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Kimbrough, Mary Alice (Sexton), 1907-1991 (MSS 159)

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MSS 159 KIMBROUGH, Mary Alice (Sexton), 1907-1991


2003.102.1

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mary Alice Kimbrough was born Mary Sexton on August 9, 1907 near Bethel, Tennessee, the daughter of Edward Harvey and Magdalene Jackson Sexton. Although the sixth of eight children, only five, William, David, Clara, Alma, and Mary, survived to adulthood. Soon after her birth, Mary’s family moved to an estate near Minor Hill, Tennessee, where they lived and farmed. Throughout Mary’s childhood, the family would alternately live in Minor Hill or on the farm.

Mary and her siblings attended school in Minor Hill, and Mary went on to attend the University of Tennessee. Although she was very involved in school life and excelled in academics, she returned home after one year of college and began working as a substitute teacher.

In the summer of 1928, Mary married William Joseph “Joe” Kimbrough, a clerical employee for the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company. A son, William Joseph, Jr., was born in 1930. A second son, James “Jimmy” Edward, was born the following year.

In the late 1930s, Mary began to lose the use of her limbs, and would occasionally fall down while walking. When doctors in Nashville were unable to diagnose her mysterious malady, she traveled to the Mayo Clinic in October 1941 where doctors soon discovered that Mary was suffering from “Spinal Muscular Atrophy,” also known as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or “Lou Gehrig’s Disease.” At the time of her diagnosis, very little was known about the disease; within 9 years, she was in a wheelchair, and for the next 50 years the paralysis grew progressively worse.

In 1942, the family settled permanently in Bowling Green, Kentucky. William Joseph “Joe, Jr.” graduated from Indiana University and became an administrative librarian in Minneapolis, while Jimmy eventually settled in Nashville, Tennessee and became a lithographic printer. They bought their home on Chestnut Street in 1961, and though practically homebound, for the next 30 years Mary spent her time by maintaining a voluminous correspondence, collecting rocks, making postcards, and
contributing to the work of the First Baptist Church. She died on January 31, 1991, in a Bowling Green nursing home.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- The Collection.
- Vertical Files. Kentucky Library.

COLLECTION NOTE

The collection consists mainly of letters written by Mary Kimbrough to her son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr. Other items include letters written to Mrs. Kimbrough from friends and family, church programs, magazine articles, newspaper clippings, an art course book, and a collection of handmade paper dolls.

Mrs. Kimbrough’s letters are full of references to local and national individuals and events, especially ones relating to Western Kentucky University. Her beautiful penmanship also makes this collection unique, particularly since her hands were permanently clenched as a result of her disease. Her letters are well written, inspirational, and provide a commentary on many different events and issues of the early 1980s.

SHELF LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOX</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe,” Jr.</td>
<td>1960-2003</td>
<td>231 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Folder 1 Descriptive inventory and biographical data</td>
<td>1960-2003</td>
<td>12 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Folder 2 Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1975-1979</td>
<td>6 items</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Folder 3 Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Folder 4 Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>4 items</td>
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<td>Folder 5 Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>17 items</td>
</tr>
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<td>Folder 6 Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>24 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Folder 7 Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>23 items</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Folder 8 Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>21 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 9</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>26 items</td>
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<td>Folder 10</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>22 items</td>
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<td>Folder 11</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>19 items</td>
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<td>Folder 12</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>16 items</td>
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<td>Folder 13</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>19 items</td>
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<td>Folder 14</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>14 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 15</td>
<td>Letters to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>1987-1988</td>
<td>3 items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 16</td>
<td>Card to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>1 item</td>
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</table>

