

Harriet Louise Cooke Nelson Papers

Finding Aid

Windsor Historical Society
96 Palisado Avenue, Windsor, CT 06095

Creator: Harriet Louise Cooke Nelson, 1860-1948

Dates: 1836-1948, bulk dates 1875-1933

Extent: 2 linear feet

Accession #: 2006.40

Biographical Note

Harriet Louise Cooke Nelson was born in Woonsocket, RI on October 25, 1860, the daughter of Rev. Theodore Cooke and his wife Martha E. Hale. When Harriet was eleven years old, her father died and her mother took her family of six young children home to live with her parents Calvin and Hannah Hale in Stow, MA. Harriet graduated from Wellesley College in 1883 with a teaching degree and for nine years taught at the high schools in Worcester, MA and Putnam, CT. She was married to Roscoe Nelson, a former colleague at Putnam High School, on June 30, 1892. The young couple immediately moved to Windsor, CT, where he began what would become a forty year pastorate at the First Congregational Church (First Church in Windsor).

Harriet and Roscoe had three sons, Frederic Cooke (1893-1981), Roscoe Winthrop (1895-1966), and Theodore Phillips (1898-1910). The accidental death of Theodore at the age of 12 and the death of Harriet's youngest sister from tuberculosis precipitated periods of emotional difficulties through which Harriet carried out the traditional responsibilities of managing her household and her role as the minister's wife. During the Nelson's tenure in Windsor, they saw the town evolve from a small, close-knit agricultural community to a suburb increasingly influenced by the nearby city of Hartford, the region, and world events. The couple retired in 1932 and moved to Hartford, and then later to West Hartford, CT. Harriet Cooke Nelson died on June 29, 1948; her husband Roscoe passed away thirteen years later in 1961.

Scope and Contents

The Harriet Louise Cooke Nelson collected papers consist of correspondence, diaries, photographs, and assorted school and family memorabilia that document the life of Harriet Louise Cooke Nelson (1860-1948). Harriet was the wife of Rev. Roscoe Nelson, the pastor of First Church in Windsor, a Congregational church in Windsor, CT, from 1892-1932.

The collection contains approximately 250 handwritten, personal letters written between 1851 and 1933. Half of the correspondence is addressed to Harriet from various members of the Cooke family or from her husband Roscoe and their sons Frederick and Winthrop. Another one hundred letters were sent from Harriet to her extended family, friends, husband, and sons. One small group of letters was written by Roscoe Nelson to his wife and family while he was traveling. Miscellaneous family correspondence completes the series.

The correspondence illustrates the close family ties held by the Cooke and Nelson families and conveys the importance of placed on education by the couple. Harriet describes her activities as a teacher and as a minister's wife, special events, travels, and the trials and joys of everyday life. She suffered from periods of nervous depression and the stress of these episodes is evident in her writing. She was particularly affected by the untimely death of her young son Theodore.

Six small diaries cover many of the years between 1876 and 1919 including her 16th year (1876) and her first year as a new mother (1894). Assorted family papers provide detail about the ordination and death of her father Rev. Theodore Cooke, her sister Sarah (Sadie) Cooke's writings and funeral, Roscoe and Harriet's wedding, and a short biography of Harriet. A dozen family photographs include portraits of her parents, siblings, husband and children.

A spreadsheet contains basic information about each letter in the collection including date, name of author, recipient, and a brief description of topics. Hale and Cooke family genealogies were compiled by the arranger as a supplement to the collection.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged by format. Letters in the correspondence series are further divided into subseries by the author and recipient. Within each subseries the materials are arranged chronologically.

- Series I. Correspondence
- Series II. Diaries
- Series III. Family papers and photographs
- Series IV. Supplementary materials

Box and Folder Lists

Series I. Correspondence

- Box 1
Pre 1875 Miscellaneous letters and papers

- Box 2
1875-1887 Harriet's letters to family, including Wellesley College years

- Box 3
1888-1894 Harriet's letters to family, to sisters Caroline (Carrie) Cooke and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Cooke, and to fiancée/husband Roscoe Nelson

- Box 4
1895-1896 Harriet's letters to family and to brother John W. Cooke

- Box 5
1897-1900 Harriet's letters to family and to husband Roscoe Nelson

Box 6

1901-1933 Harriet's letters to family, to mother Martha Hale Cooke, to sisters Caroline and Elizabeth, to husband Roscoe Nelson, and to son Winthrop Nelson. Includes letters Harriet and Roscoe wrote during their 1913 trip to Europe.

