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Ruth Estelle Slack papers,
Slack, Ruth Estelle, 1901-1986.

Holdings

Library	Call Number	Copy	Material	Location
Vermont Historical Society Library	MSC 209:29	1	Manuscript	Vault-Manuscript

Personal Author : Slack, Ruth Estelle, 1901-1986.

Title : Ruth Estelle Slack papers, 1914-1945, n.d.

Physical Description : 1 folder.

General Note : Family photographs were removed from the collection. They can be found in F-PO-Slack, F-PO-Mears, and F-PO-Dwinnell.

Summary : The papers consist mainly of genealogy regarding the Dwinnell and Mears families. The papers also include a letter addressed to "Dear People", describing events surrounding the flood in 1927. There are also three business items, which deal with insurance and stocks and bonds.

Biographical or historical data : Ruth Estelle Slack (1901-1986) of Montpelier, Vermont was the daughter of Vermont Supreme Court Justice Leighton Slack (b. 1867) and Leah Mears Slack (b. 1877).

Personal Subject : Slack family.
Mears family.
Dunnell family.

Subject Term : Floods Vermont Montpelier 1927.

Geographic Term : Montpelier (Vt.) Archival resources.

Genre/Form : Genealogies.
Photographs.

Local Subject : 1927 flood.

Montpelier, Vermont,
November 15, 1927.

Dear People:

I know you will want to know something about our flood experience and as none of us have a minute to write you I am dashing off what I can in spare time, making several copies at once.

The afternoon of November 3 I worked as usual until 4:00 o'clock, but ever after 2:00 we were too busy watching the river rise to actually accomplish much. When I went home I took Cora Calderarai who lives on Barre Street near the river, with me as I was afraid she couldn't get home, and I had my car. We found that they had moved our furniture which was on the lower floor of our barn - most of Father's books, our over-stuffed living room set, some barrels of dishes, and book cases, secretary, and four bureaus - into the house. We lifted most of the boxes of books up on to the barrels and workmen's bench, thinking that of course the water couldn't come that high. Mother came in about 4:20 from a party and after taking off her party dress and hat helped move up books. She and I carried one of our big chairs up-stairs and also the headboard and footboard of our old four poster bed. These were the only bits of furniture that didn't get soaked with water and saturated with the most filthy mud and slime imaginable. I hadn't stopped to put my car into the garage when I came home and about 4:30 the water was so high around the house that I couldn't drive my car up to high ground and get back to the house, but a Mr. Brown from St. Johnsbury (one who had come over that day to sand our hardwood floors) came along and took our only pair of rubber boots which the Pitkins had just sent over and drove my car up the hill. I didn't see boots, car or Mr. Brown until Saturday when I learned that my car was high and dry. Some stranger came along and carried Cora over to the Pitkins on his back. For ten minutes or more the Pitkins were calling to us to come over right away but we stayed trying to get the books up off the floor. About 4:40 Father, Mother, and I took a big board and waded over through water which was up to my waist, ice cold and running in a very strong current.

The Pⁱkin house is next door to ours, a big old brick house which sets up about five feet above the sidewalk. The down stairs rooms are very high and there is a second floor and an attic, and there was a barn attached to the house. Father and Mother had been rooming there since they came to Montpelier.

Mrs. Pitkin had been very forehanded and got all the food on to the stairs and we carried up the food and wood - there were three fireplaces upstairs. Almost the last minute Perley brought up a barrel of apples from the cellar and we got that upstairs. Then we had supper and were eating after the water was up to our ankles. There were ten of us in the house - Mr. and Mrs. Pitkin (Perley and Sylvia), Polly and Frank (their two children eight and six years old) Mrs. Rolleau (Perley's grandmother eighty-seven years old) Marion (their maid), Cora Calderarai, Father, Mother, and I, together with a dog and a cat! Perley, Marion, and I carried up all the books and pictures and other small things that we could and gathered up all the candles we could find. When we went upstairs the water was almost up to our knees.

From then on I haven't a very clear recollection of the time different things happened only I know the night seemed lots longer than the two weeks have since. For a while we had electric lights but they went off about 9:00 o'clock. At first the water came up very fast. In the afternoon Father measured it and it rose nine inches in twenty minutes. We thought we might have to have a raft and so we brought in all the doors and boards and kegs we could find in the upper part of the barn. Polly and Frank slept through most of the night. Of course we could hear the big pieces of furniture tipping over downstairs and all we could do was to take a candle and go out to see how high the water had come. We watched it creep up stair by stair until at its height it was within three stairs of the second floor. About 8:30 or a little later there was a terrible ripping sound and we thought it was the ell of the house which was of wood, but it proved to be the barn which ripped right off the ell and floated down beyond the next house and lodged against a barn. About 9:00 Perley thought we couldn't live in the house through the night for the water was rising very fast and he decided that he would try to swim across Main Street down the current a bit to the Methodist Church and there could swim up School Street to the high ground, get over to the Lane Manufacturing Company's plant (he is President of that company), get some men together and build a raft. He took a big plank and left the house where the barn had ripped off, but before he got around the corner of the house the board caught under the eaves and was torn away. In about a second we heard him calling and we went to a window over a small porch roof and hauled him with two blankets. He had been in the water only a minute but was almost frozen and said he knew then that though he had been used to strong ocean currents he could never swim across this one and that if he succeeded in getting a raft we never could get away on it. Pretty soon after this we heard a woman scream for help and for boats but of course we couldn't get to her and no one had a boat. She was across the road down toward the business section several houses and the ell of that house ripped off the main part. However we found out in the morning that they were all right or as nearly so as any of us. After that we heard people screaming from across the river on Elm Street and I think no part of the whole night was quite as bad as

