

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Kitty Marion Papers
1908-1939, n.d.
MssCol 6263

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Summary

Main entry:	Marion, Kitty
Title:	Kitty Marion Papers, 1908-1939, n.d.
Size:	1.3 linear feet (2 boxes)
Source:	Donated in 1944 as part of the Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection.
Abstract:	<p>Kitty Marion was a German-born actress and social activist deeply involved in the British Suffragette, and the American Birth Control movements. Arrested numerous times in both her adopted countries and subjected to over two hundred prison force-feedings, her unflagging dedication to women's causes led to her association with Margaret Sanger, Emmeline Pankhurst and Edith How-Martyn. Marion was perhaps best known as the woman selling the <i>Birth Control Review</i> on the streets of New York City from 1917 to 1930.</p>
Access:	Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.
Preferred citation:	Kitty Marion Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Provenance note

Kitty Marion's papers were donated to the New York Public Library and processed as part of Series Q of the Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection. In 2005 they were reprocessed, and while administratively remain part of the collection, they are physically arranged as a separate collection.

Biographical note

Kitty Marion, actress, suffragist agitator and birth control advocate, was born Katherina Schafer in Germany in 1871. Fleeing the authority of her strict father, at the age of fifteen Marion emigrated to England. She soon pursued the career of a traveling actress, during which time she took the stage name she was to use for the remainder of her life. Her disgust at the exploitation of female actresses, paired with her observations of the realities of women's lives around the country, kindled the beginnings of Miss Marion's career as an activist--a career that began with her denunciations of the theater industry, but soon shifted to active participation in the British Suffragette movement.

Miss Marion joined the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union in 1908, and soon began to participate in political demonstrations and marches, eventually engaging in more radical civil disobedience protests. On July 29, 1909, Marion was arrested for throwing a brick through a Newcastle post office window, for which she was sentenced to a month in prison. It was during this imprisonment that she adopted the method increasingly used by Suffragettes to protest their punishment--a hunger strike--and was subsequently subjected to the first of what would amount to a lifetime career of force-feedings at the hands of British and American prison authorities. Marion protested this first treatment by breaking a gaslight in her cell, and using mattress stuffing to set her cell on fire.

Despite repeated imprisonments, Kitty Marion continued her political protests, being arrested several times in the following four years. Her final British arrest was in 1913, under suspicion of setting fire to the grandstand at Hurst Park, near London. For this crime she was sentenced to a three year imprisonment, of which she served only several months before being released to a hospital under the provisions of the Cat and Mouse Act. The outbreak of World War I coincided with her hospital stay, and the British government permitted the German immigrant Marion to move to the United States instead of returning to prison.

Once in the states, Marion soon became involved with Margaret Sanger's American Birth Control League, initially working in the office of the League and becoming the "circulation department" for the *Birth Control Review* in 1917. For thirteen years--until the journal switched to private circulation in 1930--Marion stood on street corners in New York City, selling the *Review* to passersby and attracting quite a bit of local attention. Her involvement with the *Review* was not merely limited to sales, however, as she also wrote numerous articles featured in the journal.

Marion's dedication to the *Review* and the birth control cause was just as iron-fast as had been her support of the Suffragette cause in England. She was arrested several times for her public sales of the publication and charged under the Comstock laws with the sale and distribution of obscene literature. While the exact number of arrests Marion claimed varied, her estimates ranged between 7 and 9 total career arrests. In the July 4, 1936 edition of *The New Yorker*, an article featuring Miss Marion quoted her estimate that she sold over 99,000 copies of the *Review*. She asserted she had gone on hunger strike four times, and been force-fed a total of 232 times.

After her tenure at the *Birth Control Review* came to an end in 1930, Marion became a teacher of diction for students of foreign birth in New York City public schools, teaching at two schools in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. Having been naturalized in 1923, Kitty Marion lived in New York until her death in 1944.

Scope and content note

Kitty Marion's papers briefly document her personal life and involvement with both the Birth Control International Information Centre in London and the American Birth Control League's *Birth Control Review*. The materials range from 1908 to 1939, with the bulk of the materials falling between 1934 and 1937, when she was actively involved in the American and international birth control movements.

The collection includes annotated drafts of her memoirs in English and German, incoming correspondence and newsletters, printed matter--much of which features articles on Marion herself, a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, and three photographs.

Arrangement note

The Kitty Marion Papers are organized in the following series:

- I. Writings, 1908-1914, 1930, n.d.
- II. Correspondence, 1926, 1933-1939, n.d.
- III. Printed material and scrapbook, 1909, 1917, 1927-1937, n.d.
- IV. Photographs, 1925, n.d.

Series descriptions and container list

I. Writings, 1908-1914, 1930, n.d.

7 folders

Kitty Marion's writings consist of autobiographical entries and personal testimonies on protests in which she participated, her treatment in British and American jails, and accounts of the abuses of female actresses in the British theater. A small amount of information is present regarding organizations with which she was affiliated.

The bulk of this series is comprised of Marion's memoirs, heavily annotated by hand. The materials cover her life from early childhood through her involvement with the American birth control movement in the 1930s. In them she discusses her family, life as a German immigrant in England, experiences as an actress in the theater, the means through which she became involved with the Suffragettes, her various imprisonments and excruciating force-feedings, and her career as a newspaper woman selling *The Birth Control Review* in New York City. The manuscript of the memoirs is present in both English and German language drafts.

