

Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens
714 North Portage Path
Akron, OH 44303

OHRAB Final Report
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Project Title: Processing the Irene Seiberling Harrison Collection

Project Director: Julie Frey, Director of Museum Services/Curator, Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens
330-315-3226 E-mail: jfrey@stanhywet.org

Project Summary

The project addresses the papers of Irene Seiberling Harrison, oldest daughter and second child of Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company co-founder F.A. Seiberling. Prior to the implementation of the grant the papers were haphazardly arranged in 43 boxes and not accessible for research. There was no sense of what most of the boxes contained other than what had been obtained by a brief, visual inventory of each box. The goals of the proposed project were to organize the collection, rehouse the materials into archival folders and boxes and create a finding aid which would allow researchers and staff to access and utilize the materials.

Summary of Activities to Date:

At the close of the grant period, 34 of the 48 boxes of the Irene Seiberling Harrison Collection have been organized, rehoused and processed. A box list exists for each of the 34 boxes detailing the contents of the collection. Acidic boxes and packing materials were discarded and replaced with acid free boxes and inert sleeves and folders.

The collection was donated to Stan Hywet Hall after the death of Irene Seiberling Harrison in 1999. When the staff, with the assistance of the Irene's family, packed the materials for transport there was no consideration given for original organization. As the current Collection's staff understands, the materials were already haphazardly stored. As a result, the decision was made to retain existing organization where it made sense but in many other instances move materials so that either like materials would be stored together or materials related to the same topic would now be stored together. The collection has not expanded considerably as materials were simply reorganized within the existing box structure.

The highest priority materials were organized first. These included the courtship letters of F.A. Seiberling to his future wife Gertrude Penfield in 1886 and 1887; the earlier correspondence of Irene Seiberling Harrison dating between 1900 and 1955; the photographs; and materials related directly to Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens which included materials dated between 1911 and 1916 dealing with the design and construction of the home.

The courtship letters were scanned as part of their processing with the high resolution scans saved on Stan Hywet Hall's server. This additional effort proved fortuitous as the Akron Beacon Journal recently reached out to Stan Hywet for a selection of love letters for an upcoming Valentine's Day article. The staff was able to easily access the information and provide copies to the reporter. Several of the scrapbooks from the collection were also immediately scanned as their contents proved beneficial to current projects ongoing at Stan Hywet Hall. While the scanning activity was not part of the original grant, the Collections Department plans to move forward within this year to scan the photographs in the Irene Seiberling Harrison Collection as well as other key materials, which are being noted during processing.

Within each box materials were sorted. In boxes containing correspondence, the letters were unfolded, organized by date and then by correspondent. Folders were created to store materials of the same year and then same correspondent together. The folders were organized chronologically, numbered accordingly and labeled. Letters that were deemed important, fragile in condition or would possibly be accessed repeatedly were housed in plastic sleeves.

Boxes containing notebooks, journals, address books, scrapbooks and other like materials were sorted. Books with fragile covers or made of materials that may adversely affect the other collections in the box were wrapped in acid free tissue paper and secured with linen twine. Paper labels were tied to the front of the wrapped item to identify it within the box. Some oversized scrapbooks and other materials were rehoused in size specific boxes.

All of the loose photographs were consolidated into two boxes. Photographs that appeared to be deliberately attached to correspondence, part of a scrapbook or other item were left in with their original materials. In some instances they were rehoused in plastic sleeves to minimize damage from surrounding materials. Additional rehousing will be undertaken on the two loose photograph boxes as well as plans to scan many of the photos that can be immediately useable to Stan Hywet Hall staff for upcoming exhibition and publicity materials.

The 14 boxes remaining to be cataloged contain the lowest priority materials. The grant team ran into delays when the main storage area where the archives collections are stored and the team had set up to process the papers had to be temporarily shutdown to deal with peeling paint and possible water issues. The issues turned out to be minor but the museums took the opportunity to address the peeling paint and repaint the most affected sections of the room.

We also experienced some inconsistency in our team staffing. The original hope had been to recruit two grad school level interns to work on the project. Ultimately only one intern was found. She was only available to work during the summer months before graduating and finding a full time position. In the fall, we were lucky enough to recruit a new volunteer who integrated flawlessly into the archival processing team and has been a tremendous help. He will continue to work on the project through the winter months to finish up, with the other team members, the remaining boxes. Another longtime volunteer in the Collections department and retired librarian has also recently joined the project team to assist with the remaining boxes.

The OHRAB grant funded \$1600 of the estimated \$2700 project. The Collections Department reached out to the Stan Hywet Hall Gilde, a volunteer group affiliated with the museum composed predominately of Manor House tour guides, who graciously offered to pledge the remaining \$1100. The OHRAB funds were spent in 2015 and any further expenses incurred with the processing of the remaining boxes will be funded by the gift of the Stan Hywet Hall Gilde.

Use of the Collection:

The processing of Irene Seiberling Harrison's papers has already proved to be tremendously helpful. The Curator has been making repeated research trips to the Ohio History Connection in Columbus, OH to conduct research in the F.A. Seiberling Collection (Irene's father) and J.P. Seiberling Collection (Irene's brother) in anticipation of several upcoming exhibitions over the next five years. In addition the Willard Seiberling Collection (Irene's brother) is housed at the University of Akron Archives. Correspondence threads within these three collections has been picked up or elaborated upon by materials found in the Irene Seiberling Harrison papers leading to a richer context from which the Collections staff can move forward with exhibition projects and interpretation.

Additional materials have been found that enhance the existing biographies of F.A. and Gertrude Seiberling, Irene's parents and many of Irene's siblings and their spouses. In addition, the two boxes of photographs provide hundreds of new images of the family which were previously unknown. These photographs are predominately candid images of the Harrison and extended Seiberling family at home and on vacation. Many of the images and materials found in the correspondence of the Irene Seiberling Harrison collection will be immediately used in the upcoming 2016 exhibit "Family: Sharing Our Stories."

Final Thoughts:

As already stated, the grant team of staff and volunteers will continue to push forward and complete the process of the remaining 14 boxes. The hope is that these materials will be completed in the late winter or early spring of this year. The team will then regroup to discuss revised priorities concerning the collection and a list of tasks to tackle in "Phase II." It is anticipated that this will include additional scanning of photographs and letters as well as more detailed processing of certain boxes containing materials that are earmarked as especially useful for future research and exhibition projects.

It is an institutional goal to make the collections more accessible online. When Stan Hywet Hall takes the step to publicize finding aids and collections materials online the Irene Seiberling Harrison materials will be immediately ready for uploading and inclusion in this type of project. In addition, the Curator was recently contacted by Judy James of the Summit County Public Library. She assists with the Summit Memory Project which is an online collaborate project to integrate and make accessible archival materials within Summit County. Stan Hywet has participated in the past and James would like to see more material included from Stan Hywet Hall on the Summit Memory page. While no specifics have been outlined to date, materials from the Irene Seiberling Harrison collection could easily be included in this collaborative endeavor.