence from Pope Benedict XV, circa 1919.	3	2
Notes, poems, photographs, ephemera, 1926, 1930, 1931, undated.	3	3
Research materials, notes, transcriptions, mostly regarding King Louis XVI, 1931, undated.	3	4
Envelope containing various pieces of correspondence and reproductions of prints, 1949-1950.	3	5
Research materials (facsimiles), undated.	3	6