

Courtney Letts de Espil Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
1996

Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82056200>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms007055>

Prepared by Karen Linn Femia

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2007
Revised 2010 April

Collection Summary

Title: Courtney Letts de Espil Papers

Span Dates: 1925-1994

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1930-1949)

ID No.: MSS56200

Creator: Letts de Espil, Courtney

Extent: 525 items

Extent: 12 containers plus 1 oversize

Extent: 4.8 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English and Spanish

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82056200>

Summary: Writer and wife of the Argentine ambassador to the United States (1933-1943). Correspondence, diaries, writings, clippings, photographs, and other papers concerning social affairs in Washington and including references to many prominent individuals of the New Deal era. Also includes material on a cruise to the Arctic in 1927, the Espils's return to Argentina in 1943, and life in Argentina under Juan Perón.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Berle, Adolf A., Jr., 1895-1971.

Berle, Beatrice Bishop, 1902-1993.

Bush, George, 1924-2018--Correspondence.

Espil, Felipe A., 1887-

Hughes, Antoinette.

Hughes, Charles Evans, 1862-1948.

Hull, Cordell, 1871-1955.

Hull, Frances, -1954--Correspondence.

Hull, Frances, -1954.

Ickes, Harold L. (Harold LeClair), 1874-1952.

Krock, Arthur, 1886-

Krock, Martha.

Letts de Espil, Courtney.

Morgenthau, Elinor, -1949.

Morgenthau, Henry, 1891-1967.

Pearson, Drew, 1897-1969.

Perón, Juan Domingo, 1895-1974.

Saavedra Lamas, Carlos, 1878-1959.

Stevenson, Adlai E. (Adlai Ewing), 1900-1965--Correspondence.

Vandenberg, Arthur H. (Arthur Hendrick), 1884-1951.

Vandenberg, Hazel, -1950.

Wallace, Henry A. (Henry Agard), 1888-1965.

Wallace, Ilo.

Welles, Mathilde, -1949--Correspondence.

Welles, Mathilde, -1949.

Welles, Sumner, 1892-1961--Correspondence.

Welles, Sumner, 1892-1961.

Windsor, Edward, Duke of, 1894-1972--Correspondence.

Windsor, Wallis Warfield, Duchess of, 1896-1986--Correspondence.

Subjects

Diplomatic and consular service, Argentine--United States.
Diplomatic and consular service, Argentine.
New Deal, 1933-1939.

Places

Arctic regions--Description and travel.
Argentina--Foreign relations--United States.
Argentina--History--1943-1955.
United States--Foreign relations--Argentina.
Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

Occupations

Authors.

Provenance

The papers of Courtney Letts de Espil, writer and wife of the Argentine ambassador to the United States, were given to the Library of Congress by Letts de Espil in a series of installments from 1939 to 1995 and by Mrs. Benjamin Welles in 1977.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Courtney Letts de Espil in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Courtney Letts de Espil are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Courtney Letts de Espil Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

| Date | Event |
|---------------|---|
| 1899, 17 June | Born, Chicago, Ill. (?) |
| circa 1920 | Married Wellesley H. Stillwell (divorced 1924) |
| 1925 | Married John Borden (divorced 1933) |
| 1928 | Published <i>The Cruise of the Northern Light</i> (New York: Macmillan Co. 317 pp.) |
| 1933 | Published <i>Adventures in a Man's World</i> (New York: Macmillan Co. 246 pp.) Married Felipe Espil, the Argentine ambassador to the United States |
| 1943 | Moved to Buenos Aires when Felipe Espil was called back to Argentina after a military coup |
| 1945 | Moved to Madrid when Felipe Espil was appointed ambassador to Spain |
| 1955 | Moved to Sao Paulo when Felipe Espil was appointed ambassador to Brazil |
| circa 1959 | Returned to Buenos Aires, Argentina, when Felipe Espil retired from diplomatic service |
| 1967 | Published <i>La Esposa del Embajador</i> (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Alvarez S.A. 167 pp.) |

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|---------------|---|
| 1969 | Published <i>Noticias Confidenciales de Buenos Aires a USA (1869-1892)</i> (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Alvarez S.A. 245 pp.) |
| 1972 | Felipe Espil died |
| circa 1973 | Moved to New York, N.Y. |
| 1974 | Married Foster Adams |
| 1995, April 7 | Died, Washington, D.C. |

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Courtney Letts de Espil span the years 1925-1994 with the bulk of the material dating from the 1930s and 1940s. The papers are in English and Spanish and primarily consist of diaries, writings, correspondence, news clippings, and photographs.

