Yancey, Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech), 1908-2004 (MSS 579)

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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 579  YANCEY, Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech, 1908-2004


2000.93.2

Related collection: MSS 87

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Clara Louise “Clara Lou” Robertson was born in Louisville, Kentucky on 14 February 1908 to Eugene Beverly Robertson (1866-1957), a bank executive, and Clara Mae (Thomas) Robertson (1884-1974). She resided at 331 Birchwood Avenue with her parents and a brother, James Thomas “Jim Tom” Robertson (1906-2001). After attending Emmet Field Elementary School and George Rogers Clark School, she entered Louisville Girls High School in September 1922. In January 1924, she enrolled in the newly opened J. M. Atherton High School for Girls and graduated in June 1926. Clara Lou attended John B. Stetson University (now Stetson University) in DeLand, Florida from 1926-1929 and was a member of Pi Beta Phi sorority. After travel in Europe, she completed her coursework at the University of Louisville in 1930 and graduated in the spring of 1931. Also in 1931, while working as a representative of Fogle Tours of Louisville, she met William John “Bill” Keech (1904-1976). Born in El Salvador to missionary parents who later moved to California, Bill was a graduate of Occidental College and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. They married on 21 February 1935 in Redlands, California.

Bill and Clara Lou lived in California, where Bill was pastor at a Baptist church in Garden Grove; in Salt Lake City, Utah, where Bill was Director of Evangelism and subsequently Director of Christian Education for the Utah, Montana and Idaho Baptist conventions; in West Hempstead, New York, where Bill was Director of General Missionary Education for the Northern Baptist Convention; and Narberth, Pennsylvania, where Bill was Director of Missionary and Stewardship Education for the American Baptist Convention. When they lived in Pennsylvania, Clara Lou’s widowed mother also spent part of the year with them until her death in 1974.

Bill Keech retired on 1 December 1969. In July 1975, the Keeches moved from Narberth to the Methodist Retirement Home in Durham, North Carolina in order to be near their son, William Robertson Keech, and his family. Born in 1939, William Robertson Keech (referred to as “Robby,” “Billy” or “Bill”) had earned his bachelor’s degree at Bucknell University (1961) and his M.A. and Ph.D. (1965) at the University of Wisconsin. He was a member of the political
science faculty at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill from 1965 through 1996; a professor in the Department of Social and Decision Sciences at Carnegie Mellon University from 1997-2006, and thereafter Research Professor of Political Economy at Duke University.

After a ten-year struggle with Parkinson’s Disease and other health problems, Bill Keech died on 1 April 1976. In 1986, Clara Lou married Charles Bernard Yancey, a widower and beau from her Florida college days with whom she had kept in touch. Clara Lou (Robertson) Keech Yancey died in Durham, North Carolina on 17 March 2004, predeceased by Charles in 1997.

**COLLECTION NOTE**

This collection consists primarily of the correspondence, drafts of letters, and papers of Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech Yancey. Many letters to Clara Lou from family or close friends address her as “Sistoo,” a nickname acquired in childhood and derived from her young brother’s mispronunciation of “sister.” Others, particularly her parents, address her as “Sug” or “Shug” (Sugar). Also included are papers and correspondence of her parents Eugene Beverly Robertson and Clara Mae Robertson, her brother James T. Robertson, her husband Bill Keech, and her son William Robertson Keech and his family, as well as genealogical data and photographs. An inventory is in Box 1, Folder 1, along with Clara Lou’s obituary.

Box 1 contains Clara Lou’s letters to her parents, husband and brother from 1927-1982, general correspondence from 1927-1974 with family, college and other friends and former neighbors, and miscellaneous papers. Letters to her parents (Folder 2) relate her activities as a student at Stetson University and, after her marriage, news of family and mutual friends. Letters to her husband Bill (Folder 3), usually written during his travels for the Baptist Convention, generally concern household matters. Letters and drafts of letters to her brother, Louisville attorney James T. “Jim Tom” Robertson, his wife Laverne and daughter Beverly (Folder 4) are dated mostly after the death of Clara Lou’s mother in 1974 and disclose the tension that arose between them in connection with the distribution of her mother’s jewelry, Jim Tom’s administration of the estate, and the control of Clara Lou’s inheritance in light of her financial obligations to the Methodist Retirement Home. Also included is her draft 1958 letter to James Robertson, Jr., Jim Tom’s son by his first marriage, in which Clara Lou discusses their family.

