

# **Ann Parr collection of material relating to Geddes Mumford**

**Ms. Coll. 1423**

**Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.**

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Last updated on December 11, 2019.

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

2019 December 11

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Creator</b>	Parr, Ann L. Kessinger, 1923-1998
<b>Title</b>	Ann Parr collection of material relating to Geddes Mumford
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1423
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1943-1998
<b>Extent</b>	0.2 linear foot (1 box)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	Geddes Mumford (1925-1944) was the son of Lewis and Sophia Mumford and a World War II soldier who was killed in action. In the years before his death, he was romantically involved with Ann Louise Kessinger Parr, who collected and saved material relating to Geddes's service, death, and memory.

**Cite as:**

Ann Parr collection of material relating to Geddes Mumford, 1943-1988, Ms. Coll. 1423, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## Biography/History

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This collection consists of material collected by Ann Louise Kessinger Parr relating to Geddes Mumford with whom she was romantically involved before he was killed in action in World War II, in 1944. Geddes Mumford, born July 5, 1925, was the son of Lewis and Sophia Mumford. Geddes, his sister Alison, and his parents moved from New York to California for the fall 1942 Stanford University semester so that Lewis Mumford could teach in the humanities. While there, the Mumford family, and especially Geddes, became close to the family of Desmond Powell, one of Lewis Mumford's colleagues at the university.

Desmond Powell was married to Janet Kessinger (former wife of Frederick Kessinger) who was the mother of Ann, Frederick A., Janet (Beba), and Peter. It appears that Ann and Geddes became particularly close—in *Green Memories*, Lewis Mumford described her “as halfway between a comradely sister and a sweetheart” to Geddes and Geddes spent many of his leaves with the Powell family after entering service in the United States Army in July 1943.

After his training, Geddes served in Africa and in Italy as a Private First Class in the 363rd Infantry Regiment, 91st Division. While serving in Italy as an advanced scout just after the attack on the Gothic Line began, Geddes was killed on September 15, 1944 at the age of 19. The material collected largely documents the efforts of Geddes's family and friends to come to terms with his death, to understand their loss, and move forward with their lives while keeping their memories alive.

Following Geddes's death, Ann married Kenneth James DeCook in 1946; Richard Gorby in 1951; and later, Jack Parr. She was the mother of Ken, Bill, Steve, and Susan. She died in 1998.

Lewis Mumford memorialized Geddes's life and death in his book, *Green Memories*. For more biographical information on Geddes Mumford and his relationships with his family, Ann Kessinger, and the Powell family, please see the volume, available [here](#).

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection contains correspondence and collected articles and clippings about the Mumford family. The correspondence was probably kept by Ann Louise Kessinger (later DeCook, Gorby, and Parr) and it contains her letters to and from Lewis and Sophia Mumford, as well as copies of letters that were probably sent to her, in the days and months following the death of Geddes. Researchers will find copies of letters to the Mumfords from Geddes, largely speaking of combat and his experiences in World War II; from Sergeant Robert Fleisher (nephew of Lewis and Sophia Mumford) providing information on Geddes's service and death; and from Janet Powell (Ann's mother) sending sympathy and memories of Geddes. Letters between Sophia and Lewis Mumford and Ann provide evidence of the relationships between the families and between Ann and Geddes; and while the bulk of the letters were written just before and after Geddes's death, updates on the families continued until 1993. Ann appears to have written before her first marriage, and it seems that she was concerned about how the Mumford family might respond to her 1946 marriage to Kenneth James "Jim" DeCook; however, she received letters from Lewis Mumford with his support before and after the wedding. In 1966, she appears to have invited Lewis and Sophia to her daughter's wedding, resulting in a newsy letter from Sophia, expressing her wish that they had remained closer over the years. In 1993, Ann wrote Sophia a letter with memories of meeting Geddes—it is unclear if this unsigned letter was ever finished or sent, or if this was a draft of another letter. The collection also contains one of Geddes's dog tags, listing Sophia Mumford as his next of kin. It is possible that the Mumfords sent this to her.

The articles document Lewis and Sophia Mumford, primarily, indicating that the family was frequently in

Ann's thoughts. These articles include mentions of books by Lewis Mumford being published, Lewis Mumford's thoughts on America's role in Vietnam, and notices of the deaths of both Lewis and Sophia in 1990 and 1997, respectively. In addition, there are a few articles about memorial events for soldiers who died in Italy, Sophia's interview by Studs Terkel, and Lewis's role as an architectural critic.

It is uncertain if these saved letters and articles are a complete picture of the relationships between the Mumfords and Ann, but their connection to each other and the memory of Geddes is clear. Interestingly, there are no letters from Geddes to Ann; although there is evidence that she wrote to Geddes while he was in Italy, despite being a "non-letter writer" (box 1, folder 3).

While more information about the Mumford family and Geddes Mumford can be found in the Lewis Mumford papers, the Sophia Wittenberg Mumford papers, and *Green Memories*, Lewis Mumford's book about Geddes Mumford's short life and death, this collection documents the way in which his family and friends remembered him and how their memories of him remained a part of their lives.

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## Administrative Information

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

2019 December 11

Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.

### Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

### Use Restrictions

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### Source of Acquisition

Gift of David Dooley, 2014.

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## Related Materials

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### Related Archival Materials note

At the University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts:  
Lewis Mumford papers, circa 1905-1987, Ms. Coll. 2  
Lewis Mumford supplementary collection, 1926-1978, Ms. Coll. 1350  
Sophia Wittenberg Mumford papers, 1875-1997, Ms. Coll. 958  
Ernest Walter Martin papers relating to Lewis Mumford, 1966-1995, Ms. Coll. 1362  
Lewis Mumford letters to Harry T. Moore, 1942-1976, Ms. Coll. 1361  
Jane Morley collection of letters from Sophia Mumford, 1987-1991, Ms. Coll. 1071  
Evelyn Manuel Huber collection of Mumford and Huber family material, 1884-1993, Ms. Coll. 1072

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## Controlled Access Headings

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### FORM/GENRE(S)

- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Correspondence

### PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Mumford, Geddes, 1925-1944
- Mumford, Lewis, 1895-1990
- Mumford, Sophia Wittenberg, 1899-1997

### SUBJECT(S)

- Families
- Soldiers
- World War, 1939-1945
- World War, 1939-1945--Europe
- World War, 1939-1945--Social aspects

## Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Letters, 1943 June-1944 August.	1	1
Letters, 1944 November-1946 November.	1	2
Letters, 1966, 1993.	1	3
Dog tags belonging to Geddes Mumford, circa 1943-1944.	1	4
Clippings and articles about the Mumfords (Lewis and Sophia) and about memorial events for Americans in Italy during World War II, 1944, 1965, 1990-1998, undated.	1	5