

Agatha Rossetti Hessley Papers 1970-2005, undated

Creator: Agatha Rossetti Hessley (1906-1994)

Extent: 1 linear foot (2 boxes)

Language: English

Repository: Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago

Administration Information

Access Restrictions: None

Usage Restrictions: Copyright for materials created by Agatha Rossetti Hessley was transferred to the Women and Leadership Archives.

Preferred Citation: Identification of item, date, box #, folder #, Agatha Rossetti Hessley Papers, Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago.

Provenance: The materials were donated to the Women and Leadership Archives by Rita K. Hessley, PhD Professor and Chair of the Department of Chemistry at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology on August 16, 1996 (WLA1996.32) and in July 2005 (WLA2006.50).

Processor: Carole Heath. Updated by Elizabeth A. Myers, June 2007 and Maria Wagner, March 2012.

Processing Information: Finding aid updated February 2025.

Separations: The envelopes from the correspondence were discarded unless notes were included on them.

Biographical History

Born April 14, 1906, the eldest of four children of immigrant Italian parents, Charles and Agnes C.C. Rossetti, Agatha lived with her family in Sheffield, Pennsylvania. At the age of nine, her mother died, and Agatha's father decided to remarry. The woman to whom he was engaged did not want the children, so her father decided to place them in a children's home in Erie, Pennsylvania. After much protest by the children, Charles yielded and did not marry his then fiancé. Instead, the children remained in Sheffield with their father and Agatha became surrogate mother to her younger sister and brothers.

Although busy raising her siblings, she graduated as valedictorian of her high school class in 1924. She won a partial scholarship to Penn State but was unable to go to college because her father, a tannery laborer, could not meet the remaining costs. Consequently, she worked as a clerk and bookkeeper in Sheffield until she married Joseph B. Hessley on January 30, 1929. The couple then moved to Warren, Pennsylvania, where Agatha lived until her death in 1994. During her time in Warren she raised three daughters, Agnes, Ellen, Rita and two sons, Bernard and Thomas. Her

daughter Rita described her as “a traditional, classic homemaker” although, as her letters demonstrate, her interests ranged beyond those prescribed by her traditional role. When her husband’s health began to deteriorate, she lied about her age and was hired by the N. K. Wendelobe Paint Company as their bookkeeper. She worked for the company for 28 years, retiring in 1988.

Agatha Rossetti Hessley passed away on May 31, 1994. Three daughters, two sons, two brothers, thirteen grandchildren and one great-grandchild survived her.

Scope and Content

The Agatha Rossetti Hessley Papers consist of 1 linear foot (2 boxes) of materials and span the years 1970-2005. The following material represents the correspondence Agatha had with her daughter, Rita, between 1970 and 1993. This correspondence reflects major life events in the Hessley family and offers a chronicled account of world events as seen by Agatha Hessley including Richard Nixon and Watergate, the oil crisis of the 1970s, her views on the Roman Catholic Church, abortion, elections, travel, sports, higher education, and the Gulf War.

Series 1: Correspondence, 1972-2005, undated, Boxes 1-2

This correspondence has been arranged chronologically. Other material present includes newspaper clippings. A majority of the correspondence is between Agatha and her daughter Rita, although letters to other members of the family are also included. A publication of Agatha’s letters compiled by MaryEllen O’Brien entitled *Living in Ordinary Time: The Letters of Agatha Rossetti Hessley* is also part of the collection.

Subjects:

Hessley, Agatha (1906-1994)
Hessley, Rita
Catholicism

Box	Folder	Title	Dates
		<i>Agatha Rossetti Hessley Papers 1970-2005, undated</i>	
		Series 1: Correspondence, 1972-2005, undated	
1	1	Family Photographs	1994, undated
1	2	Correspondence	1970, 1972
1	3	Correspondence	1973
1	4	Correspondence	1974
1	5	Correspondence	1975
1	6	Correspondence	1976
1	7	Correspondence	1977
1	8	Correspondence	1978
1	9	Correspondence	1979
1	10	Correspondence	1980
1	11	Correspondence	1981
2	1	Correspondence	1982

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2	2	Correspondence	1983
2	3	Correspondence	1984
2	4	Correspondence	1985
2	5	Correspondence	1986
2	6	Correspondence	1987
2	7	Correspondence	1988
2	8	Correspondence	1989
2	9	Correspondence	1990
2	10	Correspondence	1991
2	11	Correspondence	1992
2	12	Correspondence	1993
2	13	<i>Living in Ordinary Times: The Letters of Agatha Rossetti Hessley</i> (4 copies) One with note from MaryEllen O'Brien to Carolyn Farrell first director of the Gannon Center	2005