

Mitchell and Day family papers

Ms. Coll. 1221

Finding aid prepared by Sarah Yerger.

Last updated on July 26, 2016.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2016 June 21

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Mitchell, Langdon Elwyn, 1862-1935
Title	Mitchell and Day family papers
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1221
Date [inclusive]	1889-1965
Extent	0.2 linear feet (1 box)
Language	English
Abstract	The Mitchell and Day family papers contain two bound manuscripts, dated between 1889 and 1965, which directly pertain to these prominent Philadelphia families. The first volume is a play written by Langdon Elywn Mitchell, and the second is a family history written by George Valentine Massey II, referencing Kenneth Mackenzie Day and Helena Mary Langdon Mitchell Day as the primary figures of his historical research.

Cite as:

Mitchell and Day family papers, 1889-1965, Ms. Coll. 1221, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Langdon Elwyn Mitchell was born on February 17, 1862, in Philadelphia to noted physician Silas Weir Mitchell, and his wife, Mary Middleton Elwyn. Although Mitchell attended both Harvard and Columbia Law schools at his family's request and was admitted to the New York bar in 1886, he chose to devote his life to writing. He was an active playwright whose best known work is *The New York Idea*, a comedy which deals with the subject of divorce. He sometimes used the pen name "John Philip Varley" but published most of his works under his given name. Mitchell briefly taught playwriting courses as the Mask & Wig Professor of Drama at the University of Pennsylvania between 1928 and 1930. His father, Silas Weir Mitchell, studied at Penn before attaining his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in 1850. Additionally, his grandfather, John Kearsley Mitchell, graduated from Penn's Medical College in 1819. Langdon married actress and childhood friend Marion Lea in 1891, and had three children: Weir, Susanna Valentine, and Helena Mary Langdon. He died on October 21, 1935.

Helena Mary Langdon Mitchell Day was born on October 22, 1902, in Philadelphia to Langdon Elwyn Mitchell and Marion Lea Mitchell. She married Kenneth Mackenzie Day in 1923 and had three children: Frank Miles, Langdon Mitchell, and Anna Lea. She died in 1972.

Kenneth Mackenzie Day was born on January 25, 1901, to Frank Miles Day and Anna Blanchard Blakiston Day. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1922 with a B.S. in Architecture, and went on to become a noted architect, developing contemporary design elements in his work which focused mainly on residential properties. Day was heavily immersed in Philadelphia professional and social society, serving as President of the Pennsylvania Society of Architects at the time of his death. He was married to Helena Mary Langdon Mitchell Day and died in 1958 from a short illness.

George Valentine Massey II was born on June 28, 1903, to George Gordon Massey and Clara Haverin Clark in Delaware. He is distantly related to Helena Mary Langdon Mitchell Day through the Massey family line with Isaac Massey (1732-1792) as a shared relative. He was a historian and genealogist with interests in Pennsylvania and Delaware regional subject matter, and published the book *The Mitchells and Days of Philadelphia, with their kin: Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and Helena Mary Langdon (Mitchell) and Kenneth MacKenzie Day*, 1968. He married Leila Lurton and had three children: Margaret, Martin, and Alice. Massey died on May 15, 1984.

Scope and Contents

The Mitchell and Day family papers contain two bound manuscripts, dated between 1889 and 1965, which directly pertain to these prominent Philadelphia families.

The first handwritten manuscript is titled "The Return of Ulysses," by Langdon Elwyn Mitchell, bound in leather boards with marbled endpapers. This bound volume is probably representative of many works written by the noted American playwright at the close of the nineteenth century into the first years of the twentieth. The son and grandson of influential Philadelphia physicians, Mitchell chose to pursue writing,

traveling widely in his quest to hone his craft.

The second manuscript is titled "Ancestry of Kenneth Mackenzie and Helena Mary Langdon (Mitchell) Day," by George Valentine Massey II. It was produced in 1965, and may have served as an initial draft of Massey's 1968 work *The Mitchells and Days of Philadelphia, with their kin: Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and Helena Mary Langdon (Mitchell) and Kenneth MacKenzie Day*. This typewritten volume includes dozens of family trees as well as numerous short biographies of notable family members. Families represented include but are not limited to: Mitchell, Day, Kearsley, Butler, Lea, and Massey. Annotations in pencil appear throughout the volume, indicating the probable presence of a later finished work.

There is a biographical sketch of Langdon Elwyn Mitchell in the second manuscript which provides a picture of his personal and professional character in addition to practical details about his life and family lineage.

Researchers may find details in the second manuscript informative and entertaining, as many of the biographical sketches are written in an accessible style, often drawing on firsthand accounts of family members from previously published works. The sketch of Silas Weir Mitchell has a firsthand account by his granddaughter, Helena Mary Langdon (Mitchell) Day.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2016 June 21

Finding aid prepared by Sarah Yerger.

Access Restrictions

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Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

S. Weir Mitchell Collection, 1829-1914, Ms. Coll. 413, University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Langdon Mitchell papers, 1876-1936, New York Public Library, Archives & Manuscripts

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Family papers
- Genealogies (histories)
- Manuscripts, American--19th century
- Manuscripts, American--20th century
- Plays (performed works)

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Philadelphia (Pa.)

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Day, Helena Mary Langdon Mitchell, 1902-1972
- Day, Kenneth Mackenzie, 1901-1958
- Massey, George Valentine, II, 1903-1984
- Mitchell, S. Weir (Silas Weir), 1829-1914

SUBJECT(S)

- Families
- Performing arts

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
"The Return of Ulysses" by Langdon Elwyn Mitchell, 1889.	1	1
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"Ancestry of Kenneth Mackenzie and Helena Mary Langdon (Mitchell) Day" by George Valentine Massey II, 1965.	1	2