
Finding aid to the Violet Orr oral history, 1919-1976 (bulk 1976), MS 3516

Finding aid prepared by Marie Silva

California Historical Society

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2011

Title: Violet Orr oral history

Date (inclusive): 1919-1976

Date (bulk): 1976

Collection Identifier: MS 3516

Creator: Orr, Violet.

Extent: Transcript: 2 folders (0.1 linear feet); Tapes: 15 audiocassettes

Contributing Institution: California Historical Society

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URL: <http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/>

Location of Materials: Collection is stored onsite.

Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.

 http://archive.org/details/chi_00009

Abstract: Transcript and sound recording of Lucille Kendall's 1976 interviews with Violet Orr, including a brief interview with Violet's husband Paul Orr; an interview history; and one folder of Orr family papers and photographs, dated from 1919 to 1976. The interviews document Violet Orr's childhood and marriage; her trip with Paul Orr to the Soviet Union in the 1920s; her activities as a Communist Party organizer in the 1930s and '40s in California, including her involvement in the San Francisco laundry workers' union and work for the radical newspaper, the *People's World*; and the Orrs' experiences during the post-war Red Scare.

Access

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Violet Orr oral history, MS 3516, California Historical Society.

Separated Materials

The original sound recording from which the Orr oral history was transcribed is stored separately on cassettes 30.1-30.15. Photographic portraits of Violet and Paul Orr have been removed to the California Historical Society's Portrait Collection.

Related Collections and Materials

Related Collections

The following oral histories were prepared by Lucille Kendall in her effort to document the lives of women labor activists and radicals for the California Historical Society's "Women in California Collection":

Clemmie Shuck Barry oral history, MS 3251

Dorothy Elizabeth De Losada oral history, MS 3522

Elaine Black Yoneda oral history, MS 3524

Helene Powell oral history, MS 3518

Katherine Rodin oral history, MS 3517

Louise Lambert oral history, MS 3520

Marion Brown Sills oral history, MS 3525

Mildred Edmondson oral history, MS 3523

Sonia Baltrun Kaross oral history, MS 3515

The following oral histories were prepared under the auspices of "The Twentieth Century Trade Union Woman: Vehicle for Social Change," a project of the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, The University of Michigan-Wayne State University:

Angela Ward oral history, MS 3536

Caroline Decker Gladstein oral history, MS 3025

Other Related Materials

Orr, Paul and Violet. 1993, *the world of tomorrow: timely look into the future*. Altadena, California: Pacific Progress Publishers, 1968.

Acquisition Information

This oral history was transcribed from four interviews with Violet Orr conducted by Lucille Kendall for the California Historical Society in 1976.

Biographical Information

Communist and peace activist Violet Orr was born in San Francisco in 1904. She spent her childhood in San Francisco, Iowa, Oregon, and finally Palo Alto, graduating from Stanford University. She married Paul Orr in 1926, and together they traveled to the Soviet Union, living there for two years, from 1928 to 1930. Active in the Friends of the Soviet Union, the Orrs joined the Communist Party in 1932. As a Communist Party activist, Violet Orr filled many positions in Northern and Southern California: as an organizational secretary in Oakland in the early 1930s; a candidate for the California State Assembly from Richmond (1934); a laundry worker and labor organizer in San Francisco (1935-1937); and an advertising and circulation manager of the *People's World* in San Francisco and Los Angeles (1937-1946). Throughout this period, she played an energetic role in California's radical print culture, not only as a manager of the *People's World*, but also as a founder of the San Francisco laundry workers' newspaper, the *Shake Out*; a contributor to the *Western Worker*; and a leafleteer among Richmond refinery workers. During the 1934 General Strike, the Orrs' Point Richmond home was ransacked by vigilantes.

After World War II, Violet and Paul Orr worked as school teachers in Oregon, returning to California in 1951 after losing several jobs in the early years of the post-war Red Scare. They continued to feel the strain of rising anti-communist anxiety in Pasadena, where Paul was fired from his job at the California Institute of Technology for refusing to disavow his Communist Party membership. In Pasadena, Violet was active in the Methodist Church and in various peace movements. She and Paul co-authored a utopian novel, *1993, the World of Tomorrow*, which was published by Pacific Progress Publishers in 1968.

Scope and Contents

This oral history collection consists of a transcript and sound recording of Lucille Kendall's 1976 interviews with Violet Orr, including a brief interview with Violet's husband Paul Orr; an interview history; and one folder of Orr family papers and photographs, dated from 1919 to 1976. The Orr interviews were conducted under the auspices of the California Historical Society's "Women in California Collection" as part of an oral history project documenting the lives of women labor activists and radicals in California.

The interviews document Violet Orr's personal experiences, family life, and radical activism, from the early 1900s to 1950s. In particular, the interviews shed light on her childhood, education, and marriage; her trip with Paul Orr to the Soviet Union in the 1920s; her activities as a Communist Party organizer in the 1930s and '40s in California, including her involvement in the San Francisco laundry workers' union and work for the radical newspaper, the *People's World*; and the Orrs' experiences during the post-war Red Scare.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog:
Orr, Paul.

People's world (San Francisco, Calif.).

Communism--California.

Communists--California.

Laundry workers--Labor unions--California--San Francisco.

Audiocassettes.

Oral histories.

Radicalism--California--Newspapers.