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THOMPSON, George Oscar, papers. 1 l.f.

Abstract: During World War I, George O. Thompson served in the U.S. Navy, where he was assigned to Submarine Chaser #309, stationed in southeastern Alaska. He and his wife, Letha, carried on an extensive correspondence.

Biography: In 1916, after working as a surveyor for a timber company in Montesano, WA, George Thompson enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He was stationed at the Puget Sound Navy Shipyard in Bremerton before being assigned to Submarine Chaser #309 for duty in southeastern Alaska in 1917. His wife, Letha, to whom he was married in 1914, lived with their young son at the home of her parents in Aberdeen, WA.

Scope and content: The collection consists of a lengthy correspondence between George and Letha Thompson, 1914-1918. The first letters are from George while he is surveying for the C.C.& T.L. sawmill in Montesano, about eleven miles from Aberdeen. The bulk of the collection is correspondence between them while George is first stationed at the Puget Sound Navy Shipyard in Bremerton and then when he is in Alaska after his assignment to a submarine chaser.

Submarine chasers in Alaska didn't see much action during World War I, so George's letters mainly describe Navy life and happenings in Alaska. However, Letha's letters contain great detail about life on the home front. She is constantly plagued by loneliness and harassed by her ill, demanding mother. She describes the unfaithfulness of her sister-in-law, her use of ergot for abortion, the Spanish Influenza epidemic, and the drudgery of a woman with a small child and an absent husband. Some of the letters are quite personal, but they provide an in-depth view of the loneliness and difficulties of separation.

Also included are letters to George from other members of the family detailing their lives during WWI. Several letters from George's friend, Ralph, who is serving in the Atlantic on board the U.S.S. South Dakota, relate much information on his life in the Navy, including frequent mention of his sexual encounters with young women in New York and Boston.

The papers provide a detailed and intimate picture of the effects of World War I on a young Washington couple and their families.

Inclusive dates: 1914-1918

Restrictions: None

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Box 1:

Folder:

- 1 Correspondence, February-November 1914. Letters to George while he is working and living in Aberdeen. Mainly from family and friends relating details of their lives.
- 2 Correspondence, February-April 1916. George is working for CC&TL on a survey crew near Montesano, WA. Describes working conditions and bunkhouse living. Letters from Letha discuss daily routine and her ill mother. Buys ergot for abortion. Extremely lonely.
- 3 Correspondence, July-September 1917. George describes his trip from Juneau to Sitka, AK and life aboard ship.
- 4 Correspondence, October 1917. George writes of life in camp, fight in mess hall, and other details of Navy life at the Puget Sound Navy Shipyard. Letha describes difficulties of living with her parents.
- 5 Correspondence, November 1917. George describes camp life, everyone with colds. Letha moves to father-in-law's in Anacortes after disagreement with her parents. Loneliness.
- 6 Correspondence, December 1917. George writes of severe winter storms, bad food. Letha continues to be lonely, Christmas, domestic work.
- 7 Correspondence, January 1918. George is listed as deserter in the newspaper, but an affidavit from his attorney will clear it up. Barracks life. Letter from friend in Atlantic Fleet relating liberty activities, including sexual. Baby very sick with cold. Loneliness.
- 8 Correspondence, February 1918. Navy life. Family news. Very lonesome.
- 9 Correspondence, March 1918. Daylight savings time. More news from his friend Ralph serving in the Atlantic on U.S.S. South Dakota. Ralph meets seventeen year-old virgin in Boston and has an affair. Family news from Letha.
- 10 Correspondence, April-May 1918. News of Port Angeles, sub chasers, and family. Letter from Ralph.
- 11 Correspondence, June 1918. Eclipse of June 8, 1918, description of ship and scenery on way to Alaska. Description of working conditions in Alaska canneries. Family news.
- 12 Correspondence, 1 July 1918-15 July 1918. Details of Navy life and Alaska. Letha describes life at home, family, and baby.
- 13 Correspondence, 16 July 1918-15 July 1918. Alaska locals very friendly and

- accommodating. Seized fish poachers near Juneau. Shipmates rowdy and drunk. Rumors that war will be over in thirty days. Letha writes of loneliness, spat with her mother.
- 14 Correspondence, 1 August 1918-15 August 1918. Letha writes in great detail about family situation—mother's cancer surgery, separation of sister from husband. George sends letter from 1898 Alaska Relief Expedition he found in an old warehouse.
 - 15 Correspondence, 16 August 1918-31 August 1918. Rough seas, most of crew Sick, Yakutat Indian village description. Letha describes deteriorating marriage of Mabel, hot weather, loneliness.
 - 16 Correspondence, 1 September 1918-15 September 1918. Letha describes mother's surgery in great detail, Mabel is having affairs with servicemen, family life. George writes of Alaska coastal towns, arrest of unregistered German, Yakutat Indian cemetery.
 - 17 Correspondence, 16 September 1918-30 September 1918. Navy life, flooding in Juneau. Letha reports more cases of influenza, notes Greeks and negroes moving into Aberdeen, family news.
 - 18 Correspondence, 1 October 1918-15 October 1918. Letha writes of influenza deaths, closure of public places in Aberdeen and Seattle, more of mother's surgery and stress from taking care of her and family. George still sailing Alaska coast, probably departing Alaska soon.
 - 19 Correspondence, 16 October 1918-31 October 1918. Letha writes of ongoing seriousness of influenza, Mabel's affairs, family news. George's ship returns to Bremerton, he hopes for leave.
 - 20 Correspondence, November 1918. George couldn't get leave, but has application for discharge papers, premature celebrations for end of war. Letha also reports premature celebrating for end of war, Armistice Day celebrations, family news.
 - 21 Correspondence, December 1918. George and Letha are working on his discharge, father loses job, work is scarce.
 - 22 Correspondence, miscellaneous undated or fragments, Letha to George.
 - 23 Correspondence, miscellaneous undated or fragments, George to Letha.
 - 24 Ephemera. Selective Service cards, greeting card, seat training primer.
 - 25 Examples of envelopes sent to George and Letha.