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Humanities and Social Sciences Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

**Michael and Barbara Foster Papers regarding Alexandra David-Neel**  
1977-1991  
MssCol 5979

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## Summary

- Main entry:** Foster, Barbara M., 1938-
- Title:** Michael and Barbara Foster Papers regarding Alexandra David-Neel, 1977-1991 (bulk 1985-1989)
- Size:** .2 linear feet (1 box)
- Source:** Donated by Michael and Barbara Foster, January 2003
- Abstract:** Alexandra David-Neel, a French writer and explorer, was the first woman to enter the forbidden city of Lhasa, Tibet in 1924. The collection consists of Michael and Barbara Foster's papers regarding their research from 1977-1991 for the publication of their biography *Forbidden Journey: The Life of Alexandra David-Neel* in 1987. The papers are mostly comprised of correspondence with various research contacts in addition to personal research notes and lists of David-Neel's published works.
- Access:** Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.
- Preferred citation:** Michael and Barbara Foster Papers regarding Alexandra David-Neel, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

## Biographical note

Alexandra David-Neel was born in Paris in 1868. A restless child, she often ran away from her strict and monotonous life at home to search for adventure. By the time she met her future husband Philippe Néel in 1904, David-Neel had traveled throughout much of Europe, North Africa, and Asia as an opera singer and writer. After a few years of marriage, Philippe allowed his unhappy wife to travel to India for a while; however, the intended short trip lasted 15 years. During her explorations, David-Neel adopted a son named Lama Yongden who became her traveling companion. In 1924, they secretly entered Lhasa, Tibet, making David-Neel the first woman to ever enter the forbidden city. After two years undercover, David-Neel and her son left Lhasa and eventually returned to Europe. David-Neel continued to explore and write until her death in Digne in 1969.

During the 1980s, Michael and Barbara Foster had researched Alexandra David-Neel in order to produce a biography of her life. Michael was the Executive Vice President of Karma Unlimited Inc., a company dedicated to the study of Eastern culture. His wife, Barbara, was an Assistant Professor at Hunter College, CUNY. Together, the couple completed the biography of David-Neel, published by Harper and Row in 1987 as *Forbidden Journey: The Life of Alexandra David-Neel*. The book includes a forward by the novelist Lawrence Durrell who had known David-Neel. Although unable to produce a film about her remarkable explorations, Michael and Barbara Foster continued to research her life and published a second biography of David-Neel in 2002.

## Scope and content note

The collection consists of Michael and Barbara Foster's papers regarding their research from 1977-1991 for the publication of their biography *Forbidden Journey: The Life of Alexandra David-Neel* in 1987. The bulk of the papers consist of correspondence between the Fosters and various people throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, France, India, and Thailand. These letters include answers to inquiries about David-Neel's life and further research opportunities as well as responses and corrections for the book. Much of the correspondence is with the British diplomat and Tibetologist Hugh E. Richardson. In his letters he exchanges anecdotes on David-Neel's life and makes suggestions for the biography. Other correspondents include Lawrence Durrell, Dorothy Middleton, Emily Hahn, and Lowell Thomas, Jr. There are a few letters to publishers and entertainment agencies about ideas for a film or docudrama television version of *Forbidden Journey*. A couple of the letters are addressed to Janice Johnson, the Fosters' editing manager, concerning book corrections and remarks. The collection also includes lists of David-Neel's published works, Barbara Foster's notes on Jacques Brasse's 1978 biography of David-Neel, *L'Adventure et la spiritualité*, and Michael Foster's business card.

## Container list

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	Correspondence, 1977-1991
	2	List of books published by Alexandra David-Néel, undated (in French)
	3	Notes on <i>L'Adventure et la spiritualité</i> , undated
	4	Karma Unlimited, Inc. business card, undated