

Papers of  
LELA MAE STILES

1914-1980

Accession Number: MS 89-19

The papers of Lela Mae Stiles were bequeathed to the Roosevelt Library from her estate in 1988.

Quantity: 10 linear feet (Approximately 25,000 pages)

Restrictions: Material that might constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy or libel of living persons has been closed.

Related Material: Material relating to Ms. Stiles' association with Louis McHenry Howe and President Franklin D. Roosevelt can be found in their respective collections of papers.

THE PAPERS OF LELA STILES - A GENERAL DESCRIPTION  
1914 - 1980

The papers of Lela Mae Stiles consist of ten linear feet of personal files. Ms. Stiles served as a research assistant on the secretarial staffs of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, and, for several months, Dwight D. Eisenhower. She was also employed by the House Un-American Activities Committee from 1955 to 1968 to assist in collecting information on the Ku Klux Klan. Her papers, however, include no official memoranda or other materials, and any correspondence which she had with the various Presidents whom she served or knew is, for the most part, purely personal. The one notable exception is a file of excerpts from letters to President Roosevelt from the electorate concerning his attempts at judicial reform. Ms. Stiles prepared this file entitled "Supreme Court Digests" for the President at his request. It is without presidential comment.

Ms. Stiles was an avid correspondent, a diarist, a biographer, and a published writer of both fiction and non-fiction. It was her habit to type or write letters to her family and friends daily, during her lunch break at the White House or on Capitol Hill. If she typed the letter, she always made a carbon and retained it in a correspondence file, in which she kept all of the letters, cards, notes, etc. which were sent to her. She made entries in her daily diaries at various times during the course of her day, and sometimes kept an office "calendar-type" diary in which she wrote about her work-day, and a separate "home diary" in which she recorded details of her domestic and social life. It is apparent that Lela Stiles kept records of the events of her life and maintained organized files of her personal correspondence in order to create a personal archives of source materials from which she could gather details for her professional writings. Oftentimes Stiles cut her letters into pieces, and labeled and filed them according to subject (e.g.: Louis Howe-personality), or writing project (e.g.: The Man Behind Roosevelt).

She wrote a daily letter to her mother from 1933 until the latter's death in 1953. In these letters she recorded intimate glimpses of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, the White House staff, Cabinet members, Congressmen, and other heads of states or celebrities who visited the White House during her employment there. Of particular interest are her descriptions of the interaction between President Roosevelt and his staff at informal gatherings on holidays and other occasions, and of her experiences at the Democratic National Conventions. She attended every convention during the Roosevelt and Truman presidencies.

She also recorded details of life in the nation's capital during the Second World War including references to civil defense measures, shortages, bond drives, restrictions on travel, the black market, the state visits of Winston Churchill, General DeGaulle, and the European aristocracy, contemporary entertainment personalities, and other people and things from the popular culture of the 1940's.

The letters also chronicle her experiences as a "Potomac Cadet", a single woman living in Washington, D.C. Society, and recorded such details as what she wore, her weight, whom she dated, the guests at the functions which she attended (of particular interest to local historians are her descriptions of the affairs hosted by the Kentucky Society of D.C., and of her annual trips home to be seen at and to view the running of the Kentucky Derby), as well as information about the food and liquor consumed, the decorations, the entertainment, snatches of conversations, etc. The majority of the letters to her mother were cut into pieces, and labled for use in writing The Man Behind Roosevelt, and "Fun at the White House", an uncompleted autobiographical/historical work about her experiences working for the Presidents. The Letters to Mother are by far the richest material in the collection because they provide the best information on the Roosevelt and Truman eras, as seen through the eyes of Ms. Stiles. Some of these "letter pieces" are filed with the particular writing for which they were to be used, ie: there are many "letter pieces" filed under "Writings: Fun in the White House", etc.

