

MsSC 138

Stuart Ramsay Tompkins Papers

Biography

Stuart Ramsay Tompkins was born on June 26, 1886 in Ontario, Canada. Following Stuart's birth, his father, Charles Abraham Tompkins, decided to take his mother, Martha Jane McNish, and their five children to homestead in Saskatchewan. At that time, Canada was in the process of being "opened-up" during the westward push of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Shortly after arriving in Saskatchewan, Martha discovered that Charles was penniless and that there were no churches and schools in the area. Consequently, she decided that their future prospects were grim. After arranging for her husband to work for a family member near Toronto, they settled in Brockville, Ontario. However, this arrangement did not last and Charles soon abandoned the family, leaving Martha to raise their five children alone.

Although they were forced to live in the slums of Brockville, Martha worked hard to keep her family together and in school. Somehow, Martha gathered enough money to send Stuart to a kindergarten where he was able to build a sound educational foundation, which served him well during his primary and secondary school years. An able student, Stuart completed his secondary education with high honors at the Brockville Collegiate Institution by the age of fifteen. His record at BCI earned him several scholarships to the University of Toronto, where Stuart graduated with First Class Honors in 1909. Following his graduation, Stuart worked briefly as a journalist before becoming the chief clerk in the Alberta Department of Education.

While working in Alberta Stuart met Edna Jane Christie, who he would later marry. An intelligent and hard working woman, Edna and Stuart were a good match and would build a marriage somewhat unique for the time period, in that she became a respected partner in his later academic career. Following a courtship documented in their many letters, they were married in January of 1915.

With World War I exploding on the world's stage, Stuart enlisted in the Canadian Army approximately six months after he and Edna's wedding ceremony. After receiving his officer's commission during the summer of 1916 Stuart departed for combat training in England. As was often the custom at the time, Edna soon followed, finding work in the Canadian Army Pay and Records Office in London. During April of 1917, following the battle of Vimy Ridge, Stuart was invalided back to England where he recovered from a severe attack of bronchitis. Following his recovery, Stuart worked at the Alberta Regimental Depot at Bramshott until he and Edna were able to return to Canada in the spring of 1918. While returning to Canada Stuart learned of the Allied Intervention in Russia and decided to participate. After his discharge from the Canadian Army Stuart volunteered for a Siberian unit, working as a recruiter in Edmonton until he departed for Siberia during December of 1918. Stuart's interest in the Siberian campaign grew out of his study of the Russian language and what he learned of the 1917 Revolution while on combat duty at the front during World War I.

Upon returning from Russia in May of 1919, Stuart faced the difficult task of re-entering civilian life and re-starting his career. After exploring several options, Stuart decided to stay with education and entered a teacher certification program at the Calgary Normal School. He received his teaching credential in June of 1920. Following certification, Stuart and Edna moved to Alix, Alberta, where he taught for one year. Edna and Stuart then moved to Lethbridge where Stuart worked as a high school teacher for four years. During their time in Lethbridge, Stuart earned a Master of Arts degree in Education from the University of Alberta, but he eventually wanted to earn a Ph.D. When the opportunity to work as the Superintendent of Schools for Yukon Territory arose, Stuart decided to take it, since the higher salary would enable him to save for graduate school.

Edna and Stuart departed for the Yukon Territory at the start of the 1924-25 school year. Although the environment was harsh and challenging in many ways they did not leave the area, or come “outside,” until they were ready to leave for good four years later. Their time in the Yukon provided much of the background for one of Stuart’s best received books, Alaska: Promyshlennik and Sourdough (1946).

After departing the Yukon in late June of 1928, Stuart studied at Stanford during the rest of the summer. However, Stuart planned to use the money he’d saved working in the Yukon to study Russian history at the University of London during the following fall. As Stuart made his way east he paid a visit to the history department at the University of Chicago. During the visit he was persuaded by several faculty members to abandon his plan to study in London and attend the University of Chicago instead. Although Chicago did not have a program in Russian History, Stuart decided to attend anyway. Edna soon joined him, finding employment in the social science secretarial pool. Following his graduation in 1931, Stuart was hired as an associate professor of history by the University of Oklahoma.

Between 1931 and 1956, Stuart worked at the University of Oklahoma as a professor of history, writing several books during his time there and after his official retirement. In 1940, Stuart completed his first book, Russia Through the Ages, which was appreciated by many as an early work in English on Russian history. In 1946, Stuart published Alaska: Promyshlennik and Sourdough, which met a warm reception from reviewers. The first volume of his three volume work on the Russian mind, The Russian Mind: From Peter the Great through the Enlightenment, was published in 1953 and met with mixed reviews. In 1958, Stuart published the second volume, The Russian Intelligentsia: Makers of the Revolutionary State, which was seen by some reviewers as a “scholarly, yet readable book” and was reissued in 1967 when the third volume, The Triumph of Bolshevism: Revolution or Reaction, came off the press. Stuart also wrote The Secret War, 1914 - 1918 during his retirement. However, The Secret War would not be published until 1981, four years after his death. Stuart also wanted to publish his letters to Edna from Siberia, but eventually decided to give copies of them to friends instead.

Stuart and Edna retired to Victoria, British Columbia in 1957. Stuart Ramsay Tompkins died on October 11, 1977, at the age of 91, while Edna lived into the 1980s.

