Guide to the Kneeland Family Papers, 1820-1961

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Henry Madden Library
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Descriptive Summary
Title: Kneeland Family Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1820-1961
Creator: Kneeland family
Extent: 7.75 linear feet
Photographs: In boxes 2 and 9.
Repository: Henry Madden Library (California State University, Fresno).
Sanoian Special Collections Library.
Fresno, California
Language: English.

Acquisition
The papers were donated by the Viola Gabriel Estate in 1987.

Access Restrictions
The collection is open for research.

Publication Rights
Copyright has been transferred to California State University, Fresno.

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History
George and Mary Kneeland lived with their first two children, Ira and Althea, in Vermont in the mid-nineteenth century. They were a poor family who dreamt of a utopian life. After the Civil War, they moved to Kansas where their two younger children, Flora and Clarissa, were born. During Clarissa's early childhood, the family moved to Colorado. There her father and brother discovered some literature on a cooperative colony being established in Topolobampo, Mexico. Ira became the colony photographer and the rest of the family gradually moved to the colony.

Much of Clarissa Kneeland's youth was spent in Topolobampo, however in 1913, disagreements among the colonists led to the collapse of the colony and the subsequent scattering of its settlers. While in Mexico, Clarissa Kneeland made a promise...
which set the course of her future. Her brother, Ira Kneeland, was virtually deaf by the age of twenty-five and she assured her mother that she would take care of him.

Clarissa Kneeland's sisters, both of whom married men from the colony, moved to California. Her father went to California to attend a Civil War veterans' reunion and was unable to return to Mexico due to the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. This left Ira, Clarissa and their mother in Mexico and although they were neutral in the conflict, they feared for their safety. The entire family settled in the Prather area in northern Fresno County, California, with Clarissa and Ira claiming land on Black Mountain, where they spent the rest of their lives.

In October 1913, shortly after returning to the United States, Clarissa joined the Socialist Party and remained an active member for nineteen years. She broke with the Socialist Party in 1932, the year the party called for the repeal of the Prohibition Act. Although her conviction in core Socialist ideals had not changed, she saw liquor as a curse to the nation and felt that children were safe under Prohibition.

Clarissa Kneeland believed in the equality of all living things. She refused to have her dog vaccinated, a decision which led to her being put into jail for fifteen days. In particular, Clarissa harbored a special affinity for birds. She kept copious notes on birds she sighted on Black Mountain and also saved pictures and articles on this topic and pasted them into various notebooks. Clarissa Kneeland dreamt of a sanctuary on Black Mountain, a place where man and beast could live together in harmony. This dream never became a reality nor did her ambition to become a successful author. Her works, both fiction and nonfiction, reflected her ideals or dealt with nature or people she knew.

Ira Duane Kneeland shared his sister's strong socialist convictions and also wrote a few short works on this subject. He also devoted much time to inventions, in particular to the design of a helicopter. He later withdrew this invention from a company which offered to fund the building of his helicopter because he thought it would be used for military gain.

Ira Kneeland contracted pneumonia in 1950; Clarissa nursed him with her own organic medicine. She became ill herself and they died a day apart in 1950.

Scope and Content

The Kneeland Family papers measure 7.75 linear feet and date from 1820 to 1961. The papers predominantly cover the life and interests of Clarissa Kneeland and her brother, Ira Kneeland and are arranged in four series: Clarissa Abia Kneeland, Ira Duane Kneeland, Socialism and Other family members.

The Clarissa Abia Kneeland series (1892-1949) predominantly comprises Clarissa's life after she left the Topolobampo Colony in 1913 and settled on Black Mountain with her brother. Her interest in nature can be seen by the numerous notebooks she filled with notes and clippings about the weather, plants and birds. There are also numerous manuscripts and short works which she wrote over the years as well as letters from various publishers about the ones which were to be published.

The Ira Duane Kneeland series (1868-1947) contains sketches of his inventions and ideas on how they might be put into practice. There is also correspondence from the various firms to which he sent details of his inventions. Like his sister, Ira wrote various short works, although unlike Clarissa, his are all on the subject of socialism.

Although much of the Socialism series (1894-1957) consists of the collection of articles, journals and newspapers which Ira and Clarissa Kneeland collected after their return from the Topolobampo Colony, other family members also contributed to this collection.

The newspaper clippings are in various scrapbooks and are predominantly about the socialist viewpoint. There are certain articles on women's rights and prominent women socialists, for example, Mother Jones and Mary Ellen Lease. There are also articles written by Ira Kneeland which outline his socialist beliefs.

