



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

Grace Eulalie Matthews Ashmore papers

1896-1972

MssCol 135

Processed by John Stinson.

Summary

Creator: Ashmore, Grace Eulalie Matthews, 1885-1972

Title: Grace Eulalie Matthews Ashmore papers

Date: 1896-1972

Source: Gift of Mrs. Erwin R. Hilts, 1973

Abstract: Thirty-one diaries of a New York City socialite, 1896-1972, with miscellaneous papers and photographs, including approximately 100 letters and postcard from opera critic Ernest de Weerth.

Preferred citation: Grace Eulalie Matthews Ashmore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by John Stinson; machine readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services and revised by Chatham Ewing.

Creator History

Grace Eulalie Matthews Ashmore was a society woman in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

These are the diaries of a New York City socialite, the daughter of Grace Birmingham and George Matthews. Her father was a grandson of John Matthews (1808-70), one of the founders of the soda water industry whose firm became one of the leading suppliers of soda water and soda fountains in the U.S. The diaries, written in a bold legible hand, record (in 31 octavo volumes) the daily life and activities of Mrs. Ashmore from the time that she was a child of eleven in 1896 until shortly before her death at age eighty-eight. They thus cover a wide and interesting span of time and show in intimate detail the life of an American woman of wealth and fashion who came to maturity in the decade just before the Great War.

Of principal importance is the record of the period up until 1918 which is given in considerable detail. (Beginning in 1919 a "5 year diary" is used with the consequent sacrifice of space and content). An indefatigable traveller throughout her life the diarist begins with an account of her life in London and in Paris (1896-97). There is a fascinating account of her visit to St. Petersburg(1901) where the people all seemed very poor and the beggars "as thick as at Rome". She records meeting the African explorer Paul Du Chaillu.

Her life in New York was a flurry of activity. From her home on Madison Avenue she commuted to Miss Chapin's School by pony cart. Her summers were spent at New London and Oyster Bay swimming and sailing. There is the record of her courtship and marriage to Henry Townsend Ashmore(who died tragically of pneumonia in 1915 the day following their eighth wedding anniversary), the description of her activities as a member of the Junior League, of her theatre and opera parties at which she heard Enrico Carusoin *Rigoletto* and Blanche Bates in *The Girl of the Golden West*. There is also mention of Sarah Bernhardt and Galli-Curci and Heifetz at Carnegie Hall "who was wonderful and gave many encores". During the war she tried her hand at selling Liberty Bonds and she passed out leaflets at the recruiting tent at Fifth Avenue and Fortieth Street. On the day of November 7th, 1918 she records: "At 1 o'clock all the whistles began blowing and soon there was a din such as had never been heard in New York..crowds of people paraded in the centre of 5th Ave. and everyone went mad".

While the diaries lack in depth throughout being almost wholly non-introspective in character, and in breadth after 1918, they nonetheless provide an interesting glimpse into the American cultural and social scene. They are unusually complete there being but one major gap in the chronological sequence (from 1929 to 1933 the equivalent of one "5 year diary").

In addition to the diaries there are a few letters and miscellaneous papers. Present are some 115 letters and post cards addressed to Mrs. Ashmore from her friend Ernest de Weerth (d.1967),the American opera critic and stage and costume designer. These very chatty and personal letters written from Rome and elsewhere in Europe in the period 1956-66 contain interesting commentary on the international operatic and theatrical world. There are also present a few photographs of Mrs. Ashmore and friends, a notebook containing the record of her reading from 1901 to 1905, a few press clippings, and transcripts of Matthews family letters in the period 1829-70 with genealogical table and notes.

Accompanying these diaries and papers is a mass of printed matter, consisting of travel literature (flyers, brochures, color post cards, etc.) of Spain, Portugal, Greece and Egypt in the post W.W. II period, and numerous articles on European travel clipped from popular travel magazines.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Diaries

Photographic prints

Geographic Names

Europe -- Social life and customs

New York (N.Y.) -- Social life and customs

Rome (Italy) -- Social life and customs

Subjects

Opera -- Italy -- Rome

Theater -- Italy -- Rome
Voluntarism -- New York (State) -- New York
Women -- Education
Women -- New York (State) -- New York -- Societies and clubs
World War, 1914-1918 -- War work

Names

Ashmore, Grace Eulalie Matthews, 1885-1972
Weerth, Ernest de, d. 1967
Matthews family
Junior League of the City of New York

Container List

Diaries 1896-1972 (31 diaries by physical count, Volume 3 not having been received from the donor in the original gift.)