Clara Lou’s general correspondence from 1926-1935 (Folder 5) includes admiring letters from László Gombos, a young Hungarian lawyer she met in Europe, her letters soliciting clients for Fogle Tours, and letters from Charles Yancey, then attending the University of Florida and hopeful that he and Clara Lou might soon marry. Correspondence from 1933-1954 (Folder 6) includes items about Clara Lou’s marriage to Bill Keech and Charles Yancey’s to Dorothy Knapp; proceeds through her moves from California to Utah to New York, and ends with Clara Lou’s description of her move to Narberth, Pennsylvania. Of interest are letters of and clippings about Georgia “Joy” Cox Tolliver, a longtime African-American domestic servant and nurse to Clara Lou’s and other families and a much-loved figure in her Louisville neighborhood.

Correspondence from 1955-1962 (Folder 7) includes condolences on the death of Clara Lou’s father, Christmas newsletters, and a visitor’s pass to the U.S. House of Representatives. Correspondence from 1963-1964 (Folder 8) includes Clara Lou’s letter to a Stetson professor recalling her studies there, and a letter describing her 1964 hospitalization. Correspondence from 1965-1966 (Folder 9) covers the period when her son receives his Ph.D. and joins the faculty of UNC-Chapel Hill, and husband Bill is diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease; Bill also
moves to the new headquarters of the American Baptist Convention in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Correspondence from 1967-1969 (Folder 10) covers the recent marriage of Clara Lou’s son, travel to England, and husband Bill’s treatment for Parkinson’s Disease with the experimental drug L-DOPA. In a renewed attempt to reach out to her nephew James T. Robertson, Jr. on behalf of her mother, Clara Lou drafts a letter discussing family relationships after brother Jim Tom’s divorce from his first wife, Virginia Lester. Correspondence from 1970-1972 (Folder 11) includes Clara Lou’s letters to Ross Perot regarding his investigations into Vietnam POWs/MIAs and her suggestion that he work with another humanitarian, physician James W. Turpin. She writes to her son Bill and his wife Sharon regarding her grandson Daniel, and to her sorority’s Grand Council on the expulsion of three members. Health issues—her own, her husband’s and mother’s—also receive mention. Correspondence from 1973-1974 (Folder 12) covers Clara Lou’s hospitalization, her mother’s last illness and death, her husband’s health, and their plan to move to North Carolina.

Box 2 contains Clara Lou’s correspondence from 1975-1998, as well as folders of letters from a few specific correspondents. Correspondence from 1975 (Folder 1) includes letters from friends in Pennsylvania after the Keeches depart for the Methodist Retirement Home in North Carolina, and Clara Lou’s letters about the strains of relocating and Bill’s health problems. Correspondence from 1976 (Folder 2) mostly concerns Bill’s decline and death, Clara Lou’s own health, and her concern over the delay in settling her mother’s estate; she also composes an anecdote for submission to a reunion of Atherton High School alumnae, and writes of patients’ rights and the necessity for accommodating spouses during a loved one’s hospitalization. Correspondence from 1977 and 1978 (Folders 3, 4) includes letters from friends around the country and memoranda about Clara Lou’s health, as well as (Folder 4) her attempts to locate copies of Annie Fellows Johnston’s *Little Colonel* books. Correspondence from 1979-1980 (Folder 5) covers health matters and hospitalization, a trip to Florida, a note from First Lady Rosalynn Carter, and Clara Lou’s comments on a letter seeking to recruit her son for a position at Michigan State University. Correspondence from 1981 (Folder 6) is mostly news from friends and includes doctor’s letters and notes about Clara Lou’s health. Correspondence from 1982-1996 (Folder 7) includes letters and guest lists for a June 1982 reunion of friends held in Wilmington, Delaware, health memoranda, and replies of legislators to Clara Lou’s concerns about drunk driving laws. Undated correspondence (Folder 8) consists of short notes and greeting cards. Correspondence of Laura B. Haydon (Folder 9), a former Louisville neighbor at whose California home Clara Lou and Bill were married, includes letters to Clara Lou with reminiscences and family news. Letters of friend Virginia (Campbell) Thomas (Folder 10) convey news of her family and of Narberth, Pennsylvania; included are pastoral letters after her ordination, and information on her design of a wheelchair substitute called the “Honey-Chair.” Letters of WKU Manuscripts Librarian Sue Lynn McDaniel, formerly McGuire (Folder 11) reflect the friendship that arose between them after WKU’s Department of Library Special Collections acquired Clara Lou’s childhood diary, kept in a *Little Colonel’s Good Times Book* (see MSS 87 and clipping in Box 1, Folder 1 of this collection), and their shared interest in Annie Fellows Johnston’s *Little Colonel* series.

