Guide to the Rose and Martha Dysart Diaries MS 24

Finding aid prepared by Samantha Mills
San Diego History Center Document Collection
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Title: Rose and Martha Dysart Diaries

Identifier/Call Number: MS 24

Contributing Institution: San Diego History Center Document Collection

Language of Material: English

Physical Description: 0.25 Linear feet (1 box)

Date (inclusive): 1909-1918

Abstract: This collection contains five diaries written by Rose Dysart and five diaries written by her sister Martha Dysart Allen in the early 1900s.

creator: Allen, Martha Dysart
creator: Dysart, Rose

Biographical / Historical Notes
The Dysart family was originally from St. Louis, Missouri. Jane Dysart had six children, including Rose Dysart, Martha Dysart Allen (nickname Mattie), Gilbert Dysart (nickname Gil), and Tom Dysart. Gilbert had two daughters, Martha and Helen. Rose lived in Enid, Oklahoma with Gil, Tom, Helen, and Martha before moving to Coronado, California in 1913. In Coronado she lived with Jane, Mattie, and Helen. Martha remained in Oklahoma with her father, Gil.

The women lived at 616 B. Avenue for the rest of their lives. Rose died in December 1917. She appears never to have married. Helen Dysart worked as a cataloger and later supervisor of the literature and languages section at the San Diego Public Library. She was hired in 1916 by Althea Warren and worked there till her retirement in 1960. From 1960 till 1970 she worked part-time in the rare book collection of the Wagenheim Room. Helen died February 26, 1972, and had no surviving relatives.

Scope and Content
This collection contains five diaries written by Rose Dysart and five diaries written by her sister Martha Dysart Allen. Rose’s diaries cover January 1, 1909 through December 31, 1916. The diaries begin in Oklahoma and the family moves to Coronado in 1913. Rose primarily describes her daily chores, errands, and recreational activities with neighbors and family. Other topics include the St. Louis Centennial, the sinking of the Titanic, early World War I news, the 1916 San Diego floods, conflicts with Pancho Villa in Mexico, and frequent trips to Tent City and the Panama-California Exposition. Martha’s diaries cover January 1, 1918 through December 17, 1918. Martha is mostly confined to the home, taking care of her ailing mother, Jane, after the death of Rose. She primarily describes her daily chores and the occasional recreational activity with neighbors and family.

Arrangement
This collection is arranged into two series:
Series I: Rose Dysart Diaries;
Series II: Martha Dysart Allen Diaries.

Diaries are arranged chronologically within each series.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements
Rose Dysart Diary One: The front cover is coming loose from the binding. Leather is cracked.
Rose Dysart Diary Two: Some pages near end of diary loose from binding.
Rose Dysart Diary Four: A large piece of the cover has broken off (still with book).

Preferred Citation
Rose and Martha Dysart Diaries, MS 24, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.

Conditions Governing Access
This collection is open for research.

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Processing Information
Collection processed by Samantha Mills in July 2013.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Gift of Clara Breed, 5/14/80

Related Archival Materials
PA 60 Martha ‘Mattay’ Dysart Family Photograph Album, 1900-1915
Subjects and Indexing Terms
Dysart, Helen
Panama-California Exposition (1915 : San Diego, Calif.).
Coronado (Calif.)
Diaries
Domestic Life
Enid (Okla.)
Flood damage
Floods -- California
San Diego (Calif.)
St. Louis (Mo.)
St. Louis Centennial
Tent City (Coronado, Calif.)
Titanic (Steamship)--Press coverage
World War, 1914-1918

Series I: Rose Dysart Diaries 1909 January 1-1916 December 31
Scope and Content
Rose lives in Enid, Oklahoma with her nieces Martha and Helen, her brother Gil, and occasionally boarders. She lists her daily chores, money made from sewing and embroidery work, letters from friends and family, and the social activities of Martha and Helen. In May 1909 they buy a plot of land and build a house for $2,070, but proceed to have financial troubles. Gil runs a shop selling candy and other goods, but has to sell it in January 1911. He goes to St. Louis to find work, and comes home in August 1911 after being laid off. Rose then moves to St. Louis to stay with her mother Jane and her sister Mattie. She works in a kitchen at the Lunch Room and picks up sewing and embroidery work through at least January 1913. There is a break in the diary, and then in June of 1913 Rose is living in Coronado with Jane, Mattie, and Helen. Her niece, Martha remains in Enid with her father, Gil. Rose lives near relatives Ellen and Virginia, who are boarding a 4-year-old boy named Amory Molina whose mother recently committed suicide. Helen and Rose have continuing financial troubles, and begin taking classes at Business School to improve their typing and shorthand. Note: some comments are written in shorthand.

