

C Bless, Bertha (1889-1977), Papers, 1894-1985
1740 4.3 linear feet

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INTRODUCTION

The papers of Bertha Bless consist of correspondence, newspaper clippings, publications, convention materials, and other miscellaneous materials related to her participation in various press organizations, including the Missouri Press Women and the National Federation of Press Women. Bless, along with her husband, B.J. Bless, Jr., published the *Weston Chronicle*, Weston, Missouri.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Bless Papers were donated by Ruth Mary Bless Clemens, Barbara C. Bless, and Carolyn A. Larsen to the State Historical Society of Missouri on 12 August 2003 (Accession No. 6001). The papers are part of the National Women and Media Collection.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bertha Iseman Bless was born on August 17, 1889, in Lawrence, Kansas to Frederick and Jennie Walruff Iseman. In 1890, the family moved to Weston, Missouri where Bless spent the remainder of her life. She attended Weston High School and graduated as the valedictorian of her class. She also attended Liberty Ladies College, Liberty, Missouri and the Kansas City Business College. In 1910, Bertha married Bartholomew (B.J.) Bless, Jr. They had four sons, only one of whom survived, Charles A. Bless. B.J. and Bertha took over the publishing duties of the *Weston Chronicle* from his father, B.J. Bless, Sr., in 1915.

Having no formal journalism experience, Bertha and B.J. joined the Missouri Press Association and attended conventions to learn more about newspaper publishing. At first, B.J. assumed the editorial responsibilities and Bertha wrote obituaries and reported the town news. She soon began managing the editorial side, while B.J. handled the production and business side. Bertha Bless wrote two regular columns, "The Rambler" and "Over the Garden," in addition to editorials and other articles. She also wrote articles for the *Kansas City Star*, magazines, and other newspapers. In 1948, B.J. and Bertha turned over the managing editorial duties of the *Weston Chronicle* to their son, Charles A. Bless, although Bertha continued to contribute articles to the paper. B.J. Bless, Jr. died on July 11, 1974.

Throughout her professional career, Bless participated in several press organizations, including the Missouri Women's Press Club (MWPC) and the National Federation of Press Women (NFPW). In November 1936, Bless helped organize the MWPC and was elected as the club's first president, a position she held from 1937 to 1939. She served as the third NFPW president from 1940 to 1941. During her term as president, Bless made an effort to recruit members for the organization and encouraged other members to recruit as well. She was also instrumental in bringing new state affiliates into the organization, including the Colorado Press Women and the Kansas Press Women. After her term as president ended, Bless continued her work with the NFPW and held several administrative positions, including regional vice-president and program chairman, as well as offering advice and guidance to her successors.

In addition to her work in the newspaper industry, Bless had an interest in history and helped organize the Platte County Historical Society in 1945. She served as president of the society and later established the Weston Historical Museum in 1960. Bless organized the first Old Homes Tour in Weston, which contributed to several buildings in Weston being listed as national historic landmarks. At the age of 80, Bless wrote and published *Weston, Queen of the Platte Purchase*. She continued writing her gardening column "Over the Garden Gate" for the *Chronicle* until her death on October 20, 1977.

Throughout her professional career, Bless won many awards including state and national honors for her editorials, news stories, ads, and features. The NFPW honored Bless in 1968 with a citation for being the "first member with three generations of her family enrolled in Press Women." In February 1970, the Missouri Press Women named Bless the first "Missouri Press Woman of the Year." In 2002, Bertha and B.J. Bless, Jr. were inducted into the Missouri Press Association Newspaper Hall of Fame.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Bertha Bless Papers consist of correspondence, newspaper clippings, publications, convention materials, and miscellaneous materials that are organized into five series: **National Federation of Press Women, Missouri Women's Press Club, Organizations, Bless Family, and Miscellaneous**. The strength of the collection lies in the National Federation of Press Women material, which chronicles the history of the organization's formative years and offers insight from the perspective of an officer and lifetime member.

The **National Federation of Press Women** series consists of administrative papers, newspaper clippings, convention materials, publications, and correspondence that focus on activities of the national organization, as well as the state affiliates. The series is arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.

The **Missouri Women's Press Club** series consists of administrative papers, newspaper clippings, convention materials, publications, and correspondence that focus on the activities of the Missouri Women's Press Club. The series is arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.