- b. 1 Paris (mainly) 1896, Sept 23-1897, Apr 17
- v. 1
- b. 1 London (mainly) 1897, Apr 18-1897, Oct 16
- v. 2
- b. 1 [missing]
- v. [3]
- b. 1 New York (mainly) 1898, Jan. 1-1898, Jul 13
- v. 4
- b. 1 New York, New London (Conn.) 1898, Jul 14-1899, Jan 31
- v. 5
- b. 1 New York, New London (Conn.) 1899, Feb 1-1899, Oct 8
- v. 6
- b. 1 New York, New London (Conn.) 1899, Oct 9-1900, Aug 10
- v. 7
- b. 1 New York, New London (Conn.), Paris, London, Berlin, etc. 1900, Aug 11-1901, Jul 26
- v. 8
- v. 9 Christiana (Norway), Stockholm, St. Petersburg, N.Y.C.etc 1901, Jul 27-1902, Mar 17
- b. 2 New York, New London (Conn.) 1902, Mar 18-1903, Mar 18
- v. 10
- b. 2 New York, Rockaway 1903, Mar 18-1904, Mar 18
- v. 11
- b. 2 New York, Rockaway 1904, Mar 18-1905, Jan 18
- v. 12
- b. 2 New York, Rockaway 1905, Jan 19-1905, Sept 30
- v. 13
- b. 2 New York, New London 1905, Oct 1-1906, Aug 17
- v. 14
- b. 2 New York, New London (Conn.), Boston, Montreal 1906, Aug 18-1907, Jun 6
- v. 15
- b. 2 New York & environs 1907, Jun 7-1908, Mar 27
- v. 16
- b. 2 New York 1908, Mar 28-1909, Mar 28
- v. 17
- b. 3 New York & environs 1909, Mar 29-1910, Jun 24
- v. 18
- b. 3 New York, Oyster Bay & environs 1910, Jun 25-1912, Feb 6
- v. 19
- b. 3 New York & environs 1912, Feb 7-1913, Nov 6
- v. 20
- b. 3 New York, Oyster Bay, New London (Conn.) 1913, Nov 7-1916, Feb 29
- v. 21
- [gap bet. Jul.15-Nov 30, 1915]
- b. 3 Ariz, Calif, New York, Oyster Bay, Bar Harbor, etc. 1916, Mar 1-1918, Dec 31
- v. 22
- b. 3 Paris, London, New York 1919, Jan 1-1923, Dec 31
- v. 23
- b. 4 New York, Paris, Florence, etc. 1924, Jan 1-1928, Dec 31
- v. 24
- b. 4 New York, Europe 1934, Jan 1-1938, Dec 31
- v. 25

Diaries (cont.)

- b. 4 New York 1939, Jan 1-1943, Dec 31
- v. 26
- b. 4 New York 1944, Jan 1-1948, Dec 31
- v. 27
- b. 4 New York, Europe 1949, Jan 1-1953, Dec 31
- v. 28
- b. 4 New York, Nantucket, Paris, Europe 1954, Jan 1-1958, Dec 31
- v. 29
- b. 4 New York, Nantucket, Europe 1959, Jan 1-1963, Dec 31
- v. 30
- b. 4 New York, Europe 1964, Jan 1-1968, Dec 31
- v. 31
- b. 4 New York, Europe 1969, Jan 1-1972, Nov 30
- v. 32

Letters, Photographs & Miscellaneous Papers 1829-1972

- b. 5 Letters to Mrs. Ashmore from Ernest de Weerth (d.1967), opera critic and stage and costume designer written from Rome and elsewhere in Europe, (w/ obituaries of de Weerth.) 1956-66 (c.58 ltrs, 58 post cards)
- b. 5 Photographs
- b. 5 Press clippings (personal & friends)
- b. 5 Notebook ("Books I Have Read") belonging to Mrs. Ashmore containing notes on her reading from Nov. 1901 - Jul 1905 (Bound)
- b. 5 Matthews Family Letters, Typed transcripts w/ introduction, genealogical table and notes. [Editor, author, unknown]. 1829-71 (Bound in folder, no pagination.)
- b. 6 Miscellany