Entries of Interest:
Page 11: January 30, 1909: Went to the library with Helen “and she got ‘Southern Calif’ by Stoddard – makes me want to live out there.”
Pages 58-59: September 2-8, 1909: Rose follows newspaper coverage of the Cook vs. Peary dispute regarding who reached the North Pole first.
Pages 64-66: October 3-9, 1909: During a three month trip to St. Louis to stay with her mother and sister, Rose attends the weeklong St. Louis Centennial celebration.
Page 101: March 22, 1910: “Had a letter from Mother said Mrs. Ross died she was a Christian Scientist & wouldn’t take any medicine.”
Page 116-117: May 20-21, 1910: Rose mentions King Edward’s funeral, which Roosevelt attended to represent the U.S. She also describes Halley’s Comet.
Page 129: July 4, 1910: Regarding the contentious boxing match: “Johnson won from Jeffries in the Prize Fight at Reno & every white man is mad.” On September 15 (page 150) a film of the fight comes to town.
Page 161: October 19, 1910: The Barnum & Bailey circus is in town. Rose nearly sets the house on fire when embers fall down the ash hole to the cellar.
Page 172: December 9, 1910: They lose their boarder: “Well Mr. B. has gone, he came home with ‘too much’ last night & fell on stairway and this morning took his things & left note saying – ‘people of my caliber should take quarters in a livery barn.’ I feel sorry for him and it’s hard on us.”
Page 184: January 14, 1911: Gil sells his shop for $115 and has to find new work.
Page 195-201: February 19-March 8, 1911: Rose follows coverage of a local divorce case between Gwen and Jess White, involving a child custody battle ending in joint custody.
Page 292-295: April 16-27, 1912: Rose records daily news coverage regarding the sinking of the Titanic.
Page 307: August 10, 1912: “Had letters from Aunt E. They are going to San Diego to live. V is going to teach & wanted Helen to go & be her assistant but Helen will never be anything is too afraid to hold her own in anything.”
Page 324: December 12, 1912: Rose decides they will follow her Aunt Ellen out to California.
Page 327: December 31, 1912: “We went to the lunch room for my money. They are commencing for New Years. Joes got in fight with nigger girl & shot at her & the police came & arrested him so he will spend his New Year Day in jail.”
Page 386-387: A roughly drawn “Ancestral Chart” of family names.
Page 388-392: Rose kept lists of Christmas presents she received each year, books she read, and money she made from sewing and embroidery.
Box-folder 1:2

Rose Dysart Diary Two 1914 January 1-1914 December 31

Scope and Content

Rose is still living in Coronado with Jane, Mattie, and Helen. Gil and Martha are still in Enid, Oklahoma, trying to sell their house. Rose and Helen continue their secretarial schooling, and finish in late February. Helen manages to find work as a stenographer in July, but Rose cannot find an open job and relies on money sent from relatives in the East. They spend their time gardening, exploring San Diego, and visiting with their neighbors, especially the Edwards, the Anthonys, Mrs. Stafford, and their relatives Ellen and Virginia. Beginning in July and continuing through the diary, Rose follows conflicting news coverage of World War I. Note: some comments are written in shorthand.

Entries of Interest:

Page 6: February 12, 1914: Virginia is so ill the family places her in a Sanitarium in Sweetwater Valley, under the care of Dr. Dunbar. She stays there till March 8.

Page 23: March 29, 1914: Rose goes on a car ride with the Anthonys to see the Exposition buildings at Balboa Park, Golden Hill Park, Ramona’s House, and the Father Serra monument.