The papers are arranged in one alphabetical series which lists both the names of the correspondents and subjects. For the most part, correspondents are her family, neighbors of her parents' in Cecilia, Kentucky, co-workers (including William Hasset, Louise Hachmeister, Roberta Barrows, and Toi Bachelder), friends, notables (including Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Edwin Pauley, Sam Rayburn, Samuel Rosenman, et al.), and individuals associated with her professional writings. Major subseries are "Stiles: Letters to Mother, 1929-1954", which are described above, "Trips, 1955-1967", which include letters, diaries and trip paraphenalia, "Writings", which include drafts of published and unpublished works (of particular interest to local historians is the unpublished book length manuscript, "Hargis of Breathitt", which is historical fiction about a major twentieth century "feud" in Breathitt County, Kentucky), letters to the Howe family concerning The Man Behind Roosevelt, letters to her publishers and editors, and letters to critics, friends and the general public, and "Hachmeister, Louise: Diaries, 1934-1952". Louise Hachmeister was the principal telephone operator on the White House switchboard during the Roosevelt and Truman presidencies. Her rather spartan diaries do include some interesting details about the White House staff, and some

fairly good accounts of the presidential entourage who accompanied Franklin Roosevelt on his visits to the family home in Hyde Park, New York.

Individual files of interest are "FDR, the television series", (Ms. Stiles appeared on the series and wrote a lively account of her day on the set), "Sunrise at Campobello", (Henry Jones, who played Louis Howe in the Broadway production, read The Man Behind Roosevelt, for character information, and corresponded with Ms. Stiles concerning specific details of Mr. Howe's personality.), "Supreme Court Digests", (described above), and "White House, 1933-1960", (Ms. Stiles collected information on the White House secretarial staff, including written accounts of her yearly visits following 1953, her last year on the staff there.)

~~There is a good deal of material in this collection which has been closed to protect the private lives of individuals. This material is listed at the end of the list of folder titles.~~

*Materials opened in 1995*

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY ON LELA MAE STILES, c. 1900 - 1988

Lela Mae Stiles was born in Cecelia, Kentucky on September 5 at the turn of the century. She made it a point to not reveal the year of her birth. Her parents were George A. Stiles and Sarah Elizabeth Carlton Stiles, referred to in all of their correspondence as "de Muddy". After working at the State Capitol in Frankfort, Kentucky for the Secretary of State, Mrs. Emma Guy Cromwell, Lela Stiles moved to New York City in 1928 to work as a journalist. Shortly thereafter, Mr. F.G. Bonfils, publisher of the Denver Post, hired Ms. Stiles to write a column entitled "Girl's Eye View of New York", which was an out-of-towner's guide to the New York scene syndicated in newspapers in the American South and West. She also wrote "Girl's Eye View of Broadway" for Broadway Magazine.

In 1928, Ms. Stiles joined the Democratic National Committee in New York during the Al Smith campaign for the presidency, and was assigned to the Commerce and Industry Division headed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. There she became the assistant to Louis Howe, Mr. Roosevelt's chief political advisor. Lela Stiles worked for Louis Howe from 1928 until his death in 1936. She wrote a successful biography of Louis Howe, The Man Behind Roosevelt, published in 1954.

She began work on the White House secretarial staff as a research assistant on March 4, 1933, the first day of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. She stayed in the White House for exactly twenty years serving during the entire Roosevelt-Truman presidencies, and for several months under President Eisenhower. She did not have a close working relationship with the President as did Marguerite LeHand or Grace Tully. As a research assistant she worked with correspondence, newspapers and other materials, and was more "behind the scenes" than in the Oval Office. She was known as the resident poet laureate, and wrote most of the comic verse which was read at intimate, private White House functions such as the informal parties held for President Roosevelt on his birthday. Her verse is for the most part unsigned, and appears in the papers of President Roosevelt as well as in her own collection. Ms. Stiles did not attend most of the gatherings where her poetry was read, rather her poems were written to be read by Ms. LeHand or Tully or others. She did attend the informal gatherings which the secretarial staff hosted for President Roosevelt, where she sang country ballads and played the guitar. In the planned seating arrangements for these functions, she usually was placed immediately to the left of President Roosevelt.

She was a committed Democrat who attended almost every National Convention from 1932 until the 1960's. As a native

Kentuckian, she was particularly interested in that State's politics. She was an officer in the Kentucky Society of Washington, D.C., and as such helped to plan its social functions, including the Miss Kentucky competition. She also arranged for Washingtonians to view the annual Kentucky Derby.

She left the White House on March 5, 1953 and worked for the Democratic National Committee under Stephen Mitchell until October 3, 1954. On March 1, 1955 she began work for the House Un-American Activities Committee (later Internal Affairs) as a research assistant gathering information on the Ku Klux Klan. She retired from this Committee and public service in 1968.