The Kneeland family collected much information about prominent socialists during their lifetime. Eugene V. Debs, a founder of and spokesman for the United States Socialist Party, ran five times as the Socialist Party candidate for president, receiving 6% of the popular vote in 1920. During World War I, Debs, a pacifist, spoke out against prosecutions under the Espionage Act of 1917. This stand cost him his citizenship and three years in prison. The file contains details of Debs's trial and a copy of his speech to the jurors declaring his innocence. Also included is a pamphlet about his life and a letter from his brother Theodore Debs to Clarissa, thanking her for her support in proclaiming his innocence. There is also a photograph in box 9 with two Kneeland women on the top floor of a new adobe store with a poster of Debs and his running mate, Stedman, showing their support for Debs's candidacy.

The folder on the O'Hara Family contains issues of The American Vanguard, the newsletter they founded. Subscribers to the newsletter were informed of the work of the O'Haras and were encouraged to contribute, with both money and time to certain causes. For example, the O'Haras helped to organize the Children's Crusade in 1921 when socialist believers sent their children to Washington D.C. to speak to the President Harding in the hope of bringing amnesty to all political prisoners. In 1920, Kate O'Hara became a political prisoner for fourteen months in a Missouri prison. During her imprisonment, her husband Frank O'Hara sent weekly bulletins to society members with details of his wife's trial.
also letters from O'Hara to her husband and members describing the conditions of her imprisonment.

The Thomas Mooney folder contains pamphlets describing his trial. He had been sentenced to death for his alleged role in a bombing at the Preparedness Day Parade on July 22, 1916, in San Francisco. This bomb killed ten people and seriously injured forty others. There is a letter to Flora Kneeland during Mooney's imprisonment from his sister, Anna Mooney and also a letter to Clarissa Kneeland from Thomas Mooney after his release. Both letters thank the sisters for their support during Mooney's imprisonment.

Upton Sinclair the novelist, was as famous for his interest in social issues as for his novels. He temporarily abandoned writing in 1934 and ran as the Democratic candidate for governor of California. Narrowly defeated, he relaunched his writing career. This folder contains a pamphlet outlining his views on socialism and two letters which he sent to Clarissa Kneeland.

The folder on the literature of the Socialist Party contains a leaflet promoting its causes. There are also two programs in Spanish outlining the views of the party.

There are a few Other family members (1820, 1852-1961) whose relationship to Ira and Clarissa Kneeland are indicated. They play a minor role in the collection and their material consists predominantly of correspondence between family members.

The photographs of Page Hollow illustrate in great detail the dwellings of Althea and Clarence Page and also include various family members.

A genealogical chart spanning three generations is at the end of the finding aid. There is little information on many of these other family members.

**Title:** Topolobampo Collection (ca. 34 linear feet)

This collection contains materials about the Kneeland Family's experience at Topolobampo, a socialist, utopian colony founded by Albert Kimset Owen at Topolobampo Bay and Los Mochis, Sinaloa, Mexico. The collection is unprocessed but is available for research.

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**Kneeland, Clarissa Abia**

**Box Box 1**

Biography, undated

Black Mountain

Accounts (5 folders) 1904, 1908-1949 and undated

Cookbook, 1916-1917

Electrification, 1944, 1945, 1949, and undated


Garden notes, 1932-1933

Guest book, 1928-1930, 1933-1939


Maps and plans, 1918 and undated

News notes from Black Mountain, 1932, 1937

Newspaper clippings and writings on birds, undated

Picnickers, 1934-1948

Plants, 1922-1949

Sanctuary for People, 1935-1949 and undated

Weather summaries, 1915-1949

Photographs, 1920-1940 and undated

Correspondence

Overseas, 1930, 1947-1949

Personal, undated

Political, 1917, 1924, 1933, 1934, 1940, 1942-1947 and undated

Publishers, 1923-1925, 1927, 1929-1932 (2 folders)

**Box Box 2**

Diaries, 1892, 1895, 1898-1901, 1925-1946, 1949 (4 folders)

Jail sentence, 1934

Manuscripts, undated

* Aleck Barton

* Arco Iris

Guide to the Kneeland Family Papers, 1820-1961
Babe of Muleighniui  
Bridge House  
Grandma's Wedding Dress  
La Casa Alta  
Letters from Gwendolin  
Letters to Beth  
Named for Wild Jassamine  
Quail Mountain  
Correspondence, 1939  
Smuggler's Island  
Correspondence  
Review and comments  
Statements and records  
Surpang  
The Stronghold of Ripsnorter  
Triple S  

Box Box 4

Vic and I  
Will of Dan Roman  
Short works and poetry, undated (2 folders)  
Sketches, undated  
Topolobampo notebook, 1899-1932  

Kneeland, Ira Duane  

Box Box 5

Account books, 1884, 1892, 1896-1898, 1913, 1941 (2 folders)  
Correspondence, 1868 and undated  
Diaries, 1891 and undated  
Inventions  
Correspondence, 1910-1912, 1927-1929, 1933, 1941, 1947  
Reports, undated  
Sketches (includes 1 postcard), 1932 and undated  
Land deeds, 1908  
Short essays (political), 1908  
Socialism  

