



Autry National Center

Finding Aid to MS.245 Gladys Knight Harris Papers, 1941- 1970

Creator(s): Gladys Knight Harris

Extent: 3 linear feet (6 boxes)

Location:

Braun Research Library
Autry National Center
234 Museum Drive
Los Angeles, Ca. 90065-5030

Access restrictions:

Collection is open for research. Appointments to view materials are required. To make an appointment please visit <http://theautry.org/research/research-rules-and-application> or contact library staff at room@theautry.org.

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Language: English

Preferred citation:

Gladys Knight Harris Papers, 1941-1970, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, CA; MS.245

Processing information: Box inventory created by Braun Research Library staff.

Preliminary finding aid completed by Sarah Jane Joel (aka Charlie Holland) 2011 February 1. Final finding aid updated by Anna Liza Posas, 2013. Final processing of collection and publication of finding aid made possible by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Immediate Source of Acquisition:

Donated by Mr. Knight Harris to the Southwest Museum of the American Indian and Library, 1983 May 21.

Biographical history note:

Gladys Knight Harris was born in 1892 in Gualala, Mendocino County, California. Ms. Harris started college in 1919 and graduated with a BA and later an MA in Home Economics in the

1920's. She married in 1920 and became a teacher but stayed at home with her two sons until she was widowed and had to return to work in 1928. She continued to teach in high schools and community colleges until the early 1940's and attended Pomona City College to study nutrition.

When Harris retired, she enrolled in Frank Wiggins Trade School in Los Angeles to learn photography, a career that her son Knight Harris pursued. She borrowed equipment from her son and studied for two years. During her stay in Alaska from 1946-1949, she used the following cameras: 4x5 Speed Graphic, 2 ¼ Rolleiflex, 35mm Contax, and Bell and Howell movie camera.

Harris left for Alaska in 1946 intending to work and stay as long as she needed to document the Eskimo way of life. She stayed in Anchorage from 1947-1948, working at Fort Richardson, staying in the BJI barracks, Juneau, and moving there in 1948.

After researching alternative locations, such as Nome, Alaska, and taking advice from friends, in 1949 she was able to make arrangements to stay in a room attached to Archie Ferguson's store in Kotzebue, above the Arctic Circle. She arrived on April 24 1949 and left in August 1949. Her contemporary, the anthropologist Frederica de Laguna was working in Yakutat in 1949, documenting women engaged in subsistence economy activities.

Harris's son, Knight Harris, told Molly Lee that she was preparing to make slide show presentations of the work, There is a newspaper clipping that mentions a slide show, scheduled for her return, and notes to the Kodak company referring to images needed for a presentation shortly after her return in 1949.

She returned to Los Angeles in 1949 and lived until the 1970s.

Scope and Content:

The Gladys Knight Harris Papers document Harris's personal interest in domestic science, household affairs, child rearing or what could be characterized as "women's work" in a harsh, unspoiled environment.

The collection consists of six boxes containing personal papers, correspondence, newspaper and magazine clippings and drawings almost exclusively pertaining to Harris's travels and lifelong interest in Alaska.

From 1947-1955, Harris collected newspaper and magazine articles that reflected her interest in the lifestyle north of the Arctic Circle. These appeared in the national general interest picture magazines such as *LIFE*, *Colliers* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. The collection includes a number of articles about the Helmericks, Bud and Connie, adventurous 'pioneers' who wrote articles and books about their experience between 1942 and 1953. She also followed the writings of the naturalist Sally Carrighar. Even Harris's friend, Laura P Ordway, joked with her about the possibility of homesteading in a letter written in 1948.

The clippings collection includes many advertisements that feature line drawings, paintings, and illustrations of Alaskan animals in silhouette. Animals and other Alaskan icons such as sleds and totem poles, appeared as popular motifs in advertising, cartoons and as decorative motifs throughout the 1940-1950s.

Harris copied or traced animal silhouettes onto parchment or tracing paper and the collection contains many of her original line drawings.

There are some transparencies of studio still life studies and personal pictures of family and friends that have not been incorporated into the Gladys Knight Harris Photography Collection, and are also housed in the Braun Research Library. These images are black and white and color, and in diverse formats. There is irreparable damage to 18 of the negatives.

The notebooks combine thoughts, conversations, addresses, accounts, lecture notes, newspaper clippings and technical notes to aid Harris's photography. One notebook contains notes on a course on nutrition taken at Pomona City College in 1941-1942.

The collections also includes the "Release and Consent" forms that Harris asked her models to complete during her three years in Alaska, including the extensive work during her four month stay in Kotzebue in 1949. These releases include hand written notes about age, physical description, livelihood, family history and connections among the models.

The smallest portion of the collection consists of personal ephemera such as greetings cards, recipes, menus, and articles clipped for her grandchildren Michael and Lucinda Harris.

Arrangement:

Series I: Images

Series II: Notebooks

Series III: Releases

Series IV: Correspondence

Series V: Newspaper and Magazine Clippings

Series VI: Drawings

Series VII: Travel Ephemera

Series VIII: Personal Ephemera

Container List:

Series I : Images

	Box#
Personal and family, black and white, color	1
Damaged Transparencies, color and black and white	1
Portraits personal, black and white	1
Road Trip, black and white	1
Copies of paintings	1
Man and telescope	1
man and gun	1
Travel and Alaska	1
black and white prints, USA	1
Girdwood	1

1 5x7 black and white print 6

Series II : Notebooks

Box#

Notebooks 1-16 1
Notebook 17 2
Notebook 18 4

Series III : Releases

Box#

Releases, Talkeetna 1
Nome 1
Teller 1
Bradburn Washington 1
Valdez, Anchorage, Unalakleet, Circle City 1
Kotzebue 1
Diomed Islands 1
Clara Forschund , Mildred Gallahorn, (exhibit materials) 4

Series 4 : Correspondence

Box #

E.R. Nash
Clara Forschund, 1950-1951 1
Laura P Ordway, 1947 1
Knight Harris, diary 1947-1948 1
Esther Vestal 4
Dan Foster 4

Series : 5 : Newspaper and Magazine Clippings

Box #

1947-1954 2
1938-1951 3
1945-1951 4
1947-1953 5
1952-1956 6
1947- 1949 Oversized
box

Series : 6 : Drawings on paper

Box# 2 - 5

Series : 7 : Travel Ephemera

Box#

Postcards 1
Bills, receipts, accounts 1
Accounts 2
Map 1948 2
Postcards 2
Bills receipts, accounts 1949 3

Maps, brochures, menus 1946-1950	3
Maps, brochures, menus 1946-1949	4
Brochures 1949-1953	6

Series : 7 : Personal Ephemera

Box#

Clippings and memorabilia collected for Michael Harris	2
Clippings and memorabilia collected for Cindy Harris	2
Brochures, booklet, menus 1940-46	2

Related archival materials:

Gladys Knight Harris photo collection, Braun Research Library Photo Archives

Description control:

Molly Lee: *With Broom and Camera: Gladys Knight Harris's Photography of Inupiat Women, 1949* from King, J.C.H. and Lidchi, H.(editors): *Imaging the Arctic*. University of British Columbia Press, 1999