



DOROTHY C. PUTNAM AND LOIS MERCER PAPERS

Coll2008-038

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Descriptive Summary

Title

Dorothy C. Putnam and Lois Mercer Papers

Creator

Putnam, Dorothy C., 1895-1991
Mercer, Lois, 1894-1989

Extent

Number of containers: 1 archive carton + 1 archive box + 1 flat archive carton
Linear feet: 2.5 linear feet

Date

1914 - 1988

Repository

ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California

Abstract

Photographs, correspondence, typescripts, newspaper clippings, a trophy and scrapbooks relating to Dorothy C. Putnam (1895-1991) and her partner of 50 years, Lois Mercer (1894-1989), bookkeeper for ONE, Inc. The majority of the materials document Putnam's life and family from her adolescence as a horseback mail carrier in Oregon; her activities as the first licensed female chauffeur in California; her wins in economy-run driving races in the 1920s; and her service in the Women's Ambulance and Transport Corps of California (W.A.T.C.C.) and U.S. Air Force during World War II. Materials also document Lois Mercer's service in the U.S. Air Force during World War II; her contribution to ONE, Inc., from 1953; Putnam and Mercer's community activism; and their 50 years of life together in Los Angeles.



Administrative Information

Access

The collection is open to researchers. There are no access restrictions.

Publication Rights

Researchers wishing to publish material must obtain permission in writing from ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives as the physical owner of the material. Note that permission to publish does not constitute copyright clearance. ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives can grant copyright clearance only for those materials for which we hold copyright. It is the responsibility of the researcher to obtain copyright clearance for all other materials from the copyright holder(s).

Preferred Citation

Dorothy C. Putnam and Lois Mercer Papers, Coll2008-038, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California

Indexing Terms

This collection is indexed under the following terms:

- Lesbians
- Mercer, Lois, 1894-1989
- ONE, Incorporated
- ONE Institute
- Putnam, Dorothy C., 1895-1991
- United States. Air Force—Officers—Women
- Women's Ambulance and Transport Corps of California, Inc.

Acquisitions Information

Donation of Dorothy Putnam and Lois Mercer, date unknown.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Loni Shibuyama, June 20, 2008.



Related Material

A VHS videotape of an interview by Dorr Legg with Lois Mercer and Lt. Dorothy Putnam, April 27, 1986, is currently (June 2008) deposited with the Outfest Legacy Project at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Biography

Dorothy “Dot” Crocker Putnam was born in Massachusetts on October 15, 1895, the daughter of Frank Wright Putnam and Elle Crocker Putnam. She was a descendant of American Revolutionary War General Israel Putnam, and claimed to be a cousin of Amelia Earhart (although the relationship may have been to Earhart’s husband, George Putnam). As a young woman, Putnam was a horseback mail carrier in Oregon. She later moved to Los Angeles, where she developed an interest in automobiles. In 1918, she became the first licensed female chauffeur in California, her clients including Carole Lombard, Charlie Chaplin and Clark Gable. In addition, she also won a number of driving contests in Los Angeles during the 1920s. During World War II, she served in the Women’s Ambulance and Transport Corps of California (W.A.T.C.C.), and later the Air Force, rising to the rank of First Lieutenant. After retiring from the Air Force, she became the first female senior truck driver for the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department.

Lois Mercer was born in California on February 12, 1894. In 1928, she moved to Los Angeles, where she worked as a bookkeeper for an insurance company. In the 1930s, she met Dorothy Putnam, who was her partner for over 50 years. During World War II, Mercer, with Putnam, joined the W.A.T.C.C., and later the Air Force, rising to the rank of Corporal. In 1953, Mercer became bookkeeper at ONE, Inc., where she continued to work part-time until she retired in 1986, at the age of 92.

Putnam and Mercer lived in Los Angeles throughout their 50-year partnership. Lois Mercer died on January 6, 1989, Dorothy Putnam in March 1991.

Source: Dorothy C. Putnam and Lois Mercer Papers, Coll2008-038, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California

Scope and Content and Container List

This collection comprises scrapbooks, photographs, typescripts, clippings, miscellaneous material and a trophy from Dorothy C. Putnam and Lois Mercer. Each of the scrapbooks includes photographs, clippings, correspondence, notes and miscellaneous typescripts documenting Putnam and Mercer's lives from the 1910s through the mid-1980s. Materials document Putnam's ancestry; her career as the first licensed female chauffeur and mechanic in California and her subsequent service as an Air Force lieutenant; her participation in driving contests; Mercer's contribution to ONE, Inc.; her involvement in the Republican Party; their shared community activism; and their 50-year partnership, which began in Los Angeles in the 1930s. Also included is a trophy Putnam won in the Ladies Driving Contest organized by the Motor Car Dealers Association of Los Angeles in 1922. Note: Scrapbooks should be handled with care as the glue holding the photographs to the pages has become brittle and many of the photographs are loose.

Box Item/Folder

		Scrapbooks and Photo Albums
1	1	Album #1 [126 photographs : b&w , col.], circa 1910 – 1969.
1	2	Album #2 [167 photographs : b&w.], circa 1910 – 1945.
1	3	Album #3 [132 photographs : b&w , col.], 1914 – 1981.
2	1	Album #4 [143 photographs : b&w , col.], circa 1915 – 1943.
3	1	Album #5 [31 photographs : b&w.], 1918 – 1946.
1	4	Album #6 [84 photographs : b&w , col.], circa 1937 – 1975.
3	2	Album #7 [109 photographs : col.], 1963 – 1976.
3	3	Photo Album of Lois Mercer & Dot Putnam [170 photographs : b&w , col.], 1975 – 1988.
1	5	Album #8 [21 photographs : col.], 1981 – 1984.
		Miscellaneous Photographs
2	2	Dorothy Putnam (found loose) [6 photographs : b&w.], 1916 – 1942.
2	3	Dorothy Putnam Photo and Clipping (framed) [1 photograph : b&w.], circa 1943.
2	4	Family Photos [2 photographs : b&w.], circa 1910 – 1920.
2	5	Family Photos [7 photographs : col.], circa 1982 – 1986.
3	4	Frank Wright Putnam [1 photograph : b&w.], Undated.
2	6	Correspondence, 1983.
2	7	Correspondence and Related Clipping About Dorothy Putnam, 1983 – 1985.
2	8	"Motor Pool" Air Force Maywood, California, 1943.
2	9	Newspaper Clipping about Tressa Prisbrey, 1982.
2	10	National Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial Fund Certificate of Recognition to Lois Mercer, 1988.
2	11	ONE Institute Material, 1982 – 1986.
2	12	Ronald Reagan and Republican Party Memorabilia, 1984 – 1986.
4		Ladies' Driving Contest Trophy from the Motor Car Dealers Association in Los Angeles, May 1922.