Box 3 contains interviews of Clara Lou and papers of her husband William J. “Bill” Keech, son William R. Keech, and husband Charles Yancey. Sue Lynn McGuire’s interviews of Clara Lou (Folder 1) consist of a summary of a December 1991 interview and an audio recording of an April 1992 interview; in both, she recounts her life and memories. Correspondence of Bill Keech from 1935-1957 (Folder 2) includes letters to Clara Lou written just before their wedding and
later during his frequent travels as a Christian educator; exploring the offer of employment with the Northern Baptist Convention, he writes in 1947 of his tour of New York City, which included dinner at the Harlem home of an African-American minister. His correspondence from 1958-1964 (Folder 3) includes more letters written to Clara Lou during his travel, an itinerary of his 1963 international tour, and correspondence relating to his honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Occidental College. Correspondence from 1965-1975 (Folder 4) includes Bill’s letter to an English relative with family information, and thanks for his participation in a medical study. Other papers of Bill Keech (Folder 5) include career data, literature from churches with which he was associated, clippings, pastoral writings, text for a biographical slideshow prepared on his retirement, and obituaries. Correspondence of son William R. Keech from 1940-1965 (Folder 6) includes childhood letters and compositions, public school, college and fraternity materials, and reference letters. Correspondence from 1966-1976 (Folder 7) includes his letters and those of wife Sharon (Barre) Keech to Clara Lou and Bill, details of their wedding and the births of their son and daughter, and career news. Correspondence from 1977-1980 (Folder 8) includes their children’s letters and cards to their grandparents, and career news for both Bill and Sharon, a professional weaver; during a 1980 visit to Louisville, Sharon reports to Clara Lou on the spirited political debates between Bill and his uncle “Jim Tom” Robertson. Correspondence from 1981-1986 (Folder 9) includes family letters to Clara Lou and clippings on Sharon’s weaving. Correspondence of Clara Lou’s second husband Charles Yancey (Folder 10) includes his and first wife Dorothy’s letters and cards to Clara Lou and Bill over their long friendship.

Box 4 contains Clara Lou’s diaries and scrapbooks. Her 1926 diary (Folder 1) covers her final months of high school and first months at Stetson University. A scrapbook from 1927-1931 (Folder 2) contains mostly hand-copied poetry. Clara Lou’s 1929 diary (Folder 3) records her summer tour of Europe with Fogle Tours, and another diary (Folder 4) notes her activities in the early 1930s. A 1932 scrapbook (Folder 5) contains mostly magazine clippings and poetry. A scrapbook from 1943-1952 (Folder 6) was used for keepsakes from well-wishers upon the Keeches’ departure from California and subsequently served as a guestbook.

