

The Filson Historical Society

**Adair-Downing family
Papers, 1854-1951**

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Size of Collection:
1 cu. ft.

Location Number:
Mss. A A191

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Scope and Content Note

This collection of letters and ephemera documents the family life of three generations of the Adair and Downing families of Bourbon and Mason Counties in Kentucky. The earliest letters, which date from 1854 to 1888, reflect the courtship and family life of Robert Farris Adair (1833-1907) of Bourbon County and Sara Isabel "Belle" Dodson (1839-1920) of Mason County. There are several letters written to Belle by an unnamed daughter who was visiting her maternal grandfather, George Dodson, in Maysville in 1879 and 1880. An 1876 letter from Belle to her husband Robert describes the death and burial of her brother, Robert M. Dodson in Cincinnati, Ohio

The bulk of the collection centers on the courtship, marriage and family life of James Curtis Adair (1871-1940) of Bourbon County and Elizabeth "Lizzie" Downing (1873-1949) of Mason County, Kentucky. The courtship letters, which range from 1892 to 1895, contain references to Kentucky politics, the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, violence in the black community of Paris, Kentucky, and also vigilante activity there. Other letters describe social life and activities common to young rural Kentuckians of both sexes including church going, parties, dancing, and bicycling.

Dating from 1899 to 1949, subsequent letters represent correspondence between Elizabeth (Downing) Adair and her sister, Matilda "Tillie" (Downing) Hall (1863-1940) and their family members. There are several letters to both sisters from their cousin Priscilla (Shackelford) Wingate (circa 1839-1928) of Indianapolis. These letters primarily refer to family news, health, farm life, and similar daily activities.

Letters received by Elizabeth (Downing) Adair from her daughter Louise (Adair) Stackhouse (1897-1986) and granddaughter Carolyn (Early) Lustic (1924-2002) from 1941-1944 reflect the role of women on the home front in World War II. Several letters from Carolyn describe her Red Cross activities as well as social life on the military air fields in Alabama and Texas where her husband, Lt. Joseph Lustic, was stationed.

The collection contains considerable miscellanea including, but not limited to, several undated letters, an unidentified photograph, classroom compositions by Jennie and Matilda Downing and greeting, holiday and sympathy cards.

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Biographical Note

The son of Richard Merrill Adair and Mary "Polly" Tarr, Robert Farris Adair (1833-1907) was born in Nicholas County, Ky. In 1854 he married Sarah Isabel "Belle" Dodson (1839-1920), the daughter of George Dodson and Permelia Ellen Curtis of Mason County. They raised nine children on their farm near Paris, Bourbon County, Kentucky. Seven children lived to adulthood, including James C. Adair (1871-1940).

In 1896, James C. Adair of Bourbon County married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Downing (1873-1949), the daughter of Charles Downing and Elizabeth Wells of Mason County, Ky. They made their home in Maysville and raised three children; Louise Adair Stackhouse (1897-1986), Isabelle Adair Early (1901-?) and Robert D. (1906-1935).

The daughter of Isabelle (Adair) Early and Calvert C. Early (1891-1937), Carolyn Early (1924-2002) married Joseph Andrew Lustic (1919-1994). Following his service in World War II, they made their home in Mason County, Ky.

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Folder list

- Folder 1: Correspondence, 1854-1879.
- Folder 2: Correspondence, 1880-1883.
- Folder 3: Correspondence, 1884-1888.
- Folder 4: Correspondence, 1890-April 1893.
- Folder 5: Correspondence, May- July 1893.
- Folder 6: Correspondence, Oct.-Dec. 1893.
- Folder 7: Correspondence, Jan.-Aug. 1894.
- Folder 8: Correspondence Sept.-Dec. 1894.
- Folder 9: Correspondence, Jan.-June 1895.
- Folder 10: Correspondence, July-Oct. 1895.
- Folder 11: Correspondence, Nov.-Dec. 1895.
- Folder 12: Correspondence, 1899-1901.
- Folder 13: Correspondence, 1901-1911.
- Folder 14: Correspondence, 1911-1915.
- Folder 15: Correspondence, 1912-1927.
- Folder 16: Correspondence, 1932-1938.
- Folder 17: Correspondence, 1940-1942.
- Folder 18: Correspondence, 1942-1944.
- Folder 19: Correspondence, 1946-1949.
- Folder 20: Correspondence, Undated.
- Folder 21: Correspondence, Undated.
- Folder 22: Miscellaneous Documents, 1904-1947.
- Folder 23: School Composition Papers, 1877-1879.
- Folder 24: Miscellaneous Greeting Cards, 1880-1944, Undated.
- Folder 25: Envelopes (Unmatched), 1895-1951, Undated.

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Added Entries

Adair, Elizabeth Downing, 1873-1949.
Adair, James C., 1871-1940.
Bicycles – Kentucky.
Bourbon County (Ky.) – History.
Breckinridge, William Campbell Breckinridge, 1837-1904.
World's Columbian Exposition (1893 : Chicago, Ill.)
Courtship – Kentucky.
Demonstrations – United States.
Dodson family.
Downing family.
Family life.
Interracial marriage – Kentucky.
Kentucky – Politics and government – 1865-1950.
Kentucky – Social life and customs.
Lustic, Carolyn Downing Early, 1924-2002.
MacArthur, Douglas, 1880-1964.
Marital violence – Kentucky – Mason County.
Mason County (Ky.) – History.
Racism – Kentucky –Bourbon County.
Sexual intercourse – Minnesota.
Stackhouse, Louise Adair, 1897-1986.
Vigilantes – Kentucky – Paris.
Violence – Kentucky – Bourbon County.
United States – Economic conditions – 1893.
Women – Political activity – United States.
Women – Social conditions.
World War, 1939-1945 – Social aspects.
World War, 1939-1945 – Women – United States.
Young women – Social life and customs.