The **Organizations** series consists of meeting programs, publications, and clippings of press organizations with which Bertha Bless was involved. The series is arranged by organization and by type of material therein.

The **Bless Family** series consists of clippings, certificates, correspondence, and speeches pertaining to the Bless family, especially their work on the *Weston Chronicle* and the publication of *Weston, Queen of the Platte Purchase*. The series is arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.

The **Miscellaneous** series consists of photographs, publications, and travel brochures. The series is arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.

FOLDER LIST

National Federation of Press Women Series

The **National Federation of Press Women** series, which comprises the bulk of the collection, is divided into two subseries: national organization and state affiliates. The first subseries is arranged by type of material and chronologically therein and contains materials that deal with the national organization. Bless served as NFPW president from 1940 to 1941 and remained involved in the organization until her death; however, she was most active during the 1940s.

The materials consist of administrative papers, clippings, convention and meeting programs, correspondence, membership directories, and newsletters. The administrative papers include the national constitution and bylaws, ideas for membership development, meeting minutes, expenditure and treasurer reports, officer lists, and the responsibilities of the regional vice-president. The clippings primarily cover the 1940s and contain articles about the organization and its officers.

The convention and meeting materials cover the NFPW annual conventions between 1939 and 1968. Bless and the Missouri Women's Press Club organized two conventions that were held in Kansas City in 1940 and 1949. Bless was the program chairman for these conventions, so there is a wealth of information about the convention itself and correspondence after the convention. Of particular interest is a scrapbook kept by Bless during the 1940 convention in Kansas City. The scrapbook includes menus, congratulatory wishes, and brochures of the Kansas City area. There are also letters from Eleanor Roosevelt, a NFPW member, and J. Edgar Hoover regarding invitations to speak at the conference.

The correspondence is arranged alphabetically by correspondent's name and was exchanged between Bless and NFPW members, primarily officers. Most of the correspondence dates to the 1940s, when Bless was most active in the organization. The bulk of the correspondence deals with administrative duties, including membership recruiting, convention planning, and the discussion of future officers. The correspondence is especially interesting because Bless writes candidly about her views of the organization and how the organization is coping during its early years. She also writes a great deal about her concern regarding freedom of the press, the impact of the war on the newspaper industry, and the role of women newspaper journalists.

The directories include membership listings for the 1940s through the 1960s. The directories from the 1970s were published as editions of the *Press Woman*, so they are located with the other issues of the publication.

The publications include issues of *The Bulletin*, the first newsletter of the National Federation of Press Women. In 1940, *The Bulletin* was replaced by *The Press Woman* as the organization's official publication. Bless was credited with professionalizing the publication and including articles about issues facing women journalists along with news of the state affiliates and the national organization. As this is an incomplete run of the publication, please see *National Federation of Press Women, Inc., Records, 1910- (C3973)* for additional issues.

The miscellaneous folders contain letterheads used by the officers, response cards sent to potential members, biographies of members, and some unidentified convention photographs.

National Federation of Press Women Series (con'd)

- f. 1 Constitution and Bylaws, 1939-1941, n.d.
- f. 2 Membership Development, 1940-1941
- f. 3 Minutes, 1938-1941
- f. 4 Expenditure Reports, 1940-1949, n.d.
- f. 5 Treasurer Reports, 1940-1947
- f. 6 Officers, 1941-1942, n.d.
- f. 7 Regional Vice-President, 1941, n.d.
- f. 8 Clippings, 1941-1959, n.d.
- f. 9-39 Conventions
 - f. 9 New York City, 1939
 - f. 10-18 Kansas City, Missouri, 1940
 - f. 19-20 Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1941
 - f. 21 Topeka, Kansas, 1942
 - f. 22 Des Moines, Iowa, 1943
 - f. 23 Estes Park, Colorado, 1946
 - f. 24 Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, 1948
 - f. 25 Kansas City, Missouri, 1949
 - f. 26-27 Reno, Nevada, 1950
 - f. 28 Seattle, Washington, 1951
 - f. 29 Los Angeles, California, 1953
 - f. 30 Chicago, Illinois, 1954
 - f. 31 New Orleans, Louisiana, 1955
 - f. 32 Jackson, Mississippi, 1958
 - f. 33 Portland, Oregon, 1959
 - f. 34 Topeka, Kansas, 1960
 - f. 35 Little Rock, Arkansas, 1961
 - f. 36 Denver, Colorado, 1962
 - f. 37 Indianapolis, Indiana, 1963
 - f. 38 Richmond, Virginia, 1964
 - f. 39 Kansas City, Missouri, 1968
- f. 40-115 Correspondence
 - f. 40 A
 - f. 41 B
 - f. 42-43 Bedard
 - f. 44 Boyd
 - f. 45 Care-Carn
 - f. 46 Carp-Ch
 - f. 47 Cl-Cr
 - f. 48 Cunningham
 - f. 49-50 Dacken
 - f. 51 Dal-Die
 - f. 52-53 Dines
 - f. 54 Dix-Dy
 - f. 55 Ea-Ei

