

**Finding Aid for the
M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence Collection, 1956-2000
Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections**

OVERVIEW

Identifier/Call No.: MSS-0001

Creators: M.F.K. Fisher and Marian L. Gore

Title: M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence Collection, 1956-2000

Dates: 1956-2000 (1970-89 bulk)

Language: Materials in English and French

Scope and Content:

The collection contains a total of 89 letters and 32 postcards written by Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher (1908-1992), the accomplished food writer, to Marian L. Gore (1914-2009), an antiquarian bookseller who specialized in culinary titles, between 1956 and 1990. During this time Fisher was a resident of Sonoma and Napa Valley, and Gore lived in San Gabriel, in Southern California. Their correspondence began when Marian Gore wrote Fisher a fan letter, and the two women quickly became close friends. The letters and postcards in the collection were written by Fisher in response to letters, calls, and bookseller catalogs received from Gore. The correspondence was personal for the most part and refers to the travel plans, families and work life of both, as well as colleagues such as James Beard, and Paul and Julia Child. Professionally, they worked together on building the collection at the Napa Valley Wine Library Association, housed at the St. Helena Public Library. Gore also sold many of Fisher's personal books, such as review copies and items from her home library. Materials date from 1956, when Fisher was 48, to 1990; Fisher died in 1992.

Quantity: .45 cubic feet (1 Hollinger legal document box)

Location: Rare Books, South Stacks. Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections, 630 W. 5th Street, Los Angeles, California 90071.

ADMINISTRATIVE/BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher grew up in Southern California, in Whittier, in a household with two sisters, Norah and Anne, a brother, David, and her parents, Rex and Edith Kennedy. Her father published the local paper, the *Whittier News*. The region was a more rural place during her childhood, and she took trips to the desert and spent summers in Laguna Beach. As a young woman, she married Alfred Fisher in 1929 and they moved to France for three pivotal years while he studied for a doctorate degree. While living in France, Fisher was immersed in the regional food culture, and became close friends with Ward Ritchie and Lawrence Clark Powell. After returning to California, the couple resided in the Highland Park and Eagle Rock neighborhoods of Los Angeles for a time while Alfred taught at Occidental College. During this time, Fisher researched cookbooks at the Los Angeles Public Library and began to write essays on the culinary arts. After their marriage ended in divorce in 1939, Fisher married her second husband, artist Dillwyn (Timmy) Parrish. They lived together in Switzerland and Southern California, and after a period of illness he died in 1941. Fisher was married to publisher Donald Friede from 1945-51. Her legal name then was Mary F.K. Friede, and M.F.K. Fisher was her professional name. Her daughters are Anna Kennedy Parrish and Kennedy Mary Friede. M.F.K. Fisher's first book, *Serve It Forth*, was published in 1937. Her fame grew during the 1940s, with the publications of *Consider the Oyster*, *How to Cook a Wolf* and *The Gastronomical Me*.

Marian L. Gore (1914-2009) had a business as an antiquarian bookseller specializing in cookbooks and wine books that she operated out of her home in San Gabriel, California. She circulated a series of detailed catalogs, such as *200 Years of Cookery*, from the 1960s-90s. Gore volunteered as a radio interviewer for KPFK between 1962-64 and conducted a series of interviews with Los Angeles-area artists, curators, collectors, and gallerists, which highlighted the growing importance of art and culture to the region. When she retired, Gore donated the remaining books in her catalog to the Los Angeles Public Library.

Throughout Fisher's correspondence with Marian Gore, which began in the mid-1950s, Fisher wrote about being engaged with a variety of work projects, such as the Napa Valley Wine Library Association, which was housed at the St. Helena Public Library, as well as teaching, and writing books, book reviews and articles. She describes the local landscape in Sonoma where she lived, the seasons and different kinds of produce available. She often preferred to entertain friends and family in her home, rather than go to Napa, Berkeley, or San Francisco. Themes that run throughout the correspondence are single parenthood and making a living as a writer. Their correspondence was most active from 1970-89. The letters add another layer of intimacy to Fisher's body of professional writing, which is largely autobiographical.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Use Restrictions

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<https://tessa.lapl.org/special-collections-ordering>.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research by appointment only in the Rare Books reading room. Information about setting appointments can be found on the Library's website at lapl.org/branches/rarebooks. Appointments can also be arranged by sending an email inquiry to [rarebook \[at\] lapl.org](mailto:rarebook@lapl.org).

Provenance/ Source of Acquisition

Paperwork included with the correspondence shows Marian L. Gore offered the correspondence for sale on October 20, 2000, along with nine books by or about Fisher. The materials in the collection were found in a staff office at the Los Angeles Public Library in the Science Department at Central Library in 2011 and no information is known about their provenance.