Box 7

1895-1921 Letters written to Harriet from her family, including her mother Martha Hale Cooke, her aunt Carrie Merrill, her sons Winthrop and Frederick Nelson, and various other individuals. Several letters written by Winthrop Nelson to family members and other persons.

Box 8

1888-1933 Roscoe's letters to Harriet and to their sons Winthrop and Frederick Nelson

Box 9

Series II. Diaries

9.1 Harriet's personal diaries for 1876, 1893-1911, 1902, 1905, 1910, 1911-1918, and 1919

Series III. Family papers and photographs

9.2 Assorted memorabilia removed from the 1893-1911 diary including children's letters, drawings, and report cards; holiday and prayer cards; correspondence; and an article about the Harvard University Alumni Association gathering in 1889

9.3 Correspondence among members of the Rev. Abraham Randall family of Stowe, MA. (1836-1842); letter announcing the death of John F. Hale in 1866.

9.4 Ordination (1847) and death (1871) of Rev. Theodore Cooke

9.5 Funeral service for Sarah (Sadie) Frances Cooke (1892); photographs of the six children of Theodore and Martha Cooke

9.6 Exhibition program from Newton (MA) High School (1878); photograph Putnam (CT) High School Class of 1888

9.7 Wedding announcement, marriage certificate, correspondence about Harriet and Roscoe's marriage (1892)

9.8 Eulogy for Harriet Cooke Nelson (1948), presumably written by Roscoe Nelson

9.9 Identified family photographs including the Calvin Hale Homestead in Stowe, MA.

Series IV. Supplementary materials

9.10 Hale and Cooke family genealogy and census records compiled by arranger

Related Materials in the WHS collections

Roscoe Nelson Collection (1932.7, 1988.37, 1990.15, 1992.26, 1996.92, 1998.6)

Friendship Quilts (1991.65.2 and 1992.26.1)

Family files: Nelson, Roscoe
Nelson, Frederic

Subject files: Churches – First Church in Windsor
Houses – Palisado Ave., 143
Schools – Hayden Hall

Subject Terms

Clarke, Isabella G., 1832- -- Correspondence
Cooke, Caroline G., 1864-1936 -- Correspondence
Cooke, Elizabeth G., 1862-1932 -- Correspondence
Cooke, John W., 1866-1898
Cooke, Sarah F., 1871-1892
Cooke, Theodore, 1815-1871
First Church in Windsor (Windsor, Conn.)
Hagans, Martha M. (Randall), 1817-1842 -- Correspondence
Merrill, Carrie -- Correspondence
Nelson, Frederic C., 1893-1981
Nelson, Harriet L. Cooke, 1860-1948 -- Correspondence
Nelson, Roscoe, 1861-1961 -- Correspondence
Nelson, Roscoe Winthrop, 1895-1966 -- Correspondence
Nelson, Roscoe Winthrop, Jr., 1925-
Nelson, Theodore P., 1898-1910
Randall, Abraham, 1771-1852 -- Correspondence
Randall, Amelia -- Correspondence
Windsor (Conn.) – Church history
Windsor (Conn.) – Social life and customs

Custodial history

The correspondence in the Harriet Cooke Nelson Papers was bundled into nine separate packets when the collection was donated to the Society. These sets were labeled with slips of paper that corresponded to a brief inventory prepared by the donor. However, upon further examination, the packet labels were found to be an inaccurate representation of the letters in each group, and the decision was made to rearrange the letters. In most cases the undated letters could be given an estimated date based on their contents.

The collection was researched, processed, inventoried, and arranged by Windsor Historical Society volunteer Susan Smoktunowicz in February and March 2008. Susan prepared a Microsoft Excel index to the correspondence portion of the collection and assembled a timeline of events from Harriet's life. She wrote "The Minister's Wife," an article about the collection which was published in the Windsor Historical Society *Newsletter* in June 2008. The finding aid was prepared by Librarian Barbara Goodwin and completed in January 2015.