

Ellen P. Smilie (1849-1933)
Trust Records, 1870-1953 (bulk: 1937-1953)
Doc 569, MSA 679

Introduction

This collection contains estate, business, investment, and personal papers and account books connected to the Ellen P. Smilie Trust, established in 1932. It chronicles the efforts of trustees George L. Hunt, Harrison G. Woodruff, and George H. Armidon to carry out Mrs. Smilie's wish for the almost \$100,000 residual in her and her husband's estate to be used for the benefit of local schools and "the young people of Montpelier." The entire collection spans from Melville and Ellen Smilie's marriage license in 1870 to the trustees' final letters in 1953, with the bulk dating from 1937 to 1953. The collection was transferred to the Vermont Historical Society by the Vermont State Archives in 1999 because the collection did not constitute records of the State of Vermont. The collection is housed in one records center box and one archival flip top box; it consumes 1.25 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Note

Melville Earl Smilie was born in Cambridge, Vermont, on August 21, 1844, the son of Earl and Matilda Bolton (Thurston) Smilie. Melville Smilie attended the Underhill Academy, a college preparatory school, but his college career at the University of Vermont was cut short by two years due to poor health. In 1864, he came to Montpelier to study law under Henton and Reed. He was admitted to the Washington County bar in 1866. He practiced law in Montpelier for one year and in Waterbury until 1874. His legal career was marked by appointments to the post of State's attorney (1868-1870) and the Montpelier City Court (1895-1905).

Smilie held several public offices; first serving as deputy county clerk in 1865, then returning in 1875 to hold the county clerkship until 1912, when he resigned due to his advanced age. He was a Montpelier justice of the peace and city auditor, a 5-year Montpelier school board member, a Vermont Mutual Fire Insurance Executive Management Board member, presiding trustee of Heaton hospital, director and trustee of the Montpelier Savings Bank Trust and Company, president of the American Fidelity company, and president of the T.W. Wood Art Gallery in Montpelier. He was principal of Waterbury graded school for two years, trustee of the Vermont State Library, a member of the Aurora Masonic lodge and a post master of the Blue Lodge, and a one-time president of the Village of Montpelier (before it received its charter as a city). Smilie married Ellen Pinneo of Bolton on May 26, 1870, and the couple had two children: Mabel (1871-1872) and Melville Earl, Jr. (1878-1927). Melville E. Smilie, Sr., died unexpectedly at a speaking engagement in Jeffersonville, Vermont, on August 27, 1919.

Ellen Pinneo Smilie was born on December 19, 1849, in Bolton, Vermont, to Heman H. and Beulah Ann (Dennison) Pinneo. The Pinneos were among the earliest settlers in Bolton; Bolton's Pinneo Brook is named after Daniel Pinneo, who arrived there

in the 1790s. Daniel provided land for the Pinneo School (later called the Pinneo Flats School) in District 1, which was demolished in the 1927 Flood and replaced by the Bolton Memorial School: it is this school to which Ellen pledged support in her 1932 will.

Ellen P. Smilie was an antique china and furniture collector. She had a wide acquaintance with dealers and patrons of other states and was regarded as somewhat of an authority on the subject. She was also an avid collector of books and belonged to a State Street book club, although most of its members had died by 1933. She was an enthusiastic student of French and owned many books written in that language.

George L. Hunt (1878-1954) and Harrison G. Woodruff (1871-1949) were appointed as trustees of the Ellen P. Smilie Trust in Mrs. Smilie's will. When Mr. Woodruff died, George H. Amidon (1904-1976) was appointed to succeed him as trustee. Woodruff was Vice President of the Montpelier Savings Bank & Trust Company; George L. Hunt was a lawyer. Mr. Amidon was on a committee investigating potential sites and costs for the new Montpelier High School in 1952, a salient fact considering the Smilie Trust gave \$52,000 to the Building Fund three years later. Mr. Amidon also served as Vermont State Treasurer from 1949-1965.

Scope and Content

The collection's earliest documents date from when Ellen and Melville E. Smilie were alive (Folders 1-2). Items of interest include the Smilies' 1870 marriage license, a photo of the interior of their home, and an undated photo of two babies, apparently twins, found in one of Harrison Woodruff's daybooks (Folders 19-23). Folder 2 contains land and mortgage deeds documenting Mr. Smilie's purchase of several properties in Montpelier, Barre, and Edgartown, Massachusetts. His acquisitions included a Green Mount Cemetery plot, the "Selina" block on the corner of School and Elm Streets, and the "Hillside" block near Hillside avenue in Montpelier. The latter two continued to be owned by the Smilie Estate until 1952. There is also a deed from Melville, Jr., to his mother in which he grants her all of his interest in his father's real estate for the sum of one dollar.