Box 5 contains Robertson family correspondence, genealogy, some Keech family history, and photographs. Correspondence and papers of Clara Lou’s father Eugene Beverly Robertson (Folder 1) include letters to her from Louisville advising on health insurance, expressing financial concerns as he prepares for retirement in 1946, and referring to a dispute over the will of Georgia “Joy” Cox Tolliver; also included is a letter of introduction that allowed the family to meet president Warren G. Harding during a trip to Washington in 1921. Correspondence of Clara Lou’s mother, Clara Mae Robertson, from 1935-1947 (Folder 2) is to her daughter and covers local and household topics; her telegram after the severe 1937 flooding in Louisville gives a brief report on conditions there. Her correspondence from 1948-1962 (Folder 3) includes her letter and a clipping regarding disciplinary action against Jim Tom Robertson for his handling of a personal injury lawsuit, and letters regarding the hospitalization of Clara Lou’s father shortly before his death in 1957. Clara Mae’s correspondence from 1963-1974 (Folder 4) includes letters from friends in her former home of Eminence, Kentucky and concerning the death of her cousin Lizzie May (Crabb) Robinson; also included is her obituary. Clara Mae’s DAR application (Folder 5) provides information on her Boone family ancestry. Correspondence of Clara Lou’s brother James T. “Jim Tom” Robertson (Folder 6) include his and his family’s letters to the Keeches, his mother, and his son Jim, Jr.; topics discussed in the letters include family activities, Clara Mae’s welfare and estate, a 1974 tornado in Louisville, and Jim Tom’s high school athletic prowess. Also included are speeches Jim Tom delivered as president of
two Christian civic organizations, and an announcement of his entry into the 1969 Louisville mayoral race as a candidate of the American Party. Two graduation programs from 1889 and 1904 (Folder 7) appear to relate to ancestors of Clara Lou's. Genealogical material (Folder 8) relates to Clara Lou’s ancestry and includes notes, correspondence and clippings. Data on Bill Keech’s family (Folder 9) includes genealogy, a booklet with information on his father William Keech’s missionary work in El Salvador, and family photographs. The remainder of Box 5 (Folders 10-17) consists of photographs and includes those of “Joy” Cox Tolliver and many of her young charges (Folder 10); Clara Lou and Bill Keech, their son William R. Keech (as he grows to his adult height of 6 feet 8 inches), Clara Lou’s parents, and some of the Keeches’ homes (Folders 11-13); William R. Keech, his wife and children (Folders 14-15); and James T. Robertson and family (Folder 16). Miscellaneous photos (Folder 17) include some family members, but are mostly of friends whose correspondence is in this collection.

**SHELF LIST**

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<th>BOX 1</th>
<th>Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech Yancey – Correspondence and Papers</th>
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<td>Laura B. Haydon – Correspondence</td>
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<td>Virginia (Campbell) Thomas – Letters to Clara Lou</td>
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<th>BOX 3</th>
<th>Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech Yancey – Interviews; Keech &amp; Yancey Family</th>
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<td><strong>BOX 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech Yancey – Diaries and Scrapbooks</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BOX 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech Yancey – Robertson Family; Genealogy; Photographs</strong></td>
<td><strong>1889-1995</strong></td>
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<td>1929-1955</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>James T. Robertson and family – Photos</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous photos</td>
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**BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD**

MSS  YANCEY, Clara Louise (Robertson)  1889-1998  
579  Keech, 1908-2004

Correspondence, photographs, interviews and papers of Louisville, Kentucky native Clara Louise (Robertson) Keech Yancey. Includes papers and correspondence of her parents, Eugene and Clara Mae Robertson, brother James Thomas Robertson, husband William J. Keech, son William Robertson Keech, and family data.  
5 boxes. 56 folders. 1,485 items. Originals, photocopies, photographs, cassette tape.

**SUBJECT ANALYTICS**

African Americans – Louisville  
American Party, 1969 – Relating to  
Baker, George Henry – Correspondence  
Baker, George Henry – Photograph  
Baker, George Henry – Relating to  
Baker, Winona A., b. 1881?  
Banks and banking – Georgia, 1896  
Banks and banking – Louisville, 1940  
Barre, Jens Theodore “Ted,” 1907-1982  
Barre, Jens Theodore “Ted,” 1907-1982 – Relating to  
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Beall family – Relating to
Birth announcements, 1957-1958  B1,F7
Boone family – Relating to  B5,F5
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Bowes, Charles Alpin “Chuck” – Photograph  B3,F17
Bowes, Charles Alpin “Chuck” – Relating to  B1,F10
Bowes, Quigley Austin, 1907-2000  B1,F9; B2,F2,5,7
Bowes, Quigley Austin, 1907-2000 – Photograph  B3,F17
Bowes, Quigley Austin, 1907-2000 – Relating to  B1,F10
Braswell, David M., Jr.  B1,F9
Brazil – Travel and description, 1980  B2,F5
Brown, Dora Margaret (Wade), d. 1978  B1,F9; B2,F3; B3,F4
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