Page 34-35: April 20-25, 1914: Rose follows conflicting news accounts from the United States and Mexico regarding the U.S. occupation of Veracruz following diplomatic disputes.

Page 59: June 19, 1914: Virginia quits working at the high school after being offered a job by Mrs. Hamilton to come tutor her daughter in Paris.

Page 69: July 10, 1914: Helen gets a job as a stenographer for $35 a month.

Page 76-81: July 31-August 13, 1914: Rose follows the news (or distinct lack of news) about the war in Europe. This continues sporadically through the rest of the diary.

Page 85: August 22, 1914: They finally receive word from Ellen and Virginia, who managed to catch a ship out of France after the war began and are now in England.

Page 109-115: October 22-November 4, 1914: Rose has heated discussions with neighbors regarding two issues: siding with England versus Germany for the war, and the vote on Prohibition in California.

Page 133: December 31, 1914: The Exposition opens at midnight, but Rose’s family does not go.
Rose Dysart Diary Three 1915 January 1-1915 June 30

Scope and Content
Rose is still struggling to find work. Cousin Anne continues to pay her to make quilts. Cousin Lolly visits in March and they show her around San Diego and the Exposition. Martha and Gil remain in Oklahoma, but Gil comes down with the grippe in April, and then loses his job after a conflict at work. In June, Helen leaves for a trip to the San Francisco Exposition. Rose periodically mentions news of World War I, and expresses her hopes that America will stay out of it. Note: some comments are written in shorthand.

Entries of Interest:

January 20, 1915: Rose and family finally get to go down to the Exposition. Rose also answers an ad for work at the Sun newspaper, but doesn’t get it.

March 18, 1915: “Helen went with Mrs. Valentine to hear Helen Keller at the Spreckles tonight.”

April 11, 1915: “I wrote 40 letters for Staffie’s ‘Door of Hope’ this morning.”

April 21, 1915: “Maj and Mrs Foster came over tonight. They were pleased with Wilson’s speech about the War. The War is still on but nothing has been gained by either side. Germany is wonderful I think.”

April 29, 1915: “Helen had a letter from Gil. Said he lost his place because he was a witness for the wife of a man who was killed in the Mill. Seems too bad one loses out for telling the truth but I believe something better will come to him for it.”

May 7-10, 1915: Rose expresses her hope that America stays out of the war after a German submarine sinks the Lusitania. Her comments on the war continue more consistently in the diary after this point.

After the last entry there is a page of humorous recipes titled “Old Aunt Mattie’s Receipts.”

Rose Dysart Diary Four 1915 July 1-1915 December 31

Scope and Content
Rose continues to live off checks from family members, and records her daily chores and social activities. In July she attends frequent concerts at Tent City. Aunt Ellen and Virginia return from a trip in August. Virginia has trouble resuming teaching at the high school because she lacks a state certificate. Rose and her family spend a lot of time socializing with their neighbors, especially the Anthonys, the Edwards, Mrs. Shields, and Mrs. Haffly. Helen gets back from her trip on Christmas Eve. Rose continues to mention news of the War. Note: some comments are in shorthand.

Entries of Interest:

July 5, 1915: “Our postman’s little boy 4 was burned Sunday and died. Another little boy & he went into basement & set fire to a can of distilate [sic].”

September 2, 1915: “The Kaiser says he will do as U.S. says about International Law, and will make peace on certain terms. Equal rights on the Sea & give Jews certain rights in all countries & freedom for Poland from Russia.”
Box-folder 1:2