The [diaries](#) form the centerpiece of the papers, in particular the eight notebooks of detailed writings covering de Espil's ten years as the Argentine ambassador's wife in Washington, D.C., 1933-1943. Many social events of political Washington are described recounting the food, the table settings, and the conversations. The Espils were friendly with many well-known politicians, reporters, State Department officials, and diplomats of New Deal Washington. There are numerous entries in the diaries concerning Adolf Augustus Berle and Beatrice Berle, Charles Evans Hughes and Antoinette Hughes, Cordell and Frances Hull, Harold L. Ickes, Arthur and Martha Krock, Carlos Saavedra Lamas, Henry and Elinor Morgenthau, Drew Pearson, Arthur H. Vandenberg and Hazel Vandenberg, Henry Agard Wallace and Ilo Wallace, and Sumner and Mathilde Welles. During these years, Courtney Letts de Espil was especially good friends with Mathilde Welles, wife of Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, and with Frances Hull, wife of Secretary of State Cordell Hull. The long conflict at the State Department between Hull and Welles is documented from the perspective of the wives through conversations and impressions reported in the diaries and correspondence in the Correspondence series. An edited and typed version of the Washington diaries appears in the writings series as Courtney de Espil's memoirs, "Washington in the Time of Franklin D. Roosevelt" which has an index that can be helpful in finding entries in both the memoirs and the diaries.

The first three notebooks date from 1927 and describe the cruise Courtney and John Borden, her husband at the time, took to the Alaskan Arctic. These notebooks formed the basis of her 1928 book *The Cruise of the Northern Light*. After October 1943, the diaries recount the Espil's return to Argentina, other diplomatic assignments, and life in Argentina during the rule of Juan Perón.

The [Correspondence](#) series contains primarily incoming correspondence. Notable correspondents include George Bush, Frances Hull, Adlai E. Stevenson II (the prologue to "Washington in the Time of Franklin D. Roosevelt," in the Writings series, explains the relationship to Stevenson), Sumner and Mathilde Welles, and Edward and Wallis Warfield, Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

The [Writings](#) series includes "Washington in the Time of Franklin D. Roosevelt," with a prologue and epilogue written in 1994, other drafts, and some published material. *La Esposa del Embajador* is an abbreviated account of Courtney de Espil's ten years in the Argentine embassy in Washington. After leaving the United States to live in Argentina, Courtney Letts de Espil became interested in the history of United States-Argentine diplomatic relations, and most of her writings after 1943 reflect this interest.

In addition to photographs of the Espils, the [Miscellany](#) series and [Oversize](#) include photographs of Sumner and Mathilde Welles and Frances Hull. Many other photographs are in a scrapbook that also contains news clippings and correspondence.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in five series:

- [Diaries, 1927-1973](#)
- [Correspondence, 1931-1981](#)
- [Writings, 1933-1994](#)
- [Miscellany, 1925-1974](#)
- [Oversize, 1933-1936](#)

Description of Series

| Container | Series |
|-----------|--|
| BOX 1-5 | <p><u>Diaries, 1927-1973</u> Handwritten notebooks. Arranged in chronological order.</p> |
| BOX 5-6 | <p><u>Correspondence, 1931-1981</u> Letters sent and received. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically therein.</p> |
| BOX 6-11 | <p><u>Writings, 1933-1994</u> Drafts, published items, and book reviews. Arranged alphabetically by title.</p> |
| BOX 11-12 | <p><u>Miscellany, 1925-1974</u> Photographs, printed matter, speeches, guest lists, and a scrapbook. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.</p> |
| BOX OV 1 | <p><u>Oversize, 1933-1936</u> Photographs. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.</p> |

