

Kate Slaughterback Collection- 1987.32

Reference Code US COGrCGM 1987.32
Title Kate Slaughterback Collection
Processed by Sarah Arnusch
Finding Aid
Prepared by Sarah Arnusch

Name and location

of Repository Hazel E. Johnson Research Center
Greeley History Museum
714 8th Street
Greeley, CO 80631
Phone: 970-336-4187
Email: museums@greeleygov.com
URL: <http://www.greeleymuseums.com/>

Collections Summary

Dates 1877-1982
Bulk Dates 1925-1966
Level of description Collection
Extent 1 cubic foot
Creator(s) Kate Slaughterback, Charles D. Randolph

Administrative/ Biographical History

Biographical note of Kate Slaughterback

Katherine (McHale) Slaughterback was born near Longmont, Colorado on July 25, 1894. She was a nurse during World War II, and after the war she made her living farming on the eastern plains of Colorado. She also held a variety of odd jobs over the years, including taxidermist, midwife, and bootlegger. Kate Slaughterback was married and divorced six times and had one child, a son named Ernie Adamson.

Kate earned the nickname "Rattlesnake Kate," on October 28, 1925 when she and Ernie went out looking for ducks that were left the evening before by hunters. As Kate dismounted her horse to open a gate, she spotted a large rattlesnake coiled up by the fence, ready to strike. She shot the snake with her .22 shotgun. The sound of the gun upset and entire den of rattlesnakes. Soon several more snakes appeared and Kate continued to shoot each one until she ran out of ammunition. She noticed a "No Hunting" sign on a post a few feet away, so she ripped the sign

out of the ground and beat the rattlers dead with the sign for over two hours with her son on her horse just sixty feet away.

When Kate returned home she told a neighbor about the ordeal. The word of the snake-slaying spread and newspaper reporters were showing up at Kate's farm. One newspaperman had her string up 140 dead rattlesnakes on a wire to pose for a photograph. This became one of the most famous pictures ever taken of Rattlesnake Kate. Kate used the skins and rattles to make a dress, headband, necklace, and pair of shoes.

Kate capitalized on her rattlesnake encounter. She actively began to hunt rattlesnakes, which she would make into a variety of souvenirs. She used her taxidermy skills to sell stuffed snakes and even turned some into ashtrays. For a period of time Kate kept rattlesnakes in a pen behind her home. She would milk them weekly and send the venom to a research laboratory in Los Angeles.

Kate died of a sudden illness on October 6, 1969 at the Weld County General Hospital in Greeley.

Biographical note of Charles D. Randolph

Colonel Charles Daniel Randolph was born on December 3, 1888 in Pleasant Valley, Iowa. He was the eldest of eight children. Randolph became famous in the 1920s for his Western Poetry and dime cowboy novels. He went by the nickname "Buckskin Bill" and referred to himself as the Poet of the Plains. Randolph married in 1907, lived in Davenport, Iowa, and worked at the Rockport Arsenal in the mid-twentieth century.

Charles became interested in Kate Slaughterback and he wrote twenty-one love poems dedicated to her between 1926 and 1965. While it is unlikely that they shared the romantic relationship espoused in the poetry of Buckskin Bill, Kate Slaughterback and Charles D. Randolph had a close friendship, and they wrote to each other regularly for over forty years.

Biographical note of Ernie Adamson

Ernie Adamson was the stepson/adopted son of Kate Slaughterback. He was born in Colorado on November 10, 1921, and served in the military during World War II. After the war, Adamson married and moved to Garden Grove, California where he worked as a maintenance man for the city. Adamson passed away on October 25, 1990 in Garden Grove.

Scope and Content

This collection consists primarily of correspondence between Kate Slaughterback, Charles D. Randolph, and Kate's friends and family members, newspapers and clippings about Kate's

encounter with a rattlesnake den in 1925, and photographs of the McHale family, Kate Slaughterback, Charles D. Randolph, Ernie Adamson, Kate's farm near Hudson, and other rural sites in Weld County. Other items of interest include personal documents, ephemera, photographic negatives, and a hand-drawn silhouette of Kate Slaughterback. There are several 3D objects in this collection that are not described in this finding aid, including a stuffed rattlesnake and Kate's .22 caliber rifle.

System of arrangement

As no original order could be established, an imposed order was assigned based on object type and subject.

Conditions governing access

There are no restrictions on the access of this collection.

Conditions governing reproduction and use

There are no restrictions on the use of this collection.

Languages and scripts of the materials

English

Custodial history

Materials in this collection were created primarily by Kate Slaughterback and Charles D. Randolph, and were collected and donated by Kate's son, Ernie Adamson.

Related archival materials

Hazel E. Johnson Collection, 1991.41.0849A-P.
Snakeskin Dress, 1969.56.0001
Snakeskin Shoes, 1969.56.0002A-B.
Snakeskin Headband, 1969.56.0003.
Rattle Necklace, 1969.56.0004.

Notes

Preferred citation: City of Greeley Museums' Permanent Collection, 1987.32.

