

Elizabeth T. Miller papers

Ms. Coll. 1265

Finding aid prepared by Rive Cadwallader.

Last updated on November 15, 2018.

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

2017 February 1

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Summary Information

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Repository | University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts |
| Creator | Miller, Elizabeth Turner, 1911-1985 |
| Title | Elizabeth T. Miller papers |
| Call number | Ms. Coll. 1265 |
| Date | 1928-1960, undated |
| Extent | 1.35 linear foot (5 boxes) |
| Language | English |
| Language Note | The bulk of this collection is in English, however there are a few items in Spanish. |
| Abstract | <p>The Elizabeth T. Miller papers, part of the Caroline F. Schimmel Collection of Women in the American Wilderness, contain documentation of Miller's 1940 travels through Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras, along with some later correspondence and recollections of the trip. Miller, a commercial artist from Baltimore, Maryland, undertook this journey with her cousin, sculptor and archaeologist Benjamin Turner Kurtz; the acclaimed operatic singer Carolyn Long; and photographer John Henry Coon. The majority of the collection consists of scrapbooks documenting various Mayan ruins and archaeological sites in these countries. Essays published in the <i>Bulletin</i> of the Natural History Society of Maryland (and a few unpublished pieces) written by Miller and Kurtz are also included, as are miscellaneous photos, notes, letters, publications and documents relating to this trip.</p> |

Cite as:

Elizabeth T. Miller papers, 1928-1960, undated, Ms. Coll. 1265, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Elizabeth T. Miller (1911-1985, later Elizabeth M. Peuleche) was a commercial artist and native of Baltimore, Maryland. In January of 1940, Miller undertook a trip to Guatemala and Honduras with her cousin, sculptor and archaeologist Benjamin Turner Kurtz (1899-1960). Later that year, Miller travelled to a number of ancient Mayan sites in Mexico with Kurtz, photographer John Henry Coon, and acclaimed operatic singer Carolyn Long. Miller married Svend J. Peuleche around 1949, and had one daughter.

Scope and Contents

The Elizabeth T. Miller papers, part of the Caroline F. Schimmel Collection of Women in the American Wilderness, contain documentation of Miller's 1940 travels through Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras, along with some later correspondence and recollections of the trip. Researchers will find diaries, loose photographs, and other records of the journey; eight large photo albums put together after the trip; short published works by Miller relating to the voyage (and notes for these essays); a few texts from other writers and scholars; and correspondence, the bulk of which was written by Benjamin Kurtz between 1954 and 1959.

Series I. Travel documentation includes Miller's passport, issued in 1939, stamped upon her arrival in Honduras in 1940, and surrendered in 1941. Also included are an itinerary for a nearly three week excursion in Guatemala provided by Clark's Tours (based in Guatemala City) and two undated pocket diaries (circa 1940) which Miller kept at this time. Somewhat hard to read, these booklets describe the activities of Miller and her travel companions, and also include addresses, shopping lists, sketches, budget calculations and a few original poems. There are loose photographs (depicting some individuals and a sculpture of a bullfight, possibly the work of Kurtz), three photo postcards from a club in Mexico City, a print of a Mayan frieze, and a larger photograph of two figures beside an enormous Ceiba tree at Copan, Honduras. Four reels of film showing, among other things, Miller and her companions scaling Chichen Itza, driving through the jungle and visiting Mexico City are also included in this series, and are available to researchers as a DVD transfer (the original reels are restricted from use).

The second series, Scrapbooks, (undated, after 1940) is roughly organized to represent different phases or destinations of Miller's trip. The first six have the same red cardboard cover and lacing, are very sparsely annotated, and have been sequenced based on a penciled number on the inside cover of each. The front