hearing these people call for help and know that no help on earth could get to them. About 11:00 o'clock Harry Woodward's barn tore off his house (the house on the other side of ours) and came between our barn and house, between our house and Pitkin's, and down the Main Street. In about five or ten minutes it was followed by our barn with almost all of our furniture upstairs in it. This came between our house and Pitkin's, lodged on the corner of their piazza for a few minutes, took the pillars off their front porch, and then sailed down the street. Later we found that it had floated down to the corner of Main and State Streets, frightening scores of people who said it was the biggest thing they ever saw afloat and just missing crashing into several buildings. It stayed in the middle of the street until some authority ordered it torn down and when they began they found the furniture which they had carried off to the schoolhouse lawn where we found what there was left of it. Some who saw it during the time it was parked on the corner say they saw lots of people come there and take away furniture so we probably never will see what is still missing. Our antique things we had had done over in St. Johnsbury so they would be already to put in the new house and they are the things which are missing. About twenty minutes past eleven the water stopped rising and during the next hour we could see it was beginning to go down a bit. But after that was our worst part of the night. Soon after the water began to go down we heard the most awful gurgle from the lower hall and we could see a great eddy of water - a real whirlpool. Perley said he thought it was only the water going down but Father said he was afraid it might be the foundation. At every gurgle we thought we could feel the house tremble and every time we went to see how much the water was going down we could see this awful eddy. Of course we realized that if it was the foundation the house would just crumble and by then we were sure - as we had been during most of the night - that we would never see daylight, but at last it did grow light and of course we all rushed to the windows to look out. All of the houses on Main Street that we could see looked all right but out on Elm Street there were whole houses torn off their foundations and some were gone and some were in different locations. People were shouting back and forth from house to house. Then the water was just at the top of the window caps on our first floor windows. We were fortunate in having food for breakfast and soon after daylight we had breakfast in Mother's room where we had all spent the night. Then we could see what queer looking objects we were for we had put on all the warm clothing we could find. I had on a pair of Perley's khaki knickers, a heavy sweater, and a heavy bathrobe on the outside.

There was nothing to do all the morning except to wonder why nobody came around in a boat and hope we would see one soon and watch it rain for all the morning it poured - most of the time like a cloud burst. We couldn't understand why the water went down when it continued to rain so hard, but by that time we were beyond trying to understand anything. About 11:00 o'clock we saw a boat coming up

Main Street. Nothing in the world ever looked as good to me as that boat did. We hung out of the windows and watched them take out several other people and then they came to our house. Then came the problem of where we could go. I was rooming at the Unitarian parsonage and Mr. and Mrs. Nichols had gone to Montreal the day before. Of course I had a key to the house and we decided the only thing for us to do was to go there. They could only take two of us in the boat at a time as the current was very strong and the boat was quite small - one built for the occasion. All ten of us went up to the Nichols' which was high and dry on the first floor although the cellar was full of water. Cora was able to get home that day but the rest of us, plus the dog which came on Saturday, stayed in the Nichols' house from Friday noon (November 4) to Monday noon. All the heat we had was one fireplace so we had to do all of our cooking over that. However we got along all right for we managed to have one hot thing and sometimes two, for each meal. We were fortunate to have food enough. Of course we got along on rather small rations but we had three meals a day and didn't really go hungry as some had to. There was no dry wood in the cellar so we had to get all of our wood next door and we carried spring water for a long ways but the regular water was not shut off at all and after Saturday we had electric lights. We were on food rations for almost everything but we brought up canned goods from the Pitkin's and we had some bread and rolls given us and we could buy milk and some food so we were all right in that way.