Other statements by Marion include a 1908 signed account of manipulative tricks often used by theater managers, a copy of a letter Marion addressed to newspapers on the subject of women in the theater, a personal statement about her imprisonment in the Newcastle Prison in 1909, and an undated speech given by Marion in defense to her arrest for destruction of government property in Newcastle.

The series is concluded by a 1930 draft report written by Miss Marion for the Birth Control International Information Centre, and a list of organizations with which she was active, or to which she had made financial contributions.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	Political statements and memoirs, 1908-1914, n.d.
	2-3	Autobiography, undated
	4-5	Autobiography, undated (in German)
	6	Draft report for Birth Control International Information Centre, 1930 March 9
	7	List of organizations and contributions, undated

II. Correspondence, 1926, 1933-1939, n.d.

5 folders

The majority of the letters are from Edith How-Martyn, honorary director of the Birth Control International Information Centre (BCIIC) in London and, coincidentally, one of the first Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) members to be sent to prison. Also present are a fair number of letters from the secretary of the BCIIC, Olive Johnson. The letters of both women report Mrs. How-Martyn's travels in East and Southeast Asia, northern Africa, the Middle East, and Jamaica, with the goals of spreading birth control education and influencing public policy.

The letters report conferences attended by Mrs. How-Martyn, and her reception by local public health officials and doctors. She mentions a meeting with Mahatma Gandhi on the subject of birth control in India. Also mentioned are debates on policy in Great Britain and abroad on the topics of sexual education in schools, alternative birth control methods, population management, abortion, sterilization, and the formation of marriage bureaus.

How-Martyn also offered observations of political issues in the countries she visited, commenting on the reception of birth control advocates in Ireland, and by Catholics throughout her travels, the scandal involving Prince Edward and Mrs. Simpson in England, the activities of Hitler and Mussolini, conflict between China and Japan, and increasing tensions in the Holy Land.

There were originally occasional newspaper clippings included in the correspondence, however these were separated at the time of original processing, and have since been placed in Series III. Printed material and scrapbook.

1	8	1926, 1933-1935
	9	1936-1937
	10	1936-1937
	11	1938-1939
	12	undated

III. Printed material and scrapbook, 1909, 1917, 1927-1937, n.d.

9 folders

Printed matter includes materials from the Birth Control International Information Centre, the Birth Control Worldwide News Service, banquet programs from events attended by Kitty Marion, and selected journals and magazines featuring stories on Miss Marion and her colleagues.

The Birth Control Worldwide News Service materials are newsletters dating between 1934 and 1937. The newsletters are typed and include indexes and abstracts preceding each edition. Several mention Kitty Marion, as well as detailed diary accounts of Edith How-Martyn's travels. Other frequent inclusions were excerpts from public speeches on birth control, and copies of pertinent newspaper articles.

The materials from the Birth Control International Information Centre include three copies of the center's newsletter, and several flyers and invitations advertising Edith How-Martyn lectures from 1935 through 1937, some of which occurred in India. The newsletter is present in three volumes dated October 1934, and February and November 1935.

Among the journals and magazines included in the collection are a 1935 copy of the *Literary Digest*, which contains an article entitled "The Birth Control Debate Renewed;" copies of *The New Yorker* from 1927, 1930, and 1936, each of which contain short features on Miss Marion; a 1917 edition of *The Suffragist*, reporting on the famous women's White House protest during the visit of the Russian envoys; and a 1909 edition of *Votes for Women* edited by Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, which includes an article about the mass arrests following the June 29 protests of that year. This last article is accompanied by a list of brief biographies on the arrestees, including Kitty Marion.

The scrapbook and newspaper clippings contain materials from a variety of different newspapers, ranging in date from 1917 to 1930. Some of the loose clippings were separated from Marion's incoming correspondence during initial processing, and were relocated to this series.

Many items in the series feature articles relating to the birth control movement; articles on Miss Marion's sales of the *Review* in New York and resulting arrests; features on Marion's colleagues, including Rosika Schwimmer; and other agitation activities of Marion's. One such activity was her 1917 ejection from a public conference at Carnegie Hall, at which she heckled Commissioner of Correction Burdette Lewis for his policy of force-feeding political prisoners. Also included is a October 2, 1937 weekly edition copy of the Viennese newspaper *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*. The paper contains an article on British Suffragettes and mentions Kitty Marion.

1	12	Birth Control Worldwide News Service, 1934-1937, n.d.
2	1-7	Printed matter, 1909, 1917, 1927, 1930-1938, n.d.
	8	Scrapbook, 1917-1930, n.d.
	9	Newspaper clippings, 1909, 1918, 1926-1939, n.d.

2 10-11 **IV. Photographs, 1925, n.d.**
2 folders

Photographs consist of one photo of Kitty Marion with two unidentified children, a photo of Miss Marion selling *The Birth Control Review* that ran with several newspaper articles, and a snapshot of women and staff in the office of the American Birth Control League clinic.

The photos featuring Miss Marion are not dated, however the American Birth Control League clinic photo dates from 1925.