two pages of the first scrapbook contain a postcard and photos from the group's sea voyage on the Yucatan Line, and later sections include some photos of a city, probably Montejos, a Mexican family, the natural landscape, Mayan ruins (with a particular focus on the decorative stone carvings at Chichen Itza), and prints of the archaeological layout of Uxmal and Chichen Itza. A magazine clipping of an article titled "Mexicans Find the Lost Bones of Cortez" is also included. The second scrapbook has two titled sections, "Kabah" and "Zayi" (an outdated name for the site now known as Sayil). Both sections primarily contain photographs of the Mayan architecture and stone carvings at these sites, some images of the landscape, Miller and her companions posing at or around the ruins, and a few printed archaeological maps. The third album is titled "Labna," and shows the site and the group touring it (on one of the later blank pages there is a rough pencil sketch of a woman with a cane). The next two scrapbooks (numbers 4 and 5) show various structures and features of Chichen Itza, including the ball court, Cenote Sagrada, El Castillo (Temple of Kulkulkan), Chichén Viejo, Temple of Warriors, Akab Dzib, and El Mercado among others. These books also hold printed maps and drawings of the ruins, along with a short (one paragraph) newspaper clipping on coffee sourcing and a full-length newspaper article about Mayan printing. The sixth album holds photographs from the archaeological sites of Teotihuacan, Cholula and Monte Alban, along with a few pictures of people and donkeys gathered on a road, a narrow river with boats, and a bullfight in a crowded stadium (as well as printed archaeological renderings and a tourist map of Oaxaca). The final two scrapbooks (un-numbered) are in a different style from the first six, and slightly larger. The album with the handwritten titles "Quirigua, Guatemala" and "Copan, Honduras" is dedicated (presumably by Miller) to her cousin Benjamin Kurtz, with whom she travelled. The album contains photographs of these sites, particularly the stelae at Quirigua. Other photos show Miller, Kurtz and their friends travelling to these destinations, and the local residents of the towns they visited along the way (a few photographs show a procession or parade through one town). Additionally, there are several printed materials including a map of the Gulf of Mexico and some archaeological site maps. The final album in the series has an embossed black cover, is titled on the inside cover, "Aboriginal Cities of Mexico," and is dedicated by Kurtz to "Weez and Lizzy." The book is divided into sections with photographs from the sites of Cholula, Oaxaca, Mitla and Tenochtitlan, with a number of professional photographs of the "treasures" uncovered at a tomb in the Oaxaca district, a few loose photographs and a color-printed tourist map of Mexico.

The third series, Publications and notes, contains writing and published work by Miller, Kurtz and others. It includes manuscripts including Miller's four page handwritten essay describing the journey to Quirigua and Copan (undated), as well as a copy of "A Pilgrimage to Copan," co-written by Miller and Kurtz, which appeared in the spring 1941 issue (volume XI, number 5) of the *Bulletin* of the Natural History Society of Maryland. This short essay describes some of the history of European and North American exploration of Copan, and the layout of the site as it appears from the top of one of its temples, along with captions for photographs to accompany the article. There is also a handwritten draft and a slightly revised typewritten draft (dated 1946) of "The Black Christ," Miller's account of a catholic festival she witnessed in the Guatemalan town of Esquipulas. Box 1, folder 7 holds issues of the *Bulletin* of the Natural History Society of Maryland that feature Miller and Kurtz's work. The 1941 issue of the journal features "A Pilgrimage to Copan" and its corresponding photograph portfolio. Next are two copies of the spring 1943 issue of the *Bulletin* (volume XIII, number 4), which includes an article by Kurtz titled, "The Great American Palace at Sayil (Zayi), Yucatan" and an article by Miller titled, "Traveling to Ancient Maya Ruins in Yucatan." As an editorial comment printed below the first essay puts it, "in this article, Mr. Kurtz gives an architectural survey of some of these ruins, principally of the Great American palace at Sayil. Following his article Miss Miller describes the difficulties of travelling to these ruins in Yucatan and adds a human touch to her story." Box 1, folders 8 and 9 consist of booklets written by linguist and ethnologist John Peabody Harrington, both inscribed to Miller by the author. "A Key to the English Language," reprinted from the *The Book of Record of the Time Capsule* (1938) explains the structure and pronunciation of English to a hypothetical audience in the very distant future. "Ten Ways in Which the

Study of South American Languages Illuminates Linguistic Knowledge" is a short piece published in 1944. Researchers will also find *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* by Bernal Diaz Del Castillo (translation by A. P. Maudslay), published by Harper & Brothers in 1928, which has Kurtz's signature on the inside cover, above a pasted photograph of him. The last file in this series contains miscellaneous notes and publications including a newspaper obituary for Kurtz (1960), a handwritten page of notes with titled "The Ancient Maya," a handwritten list of names, a printed pamphlet with information about John Henry Coon and a program from a bullfight in Mexico City.