Names:

Adamson, Ernie, 1921-1990
Randolph, Charles D., 1888-1982
Slaughterback, Kate McHale, 1893-1969

Places: Davenport (Iowa)
Fort Lupton (Colo.)
Garden Grove (Calif.)
Hudson (Colo.)
Mexico
Milliken (Colo.)

Subjects: Agriculture
Farms
Livestock
Rattlesnakes
Rural Women

Document forms: Albums
Correspondence
Documents
Ephemera
Negatives
Newspapers and Clippings
Photographs
Silhouette

Contents

Series I: Albums

Subseries A: Kate Slaughterback

Three small, spiral-bound photo albums that belonged to Kate Slaughterback, of photos taken in 1959 at Fort Vasquez, Kate's Ranch, and the Wildcat Mounds near Milliken.

Series II: Correspondence

Subseries A: Ernie Adamson

Letters written to Ernie Adamson in 1956 from several unidentified people.

Subseries B: Charles D. Randolph/ Greeley Museum

Letters written by Charles D. Randolph to the Greeley Municipal Museum in 1970 concerning Kate Slaughterback.

Subseries C: Kate Slaughterback

Postcards, get-well cards, birthday cards, and letters written to Kate Slaughterback between 1953 and 1969.

Subseries D: Kate Slaughterback/Charles D. Randolph

Letters exchanged between Kate Slaughterback and Charles D. Randolph between 1926 and 1965. Includes transcriptions of letters that were transcribed in 1971 and 2012.

Subseries E: Miscellaneous

Small notecards, greeting cards, sympathy cards, and notes that are not identified as belonging to a specific person.

Series III: Documents

Subseries A: Ernie Adamson

Car title and registration, and a receipt for the sale of livestock belonging to Ernie Adamson.

Subseries B: Kate Slaughterback

Life insurance policy for Kate Slaughterback dated 1968.

Subseries C: Miscellaneous

A certificate of share ownership for the Pat Murphy Cold Mining Company and a temporary license plate. Both documents are not identified as belonging to a specific person.

Series IV: Ephemera

Advertisements, promotional cards, and play money dating from 1883-1967.

Series V: Negatives

Subseries A: Kate Slaughterback

Negatives of photographs taken of Kate Slaughterback and her farm.

Series VI: Newspapers and Clippings

Subseries A: Ernie Adamson

City of Garden Grove, California Annual Report, 1957-1958. Ernie Adamson is featured as a city employee.

Subseries B: Kate Slaughterback

Newspapers and clippings regarding Kate Slaughterback and her 1925 rattlesnake encounter dated from 1925 through 1942.

Subseries C: Miscellaneous

Newspapers and clippings that are not identified as belonging to, or regarding a specific person in this collection. Includes several issues of Capper's Weekly.

Series VII: Photographs

Subseries A: McHale Family

Photographs of various members of the McHale family, dated from 1877 to 1894. Includes photographs of Viola and Will McHale, Charles McHale, Nellie McHale, Joseph McHale, Wallace McHale, Albert McHale, and Josephine and Bertha Sharp (sisters of Viola McHale.)

Subseries B: Miscellaneous

Photographic Christmas Cards from Kate's friend, Corrine Secor, not dated.

Subseries C: Charles D. Randolph

Photographs of Charles D. Randolph, dated from 1917 to 1966.

Subseries D: Kate Slaughterback

Photographs of Kate Slaughterback, dated from 1893 to 1969. Subjects include photos taken of Kate throughout her childhood and adulthood, various vacations, her farm, home, and animals, and photos of Kate with her friends and family.

Series VIII: Silhouette

One hand-drawn black and white silhouette of Kate Slaughterback as a young woman, dated 1919.

Container List

Series I: Albums

Subseries A: Kate Slaughterback

Box	Folder
1	1

Series II: Correspondence

Subseries A: Ernie Adamson

Box Folder

1 2

Subseries B: Charles D. Randolph/Greeley Museum

Box Folder

1 3

Subseries C: Kate Slaughterback

Box Folder(s)

1 4-5

Subseries D: Kate Slaughterback/Charles D. Randolph

Box Folder(s)

1 6-8

Subseries E: Miscellaneous

Box Folder

1 9

Series III: Documents

Subseries A: Ernie Adamson

Box Folder

1 10

Subseries B: Kate Slaughterback

Box Folder

1 11

Subseries C: Miscellaneous

Box Folder

1 12

Series IV: Ephemera

Box Folder

1 13

Series V: Negatives

Box Folder

1 14

Series VI: Newspapers and Clippings

Subseries A: Ernie Adamson

Box Folder

1 15

Subseries B: Kate Slaughterback

Box Folder

1 16

Subseries C: Miscellaneous

Box Folder

1 17

Series VII: Photographs

Subseries A: McHale Family

Box Folder

1 18

Subseries B: Miscellaneous

Box Folder(s)

1 19-21

Subseries C: Charles D. Randolph

Box Folder(s)

1 22-23

Subseries D: Kate Slaughterback

Box Folder(s)

1 24-60

Series VIII: Silhouette

Box	Folder
1	61