Scope and Content

The Stuart Ramsay Tompkins papers consist primarily of correspondence between Stuart and Edna, his wife, between 1912 and 1919, with a substantial batch of letters from 1937. The correspondence reflects both the quality of their often long distance relationship and larger historical events. The following historical events play a prominent role in the letters: the “opening up” of western Canada, Canada’s participation in World War I, combat conditions at the front in World War I, and the Canadian campaign in Siberia.

The organization given to the collection by the donor has been retained. This chronological organization was given to them by Dr. Doris H. Pieroth, who edited a book on the letters entitled: A Canadian’s Road to Russia: Letters from the Great War Decade (Stuart Ramsay Tompkins), University of Alberta Press, 1989.

Inclusive Dates: 1912 - 1919, with selected items from the 1930s, ‘40s, ‘70s, and ‘80s.

Restrictions: None

Volume: 2 linear feet.

Accession Number:

Box 1: Correspondence.

Folder:

1. **Correspondence, 1912 - 1913:** The early years of Stuart and Edna's courtship and his career with the Alberta Department of Education.
2. **Correspondence, 1914:** Stuart and Edna's courtship and Stuart's work with the Alberta Department of Education.
- 3-4. **Correspondence, 1915:** The early months of Stuart and Edna's marriage and Stuart's military training after his enlistment in the Canadian Army.
5. **Correspondence, April - May, 1916:** Stuart prepares to leave for combat training in England.
6. **Correspondence, June - July, 1916:** Stuart en route to England and during his combat training there.
7. **Correspondence, August - October, 1916:** Edna's arrival in London, and Stuart's combat training and preparations to leave for combat duty in France.
8. **Correspondence, November, 1916 (France):** Stuart begins his tour of combat duty in France.

Box 2: Correspondence.

Folder:

- 1 - 2. **Correspondence, December, 1916 (France):** Stuart's tour of combat duty in France.
3. **Correspondence, January, 1917 (France):** Stuart's tour of combat duty in France.
4. **Correspondence, February, 1917 (France):** Stuart's tour of combat duty in France.
5. **Correspondence, March, 1917 (France):** Stuart's tour of combat duty in France.
6. **Correspondence, April, 1917 (France and England):** Stuart's tour of combat duty in France. Also, Stuart's tour of combat duty ended during April after he was invalided back to England following a severe attack of bronchitis.
7. **Correspondence, May - June, 1917 (England):** Stuart recovers from bronchitis and begins his new duties at the Alberta Regimental Office at Bramshott.
8. **Correspondence, July, 1917 (England):** Stuart's tour of duty at the Alberta Regimental Office at Bramshott.

Box 3: Correspondence.

Folder

1. **Correspondence, December, 1917 - November, 1918:** The final months of Stuart's tour of duty in England and during he and Edna's return to Victoria, British Columbia. Also, included are letters reflecting Stuart's decision to participate in the Siberian Campaign with the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

2. **Correspondence, September - November, 1918 (Siberia):** Stuart's work as a recruiter for the Siberian Campaign in Edmonton.
- 3-4. **Correspondence, December, 1918 (Siberia):** Stuart prepares to depart for Siberia.
5. **Correspondence, January, 1919 (Siberia):** Stuart begins his tour of duty in Siberia.
6. **Correspondence, January - March, 1919 (Siberia):** The early months of Stuart's tour of duty in Siberia. Stuart's correspondence during these months has been separated from Edna's, which is organized in the next several folders.
7. **Correspondence, February, 1919 (Siberia):** The early months of Stuart's tour of duty in Siberia. The letters in this folder were written by Edna.
8. **Correspondence, March, 1919 (Siberia):** Stuart's tour of duty in Siberia. The letters in this folder were written by Edna.
9. **Correspondence, April, 1919 (China):** Stuart's tour of duty in Siberia and during a trip to China.
10. **Correspondence, April - May, 1919 (Siberia):** Stuart's tour of duty in Siberia, during a trip to China, and as he returned to Canada. The letters in this folder were written by Edna.
11. **Correspondence, September, 1919:** Stuart adjusts to civilian life.

Box 4: Correspondence.

Folder

- 1-3: **Correspondence, 1937 (Moscow):** Stuart's research trip to Moscow.
- 4: **Correspondence, 1944:** Stuart's research trip to Washington, DC.
5. **Correspondence, 1946:** Several letters from a correspondent in the Soviet Union.
6. **Letters From Afar: Siberia, 1919:** Manuscript for a book by Stuart R. Tompkins.
7. **The Origins of The Towns: A Comparative Study of the Various Theories, Term Paper, The University of Chicago, 1929.**
8. **Fragments of Letters and Notebooks of Various Kinds :** Several identification cards and small notebooks of various kinds.

Box 5: Correspondence.

Folder

1. **Public Records Office (1970s):** Material gathered by Stuart during his research on Major James MacKintosh Bell.
2. **Items from Retirement Years (1970s):** An article and several letters reflecting Stuart's research interests during his retirement years.

3. **Correspondence: The Secret War, 1914-1918**: Letters of acknowledgment from universities and colleges around the world for donated copies of Stuart Ramsay Tompkins' book, The Secret War, 1914-1918, which was published posthumously in 1981.