Preferred Citation

[Item], M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence Collection. Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections.

Related Materials

Catalogs from Marian Gore, Bookseller, are housed in Rare Books, including the *200 Years of Cookery* (1969-89) series. There are also a number of books by and about M.F.K. Fisher.

PROCESSING INFORMATION

Archival processing was completed at the Los Angeles Public Library by Rosemarie Knopka, Librarian Archivist, in July 2023. Juan Avalos, an Administrative Clerk in the Digitization and Special Collections Department, assisted in processing the archive.

ARRANGEMENT

Materials are arranged chronologically by date of creation.

INDEXING TERMS

The Los Angeles Public Library used both Library of Congress Subject Headings and the Library of Congress Thesaurus for Graphic Materials (TGM) as sources for subject headings for cataloging. In addition, TGM was used for genre and format terms.

Topics:

Booksellers and bookselling--California.
Food writers--United States.
Food writers--United States--Correspondence.
Napa Valley Wine Library Association

Persons:

Fisher, M. F. K. (Mary Frances Kennedy), 1908-1992.
Gore, Marian L.
GENRE / FORMAT
Correspondence
Illustrations
Postcards
Writing

CONTAINER LIST

Box : Folder Description

1 : 1 M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence, 1956-59

File contains 15 letters and 2 postcards. Several letters and sections of letters were written in French. Fisher lived in St. Helena, California at this time with her daughters, who were 10 and 13 in 1956. Fisher's daughters enrolled in school in Berkeley and they lived there as a family during the week. Fisher wrote about her plans to spend a year in Europe in 1960. After settling in a new home in Sonoma, Fisher left to live in Lugano, Switzerland for a year with her daughters.

1 : 2 M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence, 1960-69

File contains 18 letters, 6 postcards. Fisher lived in Aix-en-Provence with her children in 1960. In 1963, she lived in Genoa, Nevada. Fisher taught English at Piney Woods School, a private boarding school for African-American students in Mississippi in 1964. The Napa Valley Wine Library Association was also a topic of her letters. Fisher arranged to buy books for the library from Gore, and wrote that she was on the Board of Directors from the beginning of the Association. In 1969, she was head of the new book purchasing committee. There is a letter and a postcard from Marian to Mary Frances from 1969 about a book order for the library.

1 : 3 M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence, 1970-79

File contains 28 letters and 11 postcards postmarked from St. Helena and Glen Ellen, California and Provence, France. Bouverie Ranch in Glen Ellen is a return address throughout the 1970s. There is an invitation to *Serve it Forth: A Birthday Celebration for M.F.K. Fisher* held on Tuesday, July 25, 1978 at Chez Panisse Restaurant in Berkeley. The correspondence often discussed bookselling. Fisher sent Marian books to sell, mostly review copies of books on cookery and duplicates. Marian sent books as gifts, as well as catalogs, including the "Garden Books" catalog. They also worked together on the Napa Valley Wine Library Association.

1 : 4 M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence, 1980-89

File contains 28 letters and 10 postcards. During this time, Marian Gore sold books from Fisher's personal collection of cookery reference titles on topics such as the English medieval kitchen and Elizabethan cooking. Items for sale included a set called the Fisher collection - the buyer is not named. The correspondence mentions people they know in common in the culinary world including Eleanor Friede, Jan Langone, Jake Zeitlin, Jay Perkins, Ivan Cousins, and Shizuo Tsuji. Fisher mentioned writing projects including *Here Let Us Feast* and a Brillat-Savarin translation published by North Point Press, as well as a

number of introductions and forewords for books published by Knopf.

1 : 5 M.F.K. Fisher Correspondence, 1990

File contains 3 typewritten postcards dated September, June, and December 1990. They contain personal notes and references to work projects including a recent writing project about Fisher's first time in Dijon in 1929-32 for a collection of places by Jan Morris (*Long Ago in France: The Years in Dijon* by M.F.K. Fisher with an introduction by Jan Morris), and being interviewed by Bill Moyers (*M.F.K. Fisher on Writing and Old Women*). The last note was to send holiday greetings.

1 : 6 M.F.K. Fisher Materials Price List, 2000

File contains a one-sheet photocopy of a price list titled *Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher, 1908-1992* listing books and archival materials related to Fisher. The price list includes a collection of 89 letters and 26 postcards written to Marian Gore from Mary Frances from between 1950-1990. It was signed in pen by Marian L. Gore and dated 10/20/2000.