K1158
Robert Ridenour Lester (1894-1997) Papers
1874-1997
36 folders, 17 scrapbook volumes, 20 books, oversize photographs

Correspondence, photographs, ephemera, and some printed and published material related to Lester and the Ridenour Family. Seventeen scrapbook volumes depict travel in the U.S. and Europe, as well as Lester’s involvement in France in WWI.

BIOGRAPHY:

Robert Ridenour Lester was born May 14, 1894 in Denver, Colorado, the son of John Calvin Lester (1860-1942) Vice-President of the Ridenour-Baker Grocery Company and Kate Louise Ridenour Lester, daughter of Peter D. Ridenour, one of the founders of Ridenour-Baker.

Upon his graduation from Princeton University in 1917, Lester joined the American Field Service (AFS) in Europe driving an ambulance for the French Army in the Balkans, where he was bombarded by German Aircraft. When the U.S. entered war he served as a naval aviator and flight instructor at Key West, FL, where he attained the rank of Lt. (J.G.). Returning to Kansas City in 1920 he was employed by the Ridenour-Baker Grocery Company, a firm founded by his grandfather, Peter D. Ridenour. In 1921 Lester made his first entry into the public warehouse business through the Mutual Transfer Company, a subsidiary of the Ridenour-Baker Company. In 1926, Lester accepted a position with the Fidelity National Bank and Trust Company in downtown Kansas City for which his father-in-law, Henry C. Flower was chairman, but the bank closed during the Depression in 1932. Later in the thirties, he helped liquidate the Ridenour-Baker Grocery Company, and from its assets formed the public warehousing firm, Kansas City Terminal Warehouse Company as its president. During and after World War II he greatly expanded the company along with its subsidiary trucking firm, Terminal Transit. He continued to operate the company until he was 84 years old when in 1979, he sold the business to Space Center, Inc., of St. Paul.
in 1922 Lester along with Ford Harvey, Howard Wehrle, Rogers Crittendorn, and Simpson Yoemans founded Richards Field, the first commercial airport in Kansas City located on Blue Ridge Blvd, near Raytown, MO.

Lester had been a member of the Kansas City Country Club, the Kansas City Rotary Club, The University Club and The Early & Pioneer Naval Aviators Association.

On September 21, 1925 Lester married Ruth Flower (1899-1999) in Kansas City. She attended Barstow School, and in 1920 graduated from Vassar College. She was a former member of the Kansas City Country Club, the Kansas City Junior League, and The Society of Colonial Dames and had served on the boards of the Visiting Nurse Association, Women's Christian Association, Family and Children's Services, and Planned Parenthood. Her parents were Henry Corwin Flower (1860-1930) and Lida Carr Flower (1874-19??).

Robert R. Lester died at his home on September 11, 1997, age 103. Ruth Flower Lester also died at home on February 7, 1999, age 100.

PROVENANCE:

This collection was received from Virginia L. Buckner as accession KA1051 on December 3, 1999 and as KA1094 on August 4, 2000.

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Specific item; folder number; Robert Ridenour Lester (1894-1997) Papers (K1158); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-KC].

CONTACT:

The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City
302 Newcomb Hall, University of Missouri-Kansas City
5123 Holmes Street, Kansas City, MO 64110-2499
(816) 235-1543 SHSofMO-KC@umsystem.edu
http://shs.umsystem.edu/index.shtml
DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS:

The collection consists of materials related to Robert Lester and the Ridenour Family. It includes much correspondence, photographs, ephemera, and some printed and published material (including books on regional history). Seventeen scrapbook volumes depict travel in the U.S. and Europe, as well as Lester’s involvement in France in WWI.

