Guide to the Edward Gardner Lewis Papers 001

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V.02 (Revision of 2007 Nov 17. Reflects revised arrangement and description.)  
Palos Verdes Library District, Peninsula Center Library. Local History Center.  
November 17, 2007  
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URL: http://www.pvld.org/localhistory
Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: Palos Verdes Library District, Peninsula Center Library. Local History Center.
Title: Edward Gardner Lewis Papers
Source: Marymount College (Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.)
Creator: Lewis, Edward Gardner, 1869-1950
Identifier/Call Number: 001
Physical Description: 1 Cubic FeetIncludes 2 legal size boxes and 11 oversize folders.
Date (inclusive): 1914-1931
Abstract: Collection of documents regarding the work of Edward Gardner Lewis, who optioned to purchase 16,000 acres of land on the Palos Verdes peninsula from Frank Vanderlip, Sr. and drew plans for the first Palos Verdes Project.
Physical Location: Stored in Local History Center.
Provenance/Source of Acquisition
Preferred Citation
[Name of item], Edward G. Lewis Papers (Collection 001). Local History Center, Peninsula Center Library, Palos Verdes Library District, Rolling Hills Estates, CA.
Arrangement
This collection is arranged into four series, Correspondence, Legal Documents, Photographic Materials, and Publications and Manuscripts; thereafter chronologically. Publication and Manuscripts is further arranged into Advertisements, Autobiography, Brochures, By Lewis, Maps, Meetings of Underwriting Subscribers and Trust Indenture; thereafter chronologically.
Access Restrictions Note
Open for research. Advance notice required for access. Contact the Local History Center for access information.
Use Restrictions Note
Property rights to the physical object belong to the Palos Verdes Library District. Literary rights, including copyright, are retained by the creators and their heirs. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine who holds the copyright and pursue the copyright owner or his or her heir for permission to publish where The Palos Verdes Library District does not hold the copyright.
Related Materials Note
Local History Photo Collection (019). Local History Center, Palos Verdes Library District, Rolling Hills Estates, CA.
American Woman’s League and the American Woman’s Republic Collection. University City Public Library Archives, University City Public Library, University City, MO.
Lewis Photograph Collection. University City Public Library Archives, University City Public Library, University City, MO.
Scope and Content Note
Collection includes correspondence, legal contracts, maps, publications, photographic materials, and manuscripts related to Lewis’ involvement with the Palos Verdes Project. Correspondence includes letters and telegrams from Jay Lawyer regarding Lewis’ option to purchase the acreage in the Palos Verdes peninsula, letters of support from local leaders including E. E. Webster, President of the Redondo Beach Chamber of Commerce, as well as legal correspondence with the Commonwealth Trust Company and the Title Insurance and Trust Company. Legal documents include copies of the major agreements for the Palos Verdes Project, including the agreement between the Vanderlip group and the Olmsted Brothers, original drafts and amendments to the trust indenture, as well as the statement of release as first party of the trust indenture by Lewis. Some of the most significant materials in the collection are photographs, in the form of slides, large format negatives, and prints, of the Palos Verdes peninsula. These are believed to be some of the earliest photographs of the peninsula prior to development and include images of farm life throughout the Palos Verdes peninsula. Publications include paste-ups for Lewis’ many publications as well as a sketched draft of an artistic certificate declaring the subscribers to the Palos Verdes Project. Documents throughout the collection include handwritten notes and sketches by Lewis. Maps include a 1919 Los Angeles Harbor and Vicinity map created by the Harbor Department of the City of Los Angeles and Palos Verdes Estates Site selection maps with accompanying architectural recommendations.
Biographical/Historical Note
Edward Gardner Lewis was born in Connecticut on March 4, 1869 to a family of Episcopal clergymen, educated in private schools and attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He was a magazine and newspaper publisher in addition to being a land developer. He conceived a bank-by-mail institution called the Peoples United Mail Bank and organized the American Woman’s League (later known as the Woman’s Republic), “a national school in administration, politics, and government for women in preparation for suffrage.” He purchased a magazine based in St. Louis called “Winner,” which he renamed “Woman’s Magazine” and built its circulation to more than a million and a half. His tent city of 85 acres at the 1904 World’s Fair in Missouri housed 800,000 people. The area was incorporated as University City, of which Lewis designed, built, and was mayor for three terms. His business interests included ventures into oil drilling and mining. Controversy often caused Lewis to lose and regain large sums of money. He came to Missouri in the late 1890s to sell insect extermination products and snake-oil medicines. Between 1904-1905, he was indicted by local Post Office inspectors and was denied second class mail rights for abuses of the second class mail rate in 1907. He declared bankruptcy at least twice, once after the post office controversy and again in 1924. He moved to California during World War I to develop the colony at Atascadero and to build the “largest dehydrating plant in the world” where, under military contract, he supplied the United States Army with dehydrated vegetables. Funds from the dehydrating plant were used to acquire 16,000 acres of leases on Alkali Dome, Wyoming where he drilled for oil, with little success. At the end of the war the United States government canceled his contract and Lewis found himself in financial ruin.

By 1922, E. G. Lewis had developed University City, Missouri and Atascadero in San Luis Obispo County, California. He optioned to buy 16,000 acres of land on the Palos Verdes peninsula from Frank Vanderlip, Sr., and drew up plans for a residential city covering 25 square miles “from San Pedro and Los Angeles Harbor on the south to Redondo on the north.” Financing for the Palos Verdes Project was to come from the sale of convertible and non-convertible trust indenture notes, which were to be used to buy the option from Vanderlip for $5 million. Thousands of persons eager to buy underwriting shares filled the Trinity Auditorium in Los Angeles at sales meetings in 1922. Much enthusiasm, support, and publicity launched the project, but detractors and controversy ended Lewis’ involvement with the Palos Verdes Project in early 1923.

In 1927, Lewis was indicted again for conspiracy to use mail to defraud. He was found guilty in a second trial after acting as his own attorney and was sentenced to serve five years at the McNeil Island Federal Prison. Little is known about Lewis’ life following his venture with the Palos Verdes Project. He died on August 10, 1950. A number of landmarks and events are named after Lewis in University City and Atascadero, including a marker in front of City Hall for University City describing Lewis as a “banker, planner, developer, builder, publisher, inventor, artist, dreamer, [and] visionary,” who “left us with a remarkable legacy.”

Note: Biography adapted from Lewis’ autobiography as well as collection biography written by Marymount Palos Verdes College staff.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Real estate development -- California -- Palos Verdes Estates.
Palos Verdes Estates (Calif.)
Title Insurance and Trust (Firm)
Lewis, Edward Gardner, 1886 - 1950 -- Archives.
Marymount College (Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.)
Lewis, Edward Gardner, 1869-1950

EG Lewis Papers Folder List