Container List

| Container | Contents |
|------------------|---|
| BOX 1-5 | Diaries, 1927-1973 Handwritten notebooks. Arranged in chronological order. |
| BOX 1 | 1927, May-1935, Mar. (7 folders) |
| BOX 2 | 1935, Apr.-1940, Apr. (8 folders) |
| BOX 3 | 1940, May-1941, Aug. (9 folders) |
| BOX 4 | 1941, Aug.-1945, Apr. (8 folders) |
| BOX 5 | 1945, July-1953, Sept.; 1973, June (5 folders) |
| BOX 5-6 | Correspondence, 1931-1981 Letters sent and received. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically therein. |
| BOX 5 | Armour, Myra and Norman, 1944, 1972, undated |
| BOX 5 | Avellaneda, Victoria, 1941-1945 |
| BOX 5 | Borden, Courtney and John, 1931, 1939, 1953 |
| BOX 5 | Briggs, Ellis O. and Lucy, 1959, 1967, 1976 |
| BOX 5 | Bush, George, 1980 |
| BOX 5 | Espil, Felipe |
| BOX 5 | From Courtney Letts, 1933, undated |
| BOX 5 | To Courtney Letts, 1933 |
| BOX 5 | Hagner, Randall, 1943-1945, undated |
| BOX 5 | Hull, Frances, 1935-1943, undated |
| BOX 5 | Letts, Cora Perkins, 1942, circa 1947 |
| BOX 5 | Lodge, John Davis, 1969-1972 |
| BOX 5 | McLaughlin, Hollis, 1946 |
| BOX 5 | Miscellaneous, 1935-1981, undated |
| BOX 6 | Muñiz, Carlos Manuel, 1972-1974 |
| BOX 6 | Roosevelt, Franklin D. and Eleanor, 1939-1941, undated |
| BOX 6 | Stevenson, Adlai E. (1900-1965), 1952-1964, undated |
| BOX 6 | Stillwell, Homer, . 1931-1944, undated |
| BOX 6 | Stillwell, Louise, 1931-1932, 1942-1944, undated |
| BOX 6 | Weddell, Alexander, 1935-1939 |
| BOX 6 | Welles, Mathilde, 1 939-1949, undated (2 folders) |
| BOX 6 | Welles, Sumner, 1933, 1949, 1961 |

Correspondence, 1931-1981

Container

Contents

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|-----------|--|
| BOX 6 | Windsor, Edward and Wallis Warfield, Duke and Duchess of, 1936, 1946, undated |
| BOX 6-11 | Writings, 1933-1994 Drafts, published items, and book reviews. Arranged alphabetically by title. |
| BOX 6 | Articles, 1933, 1943, 1950-1953 |
| BOX 6 | Book reviews, 1967-1972, undated |
| BOX 6 | Books |
| BOX 6 | <i>La Esposa del Embajador</i> |
| BOX 6 | Draft, in English, circa 1966 (4 folders) |
| BOX 7 | Published copy, 1967-1969 |
| BOX 7 | Reviews, 1967 |
| BOX 7 | <i>Noticias Confidenciales de Buenos Aires a USA, (1869-1892)</i> |
| BOX 7 | Draft, circa 1969 (2 folders) |
| BOX 7 | Published copy, 1969 |
| BOX 7 | "The Presidency of Mitre and the War of Secession in the United States," undated |
| BOX 7 | <i>La Segunda Presidencia Roca</i> , draft in English, circa 1971 (2 folders) |
| BOX 8 | "Washington in the Time of Franklin D. Roosevelt" |
| BOX 8 | Prologue, 1994 |
| BOX 8 | Summary of years 1933-1939, undated |
| BOX 8 | 1933, Jan.-1936, Oct., undated (6 folders) |
| BOX 9 | 1936, Nov.-1940, June, undated (7 folders) |
| BOX 10 | 1940, July-1941, Oct., undated (3 folders) |
| BOX 11 | 1941, Dec.-1943, Oct., undated (3 folders) |
| BOX 11 | Epilogue, 1994 |
| BOX 11 | Index, undated (2 folders) |
| BOX 11-12 | Miscellany, 1925-1974 Photographs, printed matter, speeches, guest lists, and a scrapbook. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein. |
| BOX 11 | Book presentation party, 1973 |
| BOX 11 | Guest lists, 1972 |
| BOX 11 | Photographs, 1925-1944, undated <i>See also Oversize</i> (2 folders) |
| BOX 12 | Printed matter, 1941, 1954, 1967, 1974 |

Miscellany, 1925-1974

| Container | Contents |
|------------------|--|
| BOX 12 | Scrapbook, 1933-1943 |
| BOX OV 1 | Oversize, 1933-1936 Photographs. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed. |
| BOX OV 1 | Miscellany |
| BOX OV 1 | Photographs, 1933-1936 |