The last series, Series IV., contains correspondence, mostly affectionate letters written by Kurtz and sent to Miller and "Louise" (probably Kurtz' daughter). These letters were written from Kurtz's home in Merida, Mexico (state of Yucatan) between 1954 and 1959. A folder of miscellaneous correspondence includes a letter from Miller to her father, written in Chichicastenango, Guatemala in 1940. Also included is an invitation to a movie viewing from the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University, and a letter from the advertising agency N. W. Ayer, responding to Miller's explanation of an archaeological inaccuracy in one of their ads (both undated).

Administrative Information

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

2017 February 1

Finding aid prepared by Rive Cadwallader.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use. However, original films in Series I. Travel documentation are restricted. A dvd use copy of all four films is available in box 1, folder 4.

Use Restrictions

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Source of Acquisition

Gift of Caroline F. Schimmel, 2016.

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Natural History Society of Maryland.

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Audiovisual materials
- Correspondence
- Photograph albums
- Photographs
- Scrapbooks

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Chichén Itzà Site (Mexico)
- Cholula Site (Cholula, Hidalgo, Mexico)
- Copán Site (Honduras)
- Guatemala--Antiquities
- Kabah Site (Mexico)
- Labná Site (Mexico)
- Mexico--Antiquities
- Monte Albán Site (Mexico)
- Quiriguá Site (Guatemala)
- Sayil Site (Mexico)
- Teotihuacàn Site (San Juan Teotihuacàn, Mexico)
- Uxmal Site (Mexico)

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Coon, John Henry
- Harrington, John Peabody
- Kurtz, Benjamin Turner, 1899-1960
- Long, Carolyn, 1915-1991

SUBJECT(S)

- Archaeology
- Maya architecture

- Voyages and travels
- Women travelers

Collection Inventory

I. TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION.

| | Box | Folder |
|---|-----|--------|
| Stamped passport belonging to Miller, 28 December 1939. | 1 | 1 |
| Itinerary for 19-day trip to Guatemala, undated. | 1 | 2 |
| Two pocket diaries, undated. | 1 | 3 |
| Loose photos and postcards, undated. | 1 | 4 |
| Film: Central America [RESTRICTED], 1940. | 5 | |
| Film: Chichen Itza [RESTRICTED], 1940. | 5 | |
| Film: Guatemala City [RESTRICTED], 1940. | 5 | |
| Film: Mexico City [RESTRICTED], 1940. | 5 | |
| DVD transfer of films of Central America, Chichen Itza, Guatemala City, and Mexico City (use copy), circa 1940. | 1 | 5 |

II. SCRAPBOOKS, UNDATED, AFTER 1940.

| | Box | Folder |
|-------------------------------------|-----|--------|
| 1: Uxmal and Chichen Itza, undated. | 2 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2: Kabah and Sayil, undated. | 2 | 2 |
| 3: Labna, undated. | 2 | 3 |
| 4: Chichen Itza, undated. | 3 | 1 |
| 5: Chichen Itza, undated. | 3 | 2 |
| 6: Teotihuacán, Cholula and Monte Alban, undated. | 3 | 3 |
| "Quirigua, Guatemala; Copan, Honduras", undated. | 4 | 2 |
| "Aboriginal Cities of Mexico", undated. | 4 | 1 |

III. PUBLICATIONS AND NOTES, 1928-1946, UNDATED.

| | Box | Folder |
|--|-----|--------|
| Two short travel accounts written by Miller, 1946, undated. | 1 | 6 |
| Three bulletins of the Natural History Society of Maryland, 1941, 1942. | 1 | 7 |
| "A Key to the English Language," reprinted from <i>The Book of Record of the Time Capsule</i> by John P. Harrington, 1938. | 1 | 8 |
| "Ten Ways in which the Study of South American Languages Illuminates Linguistic Knowledge" by John P. Harrington, 1944. | 1 | 8 |
| <i>The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico</i> by Bernal Diaz del Castillo (translated by A. P. Maudslay), 1928. | 1 | 9 |
| Miscellaneous, 1960, undated. | 1 | 10 |

IV. CORRESPONDENCE, 1940-1959, UNDATED, BULK: 1954-1959.

| | Box | Folder |
|---|-----|--------|
| Letters written by Benjamin Kurtz, 1954-1959, undated. | 1 | 11 |
| Miscellaneous (including a letter sent by Miller to her father), 1940, undated. | 1 | 12 |