INVENTORY:

Box 001

Folder 1. Princeton Scrapbook loose photos
Folder 2. Princeton Scrapbook misc.
Folder 3. Notes at time of Bank Moratorium
Folder 4. War records
   includes photos, clippings, and letter to Mrs. JC Lester (Kate)
Folder 5. Obit and condolences for Robert R. Lester
   includes an obit. For Ruth Flower Lester
Folder 6. Autobiography draft from Robert R. Lester
Folder 7. Scrapbook nine loose items
   includes postcards from Paris, book of novelty matches, swim meet program 2/1915
Folder 8. Misc. loose photos
   includes portraits of Peter D. Ridenour & Harlow W. Baker
Folder 9. Scrapbook twelve loose photos
Folder 10. Property deeds of Robert R. Lester
Folder 11. Kansas City History clippings and letters
Folder 12. Peter D. Ridenour & Sarah L. 50th wedding anniversary party – 1908
Folder 13. Robert R. Lester & Ruth Flower wedding memorabilia
   includes marriage service
Folder 14. In Memoriam. The members of the class of 1916 who gave their lives in their country’s service.
Folder 15. Miscellaneous
Folder 16. Letters to Kate L. Ridenour from friends and family
   1874-75, 1878-79, 1881-85, 1901
Folder 17. Personal letters to Kate L. Ridenour
   1878-1884
Folder 18. Letters to Kate L. Ridenour in school from her parents 1880-1883
Folder 19. Letters and postcard misc. 1882, 1893, 1908, 1914
Folder 20. Personal letters 1887, 1894
Folder 21. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents 1895, 1910-1911, 1913, 1915-1916
Folder 22. Kate Ridenour Lester’s letters from Europe & translations of War and Peace by Henri Lavendan from L’Illustration and Some Modern French Authors written for the ’81 Club
Folder 23. Announcements of the death of Peter D. Ridenour – 1909
Folder 24. Letters from Robert R. Lester to Parents from school 1910
Folder 25. Personal letters 1910-1911, 1914
Folder 26. Letters from Robert R. Lester to his parents from school Lawrenceville and Princeton, New Jersey. 1911-1912
Folder 27. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents 1911, 1913-1915
Folder 28. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents from school, 1911-1913, 1919, 1925 includes letters to Katherine Lester, a letter to Mrs. JC Lester from Ruth Lester, a letter to Mrs. JC Lester from James Richardson headmaster at the Prossor Preparatory school, and The Favorite Calendar of Friendship to Kate from Agnes

Box 002
Folder 29. Class Day Exercises, Lawrenceville, Class of 1912
Folder 30. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents from school 1913-1915
Folder 31. Letters from Robert Lester to his parents from school 1915-1916
Folder 32. Personal letters 1918-1921, 1930
Folder 33. Letters concerning an illness 1925
Folder 34. Letters and postcards misc.
Folder 35. Letters to Ruth Flower Lester from Robert R. Lester concerns nose operation and trip to California. 1925-1926, 1934

Folder 36. Robert R. Lester War Records: Europe
Personal papers – passport, French papers, armband, S.S. Touraines passage list
Misc: movies program printed in four languages for “Salouika” 1917, plus others

Scrapbook 1. World War I 1908, 1916-1917 (o/s wrapped)
Albania; S.S. La Touraine; 1908 KC flood; Crockett, CA.; Coos Bay, Oregon; Les Vosages; Mollan; Alsace; Vieux Thann; Horfmanweilerkopf; Florina; Koritza, Albania; Kansas City to Los Angeles; Petrified Forest; Cañon de los Frijaloes; Mesa Verde; pictures of many different people

Scrapbook 2. Princeton University
includes class photo; memory and fellowship book (empty); Comparative Athletic Record; Campus photos; Lawrenceville, NJ school postcards; campus activities photos including sports; clippings on ice yacht accident, Woodrow Wilson (including inauguration photos); and the swim team.