Rose Dysart Diary Five 1916 January 1-1916 December 31

Scope and Content

Rose's entries are longer in this journal, and have more room for gossip, personal thoughts, and reflections on news and local politics. Jane grows very ill in January, so Rose, Mattie, Helen, and sometimes a neighbor take turns staying up by her bedside every night into February. At the same time San Diego is hit by the 1916 floods. The family is safe in Coronado but loses electricity and access to mail and other amenities. In March, Rose and Mattie get season tickets to the Exposition for $5 and attend more frequently. Helen moves briefly to San Francisco for work. Rose spends more of her time with neighbors, particularly Miss Holmes, Mrs. Edwards, Mrs. Shields, and Mrs. Stafford, who is active in City Planning and Civic Improvement efforts. Rose develops a recurring stomach problem, and Mattie and Jane are also often sick, so Helen returns home in July. At the end of August Helen gets work as an assistant cataloger at the library with Althea Warren. In September Rose gets some work writing letters for Mr. Winn (sp?), and otherwise continues with embroidery and quilting. As the year draws to a close they all attend the Exposition more frequently, with Rose tallying up 39 visits since buying her ticket, and Mattie 44. Note: some comments are in shorthand.

Entries of Interest:

Page 11: January 10, 1916: The house in Enid finally sells for $2,400, less than the family paid for it. Gil sends Rose $926.

Page 16: January 16, 1916: The San Diego River is rising and the dams are full. Rose mentions Hatfield the Rainmaker.

Page 27-31: January 27-31, 1916: After two weeks of rain the dams begin to fail and much of San Diego is flooded. Rose's family is safe in Coronado but affected by loss of services and access to San Diego. Rose is also dealing with the ongoing illnesses of Jane and Mattie.

Page 47: February 16, 1916: Rose attends a meeting on Civic Improvement at Mrs. Stafford’s home. Tensions run high when the topic turns to the War, since there is a Frenchwoman, an Englishman's wife, and several German sympathizers all attending.

Page 68: March 9, 1916: “Villa & his band raided Columbus N.M. & killed a number of people & now we must go after him.”

Page 74: March 15, 1916: Rose follows the news on the conflict in Mexico and the war in Europe, but laments that the news is so censored they don’t ever know what’s going on.

Page 96-101: April 6-April 11, 1916: Rose follows the political campaign between Spreckels and Johnson, and the election carries in favor of Spreckels and the Prosperity League.

Page 124: May 4, 1916: “The water force is so bad can hardly get any water. Its been 3 months since the dam broke but the San Diego government is about as bad as it possibly can be.”

Page 178: June 27, 1916: Following ongoing trouble with Mexico: “There was an emergency call at 3 o'clock this morning for men to go out to guard the dams and to border troops are coming in to be ready too. How I wish it was all settled.”

Page 187: July 6, 1916: “Mrs. Knight and Miss Holmes came in & wanted me to come over to a meeting for suffrage in all the States at Miss Holmes Sunday. I am not at all interested.”

Page 197: July 16, 1916: Upon hearing that Rose, Mattie, and Jane are all sick, Helen comes home from San Francisco.

Page 235: August 23, 1916: Helen gets a job at the library as assistant cataloger with Althea Warren for $40 a month.

Page 283: October 10, 1916: A friend or family member of the Anthonys runs away to the ocean with suicidal intent, and returns home hysterical. The reason for this is in shorthand.

Page 287: October 14, 1916: For her librarian exam Helen has to swear she lives in San Diego, and spend one night a week at their Aunt Ellen’s home.

Page 308: November 4, 1916: “Helen said that Joe Boquel the aviator was killed this afternoon late. He had written ‘Farewell’ in sky & as he came down his machine exploded.”

Page 312: November 8, 1916: Rose describes attending the national election at the Masonic Hall, with 259 out of 342 of the people in her precinct voting. The city of San Diego goes dry and this causes a commotion.

Page 368: A Memoranda page lists the Christmas presents Rose gave and received that year.
Mattie lives at 616 B. Ave in Coronado, CA with her mother Jane and niece Helen. Her sister Rose died shortly before the opening of the diary and the family is grief-stricken. Mattie describes her daily chores, her feelings for Rose, and her churchgoing habits. Jane has worsening eyesight problems, Virginia is in increasingly ill health, and Helen still works at the library.

Entries of Interest:
January 1, 1918: “The weather is bright and beautiful, but my heart is so sad – no one knows how I miss Rose all I do is a constant reminder as we worked together in almost everything.”
January 10, 1918: Helen helps move the children’s room of the library to new quarters.
January 17, 1918: Mattie receives bills for Rose’s surgery and hospital care. Dr. Allen sends a bill for $250 despite assuring the women that it was fine if they were too poor to pay. The surgeon, Dr. Burger, sends them a discounted bill for $100.

