BHC-MSS 0224
Guide to the Papers of Hazel M. Kirk
By Lisa Furchtgott
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Descriptive Summary
Creator: Elizabeth Curtis Wright
Title: Papers of Hazel M. Kirk
Dates: 1857-1961
Quantity: 1 box; 0.42 archival feet
Abstract: The collection contains letters from Presbyterian missionaries working in China and Korea from 1920 to 1961, with the bulk dating from 1920 through 1941. Most of the correspondence was sent to recipients in the United States by the Fairfield, Connecticut native Elizabeth Curtis Wright, a missionary educated in the Young Women's Christian Association as well as Smith College and Columbia University. She spent most of her career in China. Samuel Austin Moffett and his wife Eileen Moffett also sent letters and reports to Kirk from 1958 through 1961 from their post in Andong, South Korea. The collection provides insight into US missionaries' perceptions of religious practice, schooling, political shifts, and poverty in East Asia. Papers also include Kirk's Bridgeport-based diary from 1932 and earlier photographs of her family.
Languages: English, Chinese
Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical history: The collection contains little information about Kirk. As of 1932, she had worked at the Bullard Machine Tool Company in Bridgeport and lived in the city's Young Women's Christian Association dormitory. None of her own letters are included. A diary from 1932 is the only document she herself wrote among the papers she donated. A child of schoolteachers, she was born in Stratford, Connecticut in 1897 and died in West Haven, Connecticut in 1980.

The majority of the written materials comprises correspondence sent to her by Elizabeth Curtis Wright, born in Fairfield, Connecticut in 1887. Like Kirk, she spent time at YWCA missionary-training institutions. She also earned a bachelor's degree at Smith College and a master's from the Teachers College of Columbia University. Her missionary duties began in 1919, when she worked as a secretary to the Young Women's Christian Association branch in Tianjin, a city southeast of Beijing. She was moved to Zhenjiang to aid the Board of Foreign Missions and Ministers before being evacuated to Korea in 1926 or 1927, as tensions related to the Chinese Civil War intensified. After spending stints in several other cities following her return to China in 1929, she was hired in 1932 to teach at Beijing's Presbyterian Girls' High School, a position she would maintain until her final departure in 1956. There she "oversaw an industrial self-help department, which gave girls a chance to earn their tuition" and managed the school's branch of the YWCA. Her service was interrupted by a spell in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. After moving back to Fairfield, she would stay there for much of her remaining life. She died in Cumberland, Tennessee in 1974.

The remainder of the collection's letters were written by Samuel Hugh Moffett, along with his wife, Eileen Moffett. Samuel was born in Pyongyang, now the capital of North Korea, in 1916. He was the son of the Reverend Samuel Austin Moffett, who had established the Presbyterian University Theological Seminary in Seoul in the early twentieth century before moving to the northern part of the country. After finishing high school in Pyongyang, Samuel received bachelors' degrees from Wheaton College, in Wheaton, Illinois as well as the Princeton Theological Seminary. He then received a PhD in history from Yale, specializing in the spread of Christianity across Asia. Starting in 1947 he worked as a Presbyterian missionary in Beijing and Nanking, but left the country in 1949 after the rise to power by the People's Republic of China. After the death of his first wife, he was transferred to South Korea. There he married Eileen – born in 1928, a native of Spokane, Washington, and also a graduate of the Princeton Seminary – in 1956. After acting as a missionary in Andong, a small city in northern Korea, he served as a professor and administrator of the Korean Presbyterian Seminary, while Eileen taught English and bible studies. They returned to the US in 1981, when Samuel was appointed as a professor at the Princeton Seminary. He died in 2015.

Scope and content:

Letters and other materials – "Leaves From the Personal Diary" and "Personal Reports," for example – sent to Kirk over the beginning of the 1920s through 1941 carry the weight of the collection. They provide detailed, everyday accounts of her life as a US woman missionary in China and Korea during a turbulent era. Documents include descriptions of Wright's illnesses and the grounds, curricula, behavior, and celebrations making up the schools at which Wright worked, as well as her impressions of life outside the schools (e.g., "Glimpses of Koreans and Korean Life"). Although some of her letters and cards were sent directly to Kirk, many are addressed to "Members and Friends of Peug yu Hui," seemingly a group of women with connections to the YWCA or missionary training. Recipients were asked to "pass along" the correspondence, presumably by hand or mail.

The Moffett letters date from 1956 through 1961. Most were updates written from Andong and circulated by a Presbyterian Mission branch in San Francisco; all but one, a handwritten note thanking Kirk for a letter and an Easter donation of $15, are directed to "Family and Friends."

Arrangement notes:

Series I contains correspondence from Wright, including postcards, wedding invitations, a 1929 Shanghai hospital menu, Industrial Self-Help Department order receipts, holiday cards, travel to Japan, paper dolls, undated Connecticut newspaper profiles of her, and a pamphlet entitled "My Religion," written by Madame Chiang Kai-shek.

Series II contains reports sent from the Moffetts in Seoul and passing through the Presbyterian Mission in San Francisco. They include a flyer about tensions within the General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church in 1960 and a 1961 handwritten letter to Kirk.

Series III includes a copy of *Upward Path*, written by the Methodist minister John Parker and published in 1857, and Kirk's diary from 1932. Her daily entries began on January 1st and continued through October 11th. The series also contains a series of empty envelopes, almost all of them addressed by Wright in China.

Series IV features pictures of Andong, Korea, from the late 1950s; a photo of Hazel Kirk, taken in Orange, New Jersey when she was seven months old, along with photos of her mother and father;

and nineteenth-century portraits of members of her mother's family, the Tappens, most of them marked as being photographed in New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Ohio, and Maine.

The Bridgeport History Center also holds newspaper articles about Wright from 1937, 1941, 1941, 1943, and 1956, with the rest undated. Also included are a copy of her college-entrance examination grades from 1906 and an undated photo portrait. Materials including Wright's diaries from 1927 to 1939 and a copy of her 1973 memoir can be accessed in the "China Records Project Miscellaneous Personal Papers Collection" at the Yale Divinity Library Special Collections. Her own collection is located in the Special Collections & University Archives at the University of Oregon.

Samuel Hugh Moffett's papers are available at the Princeton Seminary archives.

Administrative information:
Provenance: Papers donated by Hazel Kirk
Preferred Citation: Papers of Helen Liskov (BHC-MSS 0244), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

Corporate names
Young Women's Christian Association (Bridgeport, Conn.)

Personal names
Wright, Elizabeth Curtis
Moffett, Samuel
Moffett, Eileen
Kirk, Hazel

Subject tracings
Women missionaries
Women missionaries -- Lay missionaries
Missionaries--China--Correspondence

Box I

Series I, Elizabeth C. Wright

1. Correspondence, c. 1920-1929
2. Correspondence, 1930-1934
3. Correspondence, 1935-1939
4. Correspondence, 1940-1941
5. Correspondence, undated
6. News-clippings, undated
7. Misc., 1927, 1938, 1941, undated

Series II, Samuel and Eileen Moffett

8. Correspondence, 1956-1958, 1960, 1961

Series III, Additional material

9. Rev. John Parker, *The Upward Path*, 1857

10. Envelopes from correspondence with Elizabeth C. Wright and Samuel Moffett, 1929, 1935, 1940, 1961, [?]
11. Hazel M. Kirk diary, 1932

Series IV, Photographs

12. Snapshots from Andong, Korea, 1958, 1959, undated
13. Kirk family photos, undated
14. Edward Tappen, Husband Agnes M. Hopkins, undated
15. Tappen family photos and photo plates, undated