Folder 2 also contains a Vermont Mutual Fire Insurance policy brochure and several land tax forms, insurance receipts, investment letters and bond certificates addressed to Mrs. Smilie. There is also a letter from her to Woodruff concerning an insurance payment.

Folders 3-5 contain posthumous documents dealing with the appraisal, rent, and maintenance of the Ellen P. Smilie Trust's assets, particularly its real estate. Items of interest in Folder 3 include two sample copies of Mrs. Smilie's 1932 Last Will and Testament and a complete appraisal of the 122 State Street Smilie homestead which lists, room by room, every item of furniture, antiques, silverware, jewelry, and china owned by the late Mrs. Smilie. Folder 3 also includes a 1938 Appraisal Agreement pricing damage caused to several Smilie Estate properties by a 1938 fire, letters from 1942 and 1950

written by Smilie Real Estate Agent George Gingras appraising the condition of several properties and, later, advising the trustees to sell them; a partially filled out 1949 Fiduciary Income Tax Return; several handwritten inventories of the entire Trust on ledger and yellow legal pad paper representative of multiple handwritten records discarded from the original files; and two typed lists of the Estate's silverware and securities assets.

Folders 4-5 contain monthly records for rental accounts from 1937-1947, organized by year, from the three estate properties which were let to tenants. After 1947, these reports are semiannual until a letter from George Gingras to the trustees indicates that at least one property has been sold; the latest of these rental records is dated May 15, 1952.

Folders 6-17 contain records of all non-investment-related business transactions carried out with the Ellen P. Smilie Trust. These include periodic gas, utility, and insurance premium bills, receipts for building materials, and repair/maintenance services obtained from private individuals and local businesses. Items of particular interest in this collection are as follows:

- In December 1938, John L. Maxson Typewriter & Radio Service is paid for radio installation on two of the Smilie Estate properties.
- The monthly electricity bills from Green Mountain Power Company begin in 1939 to be stamped with a mascot, "Reddy Kilowatt." He is accompanied by small poems and catchphrases which, in many cases, appeal to women as the primary consumers of household appliance products. He is sometimes even dressed as a housewife, and his messages portray modern technology as a means of peculiarly female liberation: "From housework take a real vacation / a modern, year-round celebration"; "I will lighten your burden, give freedom new wings." Starting in 1942, his messages take a patriotic turn, exhorting home-front frugality, war bond buying, the planting of victory gardens, Red Cross support, and female enlistment in the Air WAC. After the war, the messages focus on new technologies like the electric blanket and dryer appliances.

Folder 18 contains a checking account book, sample accompanying checks, and a Montpelier Savings Bank & Trust Co. passbook, all maintained by trustee Harrison G. Woodruff. The book records all credits received from the various sources of Trust income and all debits paid towards companies and private individuals servicing the Smilie Estate or Trust beneficiaries. It runs from February 18, 1938, to January 17, 1950, with the last three entries apparently written by the trustee George L. Hunt in the wake of Woodruff's death in November 1949.

Folders 19-23 contain daybooks owned by Harrison G. Woodruff filled intermittently with memos describing activities related to the upkeep of the Smilie Estate

and the disbursement of the Trust's funds for educational and charitable purposes. They run from 1939 to 1948, the year before Woodruff's death.

Folders 24-27 contain the investment records of the Ellen P. Smilie Trust. This includes shareholder newsletters, bond and stock transfer receipts, security insurance receipts, and financial advisor newsletters addressed first to trustees Hunt and Woodruff and, later, to Hunt and George H. Amidon. The Trust owned stock and bond assets in utility, railroad, steel, and banking companies. There is a flurry of letters after Woodruff's death in 1949 dealing with the reissuing and re-registering of the Estate's stocks and bonds in the name of the succeeding trustee.

Finally, Folders 28-29 contain a stream of correspondence between recipients of the Trust's funds and its trustees as they appropriate funds, weigh options, and express gratitude for the money put towards educational and charitable purposes. They include bills of charitable expenses as well. Montpelier High School, the Bolton Memorial School, and St. Michael's High School in Montpelier were ongoing recipients of the Trust's funds. The Trust provided playground equipment, pairs of glasses, books, visual education equipment, band uniforms, athletic and musical equipment, and heating appliances to these schools from 1938 to 1952.