Mattie continues to describe her errands and household chores; recreational activities with Jane and Helen; and visits from neighbors including Mrs. Haffly, Mrs. Taylor, and the Anthonys, all of whom bring frequent gifts to help the grieving family. Mattie attends church frequently and takes solace in the sermons of Mr. Berger.

Entries of Interest:
February 26, 1918: Dr. Allen accepts $60 in payment for the $250 hospital bill and considers it paid in full.
March 4, 1918: Rose has been gone three months to the day.
March 31, 1918: “Went with Helen to the Museum to see the Raemaker Cartoons, they made the war seem very realistic no wonder the Kiser has put ‘a prise on his head’ for they surely ‘show up’ his majesty.”
April 9, 1918: They attend the wedding of Dorothy and Lieutenant Fields.

Mattie continues to describe her errands and household chores, recreational activities with Jane and Helen, and visits with neighbors. They get involved with the war effort by sewing clothes for Belgian and French babies, and by donating to the Red Cross whenever possible.

Entries of Interest:
May 2, 1918: Mattie, Jane, and Helen go to Mrs. Taylor’s to sew clothing for Belgian and French babies with other women. Jane and Mattie help sew while Helen reads “A Yankee in the Trenches” to everyone.
May 26, 1918: The women attend a Red Cross fundraiser in Balboa Park with Aunt Ellen and Virginia. Madam Schumann-Heink sings and soldiers speak of the war experience. They donate all the money they have on hand, including their bus fare, and walk home.
June 6, 1918: “While in the dentist chair I heard a great deal of loud talk and cheering which proved to be 1800 High school girls & boys on a strike because the board or ‘big three’ had discharged 21 of the teachers and Principal Gould – too bad politicks are allowed in school affairs.”
June 15, 1918: Mattie describes the speeches given at a luncheon at the Grant Hotel. The theme is “Pinning the Flag of Democracy to the Heart of America,” and the speakers attempt to get San Diego more involved in the war effort.
Martha Dysart Allen Diary Four 1918 June 30-1918 September 6

Scope and Content
Mattie continues to describe her errands and household chores, recreational activities with Jane and Helen, and visits with neighbors. The household finances grow tight as wartime prices go up. Mattie recounts more war news as she reads the paper to Jane most evenings. She has worsening trouble with her neuralgia and is often sick. In August Virginia finally gets her divorce and moves to Los Angeles for a teaching position, and Ellen and Betty move with her.

Entries of Interest:
July 14, 1918: Mattie describes a trip to Camp Kearny to see the army boys, and compares their accommodations to those of the Navy boys at Balboa Park.
July 26, 1918: “Miss Stafford wants me to come over at three thirty and ask Margareta to come stay half an hour with Mother and say I have to go out and can’t leave her alone. They think M is up to some mischief, she being a German. May be so, maybe not, but ‘tis just as well to look over her belongings and see. As she has been found guilty of taking Miss S’s silk stockings. So she may be a German spy she does many queer things.”

Martha Dysart Allen Diary Five 1918 September 7-1918 December 17

Scope and Content
Mattie continues to describe her daily errands and household chores, though she is more often confined to the home now and feeling unwell. Jane’s eyesight has worsened, so Mattie reads to her most days. In October they receive word that Gil died after being injured in an accident at the mill. His daughter Martha refuses to come out to San Diego yet, saying she intends to get married and sort out their financial problems with the insurance company. In November Mattie’s brother Tom comes to stay with them, devastated over the death of Gil.

Entries of Interest:
November 17, 1918: Mattie describes a weeklong trip to Los Angeles taken with Jane and Helen in October. At the end of their trip they received word that Gil died following a mill accident. They want Martha and Tom to come to San Diego, but only Tom arrives. Martha plans to get married to defray insurance costs.
November 23, 1918: While mourning the loss of Rose, Mattie says, “Now Gilbert has been taken and of Mother’s six children only Tom and I are left.”