Frank had been in bed the day of the flood because of a severe cold and by Monday Father had a bad cold and Gram was nearly sick so we thought we ought to get out of that house into a warmer one if we could find any place to go, but of course everyone up on the hills had their houses full. Perley had Dr. Templeton come over to see Father and the doctor said we must all get out of that house as soon as possible and that he would take the Pitkins up to his house and would find a place for us in his neighborhood. Monday morning the Pitkins moved and at noon Mother, Father and I went up to Mr. Squires', people whom we had never heard of before, and stayed there until today. They were wonderfully good to us, gave us our meals and did all sorts of things for us. In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Nichols have come back and I went Monday back there to room. The boarding house where we have taken our meals is opening up today so Mother and Father are leaving the Squires' and returning to the Pitkin's. Perley and Sylvia moved back into their house on Monday.

As I have already said, my car was high and dry. Father's car was in my garage which floated off its foundation but did not move more than a dozen feet. We have been able to get the car out, the water drained out of the radiator and transmission, and a garage man had agreed to fix it up in the near future. We got back what furniture we could find on the schoolhouse yard, some of which probably isn't worth saving and some of which is pretty good. All of our solid silver was in the vault here at the National Life so that is

all safe. All of Mother's best dishes were packed in baskets which were in the upper part of the barn and up to date we haven't found any of those except the big platters and covered dishes which were in a trunk. We have several barrels of dishes, mostly kitchen ones, but up to date we haven't been able to unpack them so really don't know just what we have. All of our blankets and quilts were in trunks in the barn and one trunkfull is missing. I think we have all of our sheets and pillow cases and table linen. Our kitchen towels are all right and most of the bathroom linen is here. When I say "all right" I simply mean it is here for it is just caked with mud and filth, but we have been able to get most of them washed and then they are coming out pretty well. We have found most of our window curtains but some of them are stained beyond use for they were packed in with colored things. The over-draperies which we used in St. Johnsbury in the living room we had planned to use in our living room here and I think they are coming out all right. Of course our rugs were covered with mud and water but they are being cleaned at the laundry in St. J., which sent over its truck several days for loads of things to be taken there to be cleaned as that was about the nearest place where businesses were still running. Our greatest loss is from Father's books which we are afraid are ruined beyond recovery, which were reckoned at \$1500.00, and from loss of furniture. Of course lots of things we haven't found at all and in order to save the contents of the bureaus and chests we had to open the drawers which were so swelled that we have had to split the backs off. All of the veneered furniture is probably ruined as the veneer peels off in strips and leaves the pieces badly warped. Some of the other pieces have two or three legs in place of four but of course they can be mended. Our piano is a perfect wreck; that was floating around in the kitchen. We have been unable to find our antique mirrors, one antique dressing table and my birds eye maple one, four mohair covered straight backed chairs, one Windsor chair, one Hitchcock chair, two of our dining room chairs, one comb-back rocker, one other antique rocker, a small mahogany table, small bedroom chairs, brass kettles, one set of old andirons, one five slatted ladder back chair, two mattresses, besides books, dishes, and trunks of clothing. You see it is mosly chairs we are short of so if you come to visit us perhaps you had better bring one with you that you can sit in!

As you of course know Father had bought an old house here and was repairing it, and we were lucky that it was not completed. Almost all of the hardwood floors were laid downstairs, but they are not warped very badly and we shall leave them. Sheetrock had been used instead of plaster on many of the walls downstairs and the workmen think that will be all right when it is thoroughly dried out, but it may have to be taken off from the ceilings. Our furnace wasn't in and they cannot do much more in the house now until there is heat enough to dry out the floors and walls so we are at a standstill until the furnace is in, but the plumbers have agreed to come right away to work on it and so it ought ~~to~~ be in in two weeks. Fortunately no paper was on downstairs, although the paperhangers were coming from St. Johnsbury on the 7th to begin papering and painting. Now we have no idea when

we will get the repairs finished so we can move in, but Father says he shall go right ahead with the work as soon as they can for there seems to be nothing else to do.

Of course there are horrible tales of suffering among the people here but we personally have not suffered much from cold or exposure or lack of clothing or food. The Red Cross certainly has done wonderful work in supplying clothes and food and now is overstocked with clothing. The first report that appeared in outside newspapers gave the dead in Montpelier as 200 or 250, but there was really only one death. Lots of people had to spend the night in the rain on roofs and there were lots of heroic rescues of stranded persons, but so far no epidemic has started from these numberless exposures to cold and dampness. Ordinarily Mother and I never could move great boxes of books weighing over two hundred pounds but we had to so we did, and of course ordinarily we would all have caught severe colds from being in ice water up to our waists and then not being able to get by a fire to dry, but Mother and I have had no cold at all and Father has wholly recovered from his. We have said we had no idea how we were able to go through it, but we did. The whole affair seems like a horrible dream, as if perhaps we would wake up and find it didn't really happen. They have had floods here before but only twice in the last twenty-five years has any water come into the cellar of our house and then only a little each time. Nobody ever heard of water being in the first floor of any of the houses on Main Street and this time it must have been twelve feet deep in the street and about nine and a half feet in our living room. The ell part of our house is lower so the water came on to the second floor in the ell.

[Estelle Slack]