**BOX 2**  
**Kimbrough Correspondence**  
1916-1986  102 items

| Folder 1 | Letters to sister, Alma Jones (Mrs. Claud) | 1941; 1964 | 10 items |
| Folder 2 | Letters to brother, William R. Sexton | 1963 | 2 items |
| Folder 3 | Correspondence – granddaughter, Mary Joe Elrod (Mrs. Terry) | 1982-1986 | 4 items |
| Folder 4 | Correspondence - Frank “Jug” Chenault and niece, Margaret Reid Chenault | 1978-1986 | 27 items |
| Folder 5 | Correspondence – Lowell Harrison | 1983 | 3 items |
| Folder 6 | Incoming letters to Mary and William Joseph Kimbrough, Sr. | 1964-1985 | 9 items |
| Folder 7 | Letters from granddaughter-in-law, Karen Kimbrough (Mrs. Howard) | 1985-86 | 2 items |
| Folder 8 | Letters from Marge and Marshall Aaron | 1982 | 7 items |
| Folder 9 | Letter to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr. from his brother, James (Jimmy) | 1985 | 1 item |
| Folder 10 | Letter to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr. from his aunt, Clara Booth (Mrs. Edwin) | 1981 | 1 item |
Folder 11  Letter to son, William Joseph “Joe” Jr. from his sister-in-law, Margaret Kimbrough (Mrs. James) 1985  1 item
Folder 12  Speech to Forest Park Church 1971  1 item
Folder 13  Paper dolls 1916-1959  26 items
Folder 14  “Practical Drawing” Modern Arts course book belonging to brother, William Sexton 1916  1 item
Folder 15  Newspaper clippings 1946-1978  5 items
Folder 16  Miscellaneous 1937-1984  2 items

**BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD**

MSS  KIMBROUGH, Mary Alice (Sexton), 1916-2003
159  1907-1991

Family correspondence, greeting cards, handicrafts, and newspaper clippings of Mary Kimbrough, Bowling Green, Kentucky. Also items from various family members.
2 boxes. 32 folders. 333 items.
2003.102.1