These folders also contain the trustees' correspondence related to the upkeep of the Smilies' properties and the sale of antiques in the Smilie Homestead after it was sold and slated for destruction as the site of the new State Office Building. There are letters to Mr. Woodruff from a woman declining to come and clean the Smilie house, perhaps asked in anticipation of letting it out to tenants; letters to potential buyers of Mrs. Smilie's antiques; and a February 2, 1940, letter indicating that some government officials were using the Homestead for office space before it was sold to the State. Also included are:

- A letter from Mildred L. Hallgren, the Health Committee Chairman, thanking Mr. Woodruff for the purchase of 19 pairs of glasses for Montpelier public school students (June 13, 1940);
- A letter from the superintendent of Montpelier Public Schools to the trustees thanking them for \$900, the starting capital for a school Central Library (June 17, 1940);
- A letter from the Security Fence Company to the Montpelier Recreation Field Committee with a quote and diagrams for two tennis court installation proposals (April 4, 1941);
- A broadside for an antique sale at the Smilie homestead (September 27, 1941) – another copy has been filed in the VHS's broadside collection;
- Personal letters from George L. Hunt to George H. Amidon during Mr. Hunt's vacation in Florida during the winter of 1952. They discuss the management of the Trust and portray a cordial relationship: Mr. Hunt asks Mr. Amidon to call him by his first name, and at one point expresses real concern for Mr. Amidon in view of some court order demanding a review of the Trust's accounts;

- An intriguing 1942 book list sent from the principal of Montpelier High School to the school library's trustees. One column is titled "What Colleges Recommend," the other "What Undergraduates Read." The latter includes some unorthodox books for the time, such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, and several Willa Cather books, and it includes many more foreign authors than the English/American author-dominated "Recommended" list.
- A second book list from Montpelier High School principal Robert H. Chastney to Woodruff for the Trust to purchase; it distinguishes some books, such as *Inside the FBI*, which were so popular with the students as to elicit replacement copies (October 2, 1947);
- A letter from Hunt to the MHS principal suggesting the Trust's funds establish an influential leader lecture series targeted at the students of Montpelier and St. Michael's High Schools (January 9, 1947);
- A letter from the MHS principal to Woodruff asking if the library might not also subscribe to some periodicals "above the cultural level of the comic strip"—"not *Life* or *Look*" (January 28, 1949)
- Two 1950 letters giving insight into the money management strategy of the trustees; the trustees affirm support for both the Bolton Memorial School and the Montpelier High School library, but stipulate that the school's leaders must provide them with a list of purchases to make instead of the trustees forking over a sum of money for the school to use as it sees fit;
- A bill for visual education equipment, including a projector, "curriculum films," and a wall screen, related to a series of letters discussing the purchase of similar equipment for the Bolton Memorial and St. Michael's school. There is also a descriptive ad for a "Model MC Delineascope" projector of color slides (November 25, 1951)
- A letter from Hunt to Amidon weighing the donation of Trust funds to private or only quasi-public institutions like St. Michael's High School. He relays Montpelier High School Principal Chastney's opinion that in order to reach the widest number of young people possible, it is necessary to reach beyond the public school system. It includes a concise justification for their chosen avenue of charity, namely, the schools: "The educational system is the obvious agency [of charity] because it offers permanence, responsibility to duly constituted authority and sensitivity to acceptable public mores."

The original organization of the Trust's documents has been roughly preserved; checks and excess copies of documents as well as ledger sheets and scrap paper containing various unidentified arithmetic were discarded.

Inventory

I. Smilie family documents

- Doc 569: 1 Marriage license, 1870; Smilie Homestead photo; baby photo
 2 Deeds and business records, December 19, 1890 – Jan. 16, 1933

II. Ellen P. Smilie Will and Smilie Estate documents

- Doc 569: 3 July 28, 1932 – December 2, 1950
4 October 7, 1937 – December 1942
5 January 1943 – May 15, 1952

III. Ellen P. Smilie Trust Business Records

- Doc 569: 6 January 5, 1938 – December 31, 1938
7 January 3, 1939 – December 30, 1939
8 January 3, 1940 – December 30, 1940
9 January 1, 1941 – December 30, 1941
10 January 12, 1942 – December 31, 1942
11 January 1, 1943 – December 10, 1943
12 January 3, 1944 – December 30, 1944
13 January 9, 1945 – December 5, 1945
14 January 4, 1946 – December 27, 1946
15 January 7, 1947 – December 8, 1947
16 January 29, 1948 – October 25, 1949
17 January 9, 1950 – December 15, 1953

IV. Trustees' Account Books

- Doc 569: 18 February 18, 1938 – January 17, 1950
MSA 679: 1 Daybooks, 1939-1940
2 _____, 1941-1942
3 _____, 1943-1944
4 _____, 1945-1946
5 _____, 1947-1948

V. Ellen P. Smilie Trust Investment Records

- Doc 569: 19 July 11, 1938 – January 12, 1948
20 December 20, 1949 – December 21, 1950
21 January 24, 1951 – December 19, 1951
22 February 1, 1952 – November 19, 1953

VI. Trustees' Correspondence with Trust Beneficiaries, etc.

- Doc 569: 23 May 18, 1938 – September 22, 1942
24 January 17, 1946 – November 24, 1952

Sarah Durham
August 2013
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