Box Box 5

Colonies  
Commonwealth Community College, Arkansas, undated  
Cosme Co-operation, Paraguay (includes correspondence), 1894, 1900, 1931  
Darewell, 1946, 1947 and undated  
Kuzbas, New York, 1922, 1923  
Llano Cooperative Colony, Louisiana (includes correspondence), 1931, 1932, 1935-1937, 1944-1947  
Southern Oregon Altruistic Cooperative Association, 1930  
Texas Coast Co-operative Company, undated  
Unity annex, undated  
Correspondence  
Kneeland, Clarissa, 1937, 1943, 1947  
Kneeland, Ira, 1928 and undated  
Journals  
American Foundation for Abundance, 1940  
League for Industrial Democracies, 1924-1928, 1933  
The Epic News, 1935, 1936, 1941-1947  
The United Cooperative Industries, 1938, 1939, 1944, 1945, 1951-1957  
The World Press  
Correspondence, 1923, 1925, 1930  
Certificates, 1923, 1931  

Box Box 6

Workers Defense Bulletin, 1941-1948  
Newspaper clippings, undated (2 folders)  
Ira Kneeland, 1914-1916, 1924, 1928-1935
Socialism

Pacifism
  Articles, 1917, 1925, 1946, 1956
  Correspondence, 1918, 1930, 1945, 1947, 1954-1956

Prominent socialists
  Debs, Eugene V., 1918 and undated
  Mooney, Thomas, 1917, 1932, 1940 and undated
  The O’Haras, 1920-1923
  Sinclair, Upton, 1920 and undated

Question of money (includes correspondence and newspaper clippings) 1925-1927, 1929-1932, 1934, 1936, 1941, 1946 and undated

Question of religion (includes correspondence) 1906, 1922, 1931, 1935, 1939, 1940, 1943-1946

Slides of sheet music, 1933

Socialist Party
  Literature, 1908, 1930 and undated
  Membership card, 1929, 1931

Workers unions
  The Co-operative Industrial Association of Virginia, 1928
  The Progress Builders of America, 1900 and undated
  Vermont and Sinaloa Industrial Association, 1900 and undated

Other family members

Box Box 6
  Stoddard, Simeon (grandfather)
  Correspondence, 1820, 1861-1862

  Kneeland, George (father)
  Account book 1874-1897, 1908-1911 (2 folders)
  Biographical sketch, 1863
  Civil War souvenirs, 1862, 1865 and undated
  Correspondence, 1880-1914 and undated

Box Box 7
  Diaries, 1861-1888, 1893-1895, 1919-1922 (4 folders)
  Land deeds, 1922
  Receipts, 1872

  Kneeland, Mary Stoddard (mother)
  Account books, 1857-1860, 1899-1902
  Correspondence, 1890-1922 and undated (2 folders)
  Diaries, 1896-1929 (4 folders)
  Writings, 1852, 1853, 1855, 1858 and undated

  Campbell, Abia Lucelia Stoddard (Dudley) (aunt)
  Diary, 1915
  Short works, undated

  Dudley, Diantha M. (uncle)
  Correspondence, 1912

Box Box 8
  Kneeland, Abel (uncle)
  Correspondence, 1908, 1909

  Kneeland, Althea Maria (sister)
  Correspondence, 1875-1914 and undated

  Heliot, Armand Elmer (Flora’s husband)
  Account book, 1889-1907
  Correspondence, undated
  Death certificate, 1942

  Heliot, Flora Isabelle Kneeland (sister)
  Correspondence, 1898-1912 and undated
  Diaries, 1889-1891, 1895-1901
  Will and funeral expenses, 1961

  Kneeland, Alice Lincoln (cousin)
Correspondence, 1888
Kneeland, Clara Serena (cousin)
Correspondence, undated
Kneeland, Dorrie Abel (cousin)
Correspondence, 1902, 1907
Gabriel, Daisy Viola Belle Heliot
Correspondence, 1962
Land deeds, 1962
Kneeland, D. A. (relationship unknown)
Correspondence, 1887
Sort works and poetry, undated
Kneeland, Stillman F. (relationship unknown)
Biographical sketch, 1886
Kneeland, Willis (relationship unknown)
Graduation announcement, 1928
Moat, Edlington (relationship unknown)
Correspondence, 1932-1950
Smith, Mabel Page (Clarence Page's daughter from prior marriage)
Correspondence, 1903-1911 and undated
Stoddard, D.S. (Relationship unknown)
Correspondence, 1884
Miscellaneous family correspondence, 1820-1927, undated
Photographs, 1918, 1920 and undated
  Gabriel, Daisy Viola Belle Heliot (niece)
  Kneeland, Ira and Clarissa
  Kneeland, George and Mary (parents)
Kneeland home
  Nature on Black Mountain
  Page Hollow
  Miscellaneous family photographs
  Contact prints (duplicates)
  Oversize (duplicates) [shelved in map case A, drawer 10]