Aside from her biography of Louis Howe and her poetry, she published eulogies for John Kennedy and Sam Rayburn, an article entitled "The Day FDR Died" for the Saturday Evening Post, and another entitled "What Men Notice First About Women". She also wrote doggerell for Arthur Godfrey's radio program, an unpublished memoir of her experiences in the White House, and a manuscript of an infamous Kentucky feud.

She was a resident of the Mayflower Hotel for nearly fifty years, and an intimate friend of the Washington, D.C. society columnist, Peter Carter. She was a social belle and an avid party goer whose professed hero was "Scarlet O'Hara" whom she had seen in "Gone with the Wind" "countless times". She dated Senator Joseph Guffey, Robert Ripley of "Believe It or Not" fame, newspaper correspondent, author and adventurer Linton Wells, as well as other politicians, writers and individuals of note.

She maintained her ties to Cecelia, Kentucky throughout her life in the Nation's Capitol. She supported her parents throughout their lives and until their deaths. She also gave financial assistance to family members, Kentucky friends and neighbors who were not doing as well as she. In 1980 she retired to the Villa Rosa Home in Mitchellville, Maryland, and died in Doctors Hospital in Lanham, Maryland on May 25, 1988.

PAPERS OF LELA MAE STILES

- 1           A - B  
          Bachelder, Toi  
          Barrows, Roberta  
          Bayer, Charles M.  
          Burkhart, Alice  
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          California Friends (partially identified)  
          Carrico, Frank G.  
          Christmas 1964  
          Christmas Lists  
          "Clambert"  
          Clippings (3 Folders)
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          Democratic Convention, 1964  
          de Neergaard, "Ginny"  
          Doland, Johnny, Bob and Mrs. Erle  
          Dooley, "Bill"  
          Dudley, Trot and Arthur  
          Eben, Mary A  
          Feick, Fred L.  
          First Day Covers  
          Foster, Reginald E.
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          Hachmeister, Louise (see Diaries, box 17)  
          Hassett, William  
          Heck, Al and Anna  
          Herlihy, Dorothy and Family (2 Folders)  
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          Inaugurations  
          Johnson, Lyndon B.: Family, Friends and Staff  
          Johnson, Lyndon B.: Family, Friends and Staff -  
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          Johnson - Humphrey Campaign, 1964

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5	Kentucky Soc. of DC, 1964 - 66 (2 folders) Lewis, Paul Lyde, Chubby F. M Marriott, "Billy" Mayflower Hotel Mayflower Hotel: clippings Milburn, H. E. Miller, Emma Guffey New York Friends (partially identified) Notes and Fragments O, P, R Parties
6	Pauley, Edwin W. Phillips, John and Family Perry's Love Letter Plaut, Edward Rayburn, Sam Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Franklin D.: letters in re death of Roosevelt Family <u>Roosevelt and Howe</u> by A. B. Rollins, Jr. <u>FDR</u> - the television series Rosen, Samuel Rosenberg, Lorraine & Walter S - V Smith, "Acy & Racy" (2 Folders) Souvenirs: Inaugural Souvenirs (3 Folders)
7	Stiles, Betty Brad Stiles, Lela Mae: Personal Correspondence Stiles Family Stiles Family: Material About Parents of LMS
8	Stiles: Letters to Mother: Notes & Fragments Stiles: Letters to Mother: 1929 - 1940
9	Stiles: Letters to Mother: 1941 - 1945
10	Stiles: Letters to Mother: 1944 (noteworthy) - 1954
11	"Sunrise at Campobello" "Sunrise at Campobello": clippings

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13	Trips, 1964: New York (2 Folders) Trips, 1965: New York (2 Folders) Trips, 1966: New York Trips, 1967: Montreal Exposition Truman, Harry S. U. S. Friends (partially identified) WXYZ Washington, DC Friends (partially identified)
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15	Writings: <u>The Man Behind Roosevelt</u> : Drafts Writings: <u>The Man Behind Roosevelt</u> : Notes and Fragments
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17	Writings: "Fun in the White House" Writings: "Hargis of Breathitt" Writings: "Hargis of Breathitt": Correspondence with Kelly Kash and Family Writings: "Justice" Writings: Letters From Editors and Friends Writings: Poems by LMS and others Writings: <u>Saturday Evening Post</u> Article (3 Folders) Writings: <u>True Stories</u> Writings: "Truman's Assassination Attempt"

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