**SUBJECT ANALYTICS**

African Americans – Families, 1983  B1,F7
Alcoholism, 1982, 1986  B1,F5,13-14
Amusement parks – Bowling Green, 1978  B1,F2
Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (A.L.S.) – Diseases, 1941, 1964, 1983  B1,F1&8; B2,F1
Antiques – Bowling Green, 1982  B1,F6
Arson – Western Kentucky University – Fine Arts Center, 1984  B1,F9
Art – Study and teaching, 1916  B2,F14
Assassinations – Gandhi, Indira (Nehru), 1917-1984 – Comments about, 1984  B1,F10
Baptists – Bowling Green – First Baptist Church, 1982-1983  B1,F5&7
Baptists – Race relations – Religious aspects, 1964  B2,F1
Beech Bend Park – Bowling Green, 1978  B1,F2
Bible – Devotional use, 1964-1985  B1,F1; B2,F1&5
Boarding houses – Bowling Green, 1983  B1,F7
Bowling Green: A Pictorial History – Comments about, 1983  B1,F8
Capitol Arts Players – Bowling Green, 1984  B1,F10
Carter, James Earl, b. 1924 – Comments about, 1984  B1,F10
Carter Presidential Center – Atlanta, Georgia – Comments about, 1986  B2,F4
Cayce, Edward, 1877-1945 – Comments about, 1983-1984  B1,F7&9
Child abuse, 1983  B1,F7
Children – Tennessee, 1907-1922  B1,F1
Depressions, 1929 – Comments about, 1980  B1,F3
Depressions, 1929 – Tennessee  B1,F1
Diseases – Alcoholism, 1982  B1,F5,13&14
Diseases – Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (A.L.S.), 1941, 1983  B1,F1&8; B2,F1
Divorce, 1982  B1,F5
Domestic violence – Child abuse, 1983  B1,F7
Downing, Dero Goodman, b. 1921 – Comments about, 1985  B1,F13
Drama – Bowling Green – Capitol Arts Players, 1984  B1,F10
Drug abuse, 1986  B1,F13&14
Earthquakes, 1980  B1,F3
Education – Experimental methods – Mathematics, 1985  B1,F11
Elections and election campaigns – Comments about, 1984  B1,F10
Elrod, Mary Joe – Photos  B1,F4
Elrod, Rachel, b. 1981 – Photos  B1,F4
Falkland Islands – Foreign policy – Comments about, 1982  B1,F5
Family reunions, 1981, 1983  B1,F4&8
Fires – Bowling Green, 1984, 1985  B1,F9,11-12
Fires – Western Kentucky University – Fine Arts Center, 1984  B1,F9
Fires – Western Kentucky University – Garrett Conference Center, 1983  B1,F7
First Baptist Church – Bowling Green, 1982-1983  B1,F5&7
Folk medicine – Prescriptions and remedies, 1982-1983  B1,F5&7
Gandhi, Indira (Nehru), 1917-1984 – Assassination – Comments about, 1984  B1,F10
Great Britain – Kings and rulers, 1986  B1,F13&14
Hagerman, Thomas Bartley, 1924-2012 – Comments about, 1983  B1,F7
Handicraft – Post cards, ca. 1942, 1964  B1,F1
Harrison, Lowell Hayes, b. 1922 – Photos  B1,F8
Harrison, Lowell Hayes, b. 1922 – Relating to, 1983  B1,F8; B2,F5
Haskins, Clem, b. 1943 – Comments about, 1986  B1,F13
Helm Hotel – Bowling Green, 1984  B1,F10
Helm, Margie May, 1894-1991 – Comments about, 1982-1983, 1986  B1,F5,6,8,13-14
Hijacking – Algiers, 1985  B1,F11
Homosexuality, 1986  B1,F14
Hotels – Bowling Green – Helm Hotel, 1984          B1,F10
Income tax, 1964, 1982-1983          B1,F7; B2,F1
India – Relating to          B1,F10
Ing, Nell (Welch), 1883-1961 – Comments about, 1982          B2,F5
Keillor, Garrison, b. 1942 – Comments about, 1982          B1,F6
Kentucky Derby, 1985          B1,F11
Kimbrough, James, b. 1931 – Photos          B1,F4
Kimbrough, Margaret – Photos          B1,F4
Kimbrough, Mary Alice (Sexton), 1907-1991 – Photos          B1,F1&4
Kimbrough, William Joseph, Jr., 1930-2007 – Photos          B1,F1
Kimbrough, William Joseph, Sr., 1903-1994 – Photos          B1,F1&4
King, Martin Luther, Jr. – Celebration, 1986          B1,F13
Louisville and Nashville Railroad, 1929-1964          B1,F1
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Bowling Green, 1986          B1,F13
Mathematics – Study and teaching, 1985          B1,F11
Mennonites – Comments about, 1985          B1,F12
Military nursing – United States, 1982          B2,F2-3,6
Missions and missionary work – Baptists, 1985          B1,F11
Mondale, Walter, b. 1928 – Comments about, 1984          B1,F10
Music – Western Chamber Musicians, 1983          B1,F7
Nursing – Military – United States, 1982          B2,F6
Penmanship
Poets – Comments about, 1983          B1,F7
Politics – U.S., 1981          B1,F4
Politics – U.S. – Falkland Islands, 1982          B1,F5
Porterfield, Earl, d. 1983 - Comments about, 1983          B1,F7
Post cards, ca. 1942, 1964 – Handicraft          B1,F1
Race relations – Religious aspects – Baptists, 1964          B2,F1
Radio broadcasters – Comments about, 1982          B1,F6
Railroads – Louisville and Nashville, 1929-1964          B1,F1
Reagan, Ronald, 1911-2004 – Comments about, 1984          B1,F10
Recipes, 1982, 1984          B1,F5-6,10
Riots – Bowling Green – Beech Bend Park, 1978          B1,F2
Rue, Nelson, b. 1931? – Photos          B1,F11
Russia – Foreign relations, 1983          B1,F8
Smoking, 1983          B1,F7
Social life and customs – Bowling Green, ca. 1964-1988
Social Security, 1981          B1,F4
Spiritualists – Comments about, 1983-1984          B1,F7&9
Terrorism – United States, 1986          B1,F13
Upton, Devoy – Comments about, 1983     B1,F7
Wallace, George, 1919-1998 – Comments about, 1982     B2,F4
Western Chamber Musicians – Western Kentucky University – Comments about, 1983     B1,F7
Zacharias, Donald Wayne, b. 1935 – Comments about, 1982     B1,F12

SEE and SEE ALSO CARDS

A.L.S.
See also:
Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis
See also:
A.L.S.

Drag racing
See also:
Racing

Racing
See also:
Drag racing

Jeffrey  10/01/2013