Scrapbook 3. Includes Officers Training Camp 1917; misc. people from girls school; camping trip

Scrapbook 4. Postcards collected by Robert R. Lester 1902-1903

Scrapbook 5. European Journey by Mrs. P.D. Ridenour and Ethel 1910; also includes Tour of Mr. and Mrs. P.D. Ridenour and Ethel in Mexico 1909

Scrapbook 6. “Letters from Across the Sea” by Kate Ridenour Lester

Scrapbook 7. “An Unknown Journey” by Harriet W. Baker, includes a pencil drawing of the author

Scrapbook 8. 2 volumes July 1906 – Sept. 1906 Dedicated to “The Two Who Were With Me” by Harriet Maker Munroe. A collection of letters concerning three on a tour (Harriet, John Munroe and a chaperone). Excellent descriptions of buildings, cities, includes postcards
Box 003

Estes Park; Garden of the Gods; Washington DC;
Richmond, VA; Apalachicola, Fla.

Scrapbook 10. European Trip
Italy America Students Tour 1921 – Ruth Flower’s diary of

Scrapbook 11. Unidentified photos

Scrapbook 12. 1912 photos of:
England; Marken, Germany; Geneva, Switzerland;
Lucerne; and Mount Pilatus

Scrapbook 13. Kansas City Transit Terminal in Wyandotte County,
Kansas and Wichita Warehouse Co., Inc. in Wichita,
Kansas

Scrapbook 14. First Aviation Meet in the United States held at Squantum,
Mass.
1910 photos and postcards
1918-1919 Airforce photos
1925 Family photos

Scrapbook 15. The Brides Book

Scrapbook 16. Wedding Gifts

Scrapbook 17. Baby’s Kingdom

OVERSIZE FLATBOX (in office)

Robert Ridenour Lester’s 1916 Diploma Princeton University.
(mounted on board)

Annual Picnic, Ridenour-Baker Grocery Co., Kansas City, MO

Anderson Photo. Panoramic.

Ridenour-Baker Barnstormers, 1925 Old fashion Minstrels,
F.F.O.G. Picnic, August 1, 1925. Anderson Photo

Freshman Year Prom. E.L. Wolven, photographer, Feb. 1917.
Vassar College. (“Flower” written on verso, probably Ruth Flower)

Senior Prom, Vassar College. E.L. Wolven, photographer, 1920

Large group of female students dressed in white, holding 1920
banner. (Ruth Flower is probably included in this group from
Vassar ?)

Large group of female graduates in robes with 1920 banner.
(possibly Vassar, possibly Ruth Flowers)
Moon Vale Farm in the Ozarks near Lebanon, Mo. It belonged to Henry C. Flower in 1920’s. Photo of residence.

Mounted photograph of the Ridenour-Baker Bragdon Mer.Co. building ca. 1890’s

Interior office photographs. (Possibly Ridenour-Baker Grocery Co.) 1897 (2 photos mounted)

Mounted photograph of the Ridenour-Baker Grocery Co. building ca. 1912. [East bldg. was completed in Fall of 1911. Two more stories were added to the East Bldg. when older west bldgs. were replaced in 1915] [933 Mulberry]

OVERSIZE PANORAMIC PHOTOGRAPHS (in office)

F.1 Ambulance Company No. 239

Books and Publications

1916 Princeton Yearbook

Kansas City Social Register – 1944

Lang, Gladys T. *Choice Menus for Luncheons and Dinners*. 1929

*The Princeton Bric-a-Brac* – 1917


*Kansas City in Caricature*, by Howard Bartling, 1912

*Frontier Community*, by A. Theodore Brown, 1963

*Pioneer Days in Kansas*, by Richard Cordley, 1903

*Queen City of the Trails: Independence*, by Mrs. Harvey R. Fullerton

*The Kansas Memorial – A Report of the Old Settlers’ Meeting*, by Charles S. Gleed, 1880

*Aviation History in Greater Kansas City*, edited by Historic Aviation Magazine

*Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, vol. X, 1907-1908

*Action before Westport 1864*, by Howard Monnett, 1964

*As I Remember*, by Phyllis Patterson

*The Overland Stage to California*, by Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley, 1901

Sunset Hill: First Fifty Years

Souvenir Book of Kansas City

*Gazetteer and Directory of the State of Kansas*, 1870
The Commerce and the Community, 1948
Robert R. Lester Autobiography, 1990