National Federation of Press Women Series (con'd)

f. 56 El-Er
f. 57 Fa-Fe
f. 58 Fi
f. 59-64 Ford
f. 65 Fow-Fr
f. 66 Ga-Goe
f. 67 Goodbar
f. 68 Goodrich-Gu
f. 69 Hal-Hall
f. 70 Ham-Haste
f. 71 Hash-Hau
f. 72 He-Hig
f. 73 Hil-Ho
f. 74 Hu
f. 75 I
f. 76 J
f. 77 K
f. 78 Kleinhenz
f. 79-80 Kuskulis
f. 81 L
f. 82 Mac-Marc
f. 83 Mark-May
f. 84 Mc-Mic
f. 85 Migliano
f. 86 Mil-Moo
f. 87 Mordini
f. 88 Morr-Mu
f. 89 Na-Nic
f. 90 Nir-No
f. 91 O
f. 92 Pa-Pl
f. 93 Po-Pri
f. 94 Prosser
f. 95 Ran
f. 96 Ras-Rees
f. 97 Reev-Ren
f. 98 Ret-Rey
f. 99 Ri-Robe
f. 100 Robi
f. 101 Roc-Roe
f. 102 Roe-Ry
f. 103 Sa-Scho
f. 104 Schu-Ser
f. 105 Sey-Shan

National Federation of Press Women Series (con'd)

- f. 106 Shaw-Si
- f. 107 Sm-Ster
- f. 108 Stew-Sw
- f. 109 T
- f. 110 Wa-Web
- f. 111 Wee-Wilk
- f. 112 Will-Wins
- f. 113 Wint-Wr
- f. 114 Y
- f. 115 Unidentified
- f. 116-118 Directories
 - f. 116 1943-1950
 - f. 117 1952-1958
 - f. 118 1959-1965
- f. 119 *The Bulletin*, 1939-1940
- f. 120-152 *The Press Woman*
 - f. 120 1940-1941
 - f. 121 1942-1944
 - f. 122 1946-1948
 - f. 123 1951-1958
 - f. 124 1959-1961
 - f. 125 1962
 - f. 126 1963 January-June
 - f. 127 1963 July-December
 - f. 128 1964
 - f. 129 1965 January-June
 - f. 130 1965 July-1966
 - f. 131 1967-1968
 - f. 132 1969
 - f. 133 1970
 - f. 134 1971 January-June
 - f. 135 1971 July
 - f. 136 1971 August-December
 - f. 137 1972 January-June
 - f. 138 1972 July
 - f. 139 1972 August-December
 - f. 140 1973 January-May
 - f. 141 1973 June-July
 - f. 142 1973 August-December
 - f. 143 1974 January-April
 - f. 144 1974 May-June
 - f. 145 1974 July-December
 - f. 146 1975 January-May
 - f. 147 1975 June-October

National Federation of Press Women Series (con'd)

- f. 148 1975 November-1976 January
- f. 149 1976 May-June
- f. 150 1976 July-August
- f. 151 1977 January-June
- f. 152 1977 September-1983
- f. 153-157 Miscellaneous
 - f. 153 Letterheads, 1937-1942
 - f. 154 Response Cards, 1941
 - f. 155 Biographies, 1939-1940, n.d.
 - f. 156 Miscellaneous, 1941-1983, n.d.
 - f. 157 Convention Photographs, n.d.

The second subseries is arranged alphabetically by state and then by type of material and then chronologically therein and concerns the state affiliates. The materials include administrative records, clippings, meeting programs, and state newsletters. A weakness of this subseries is that the amount of material is not consistent for each state affiliate. For instance, Bless assisted in the organization of the Colorado Press Women, so there are many materials regarding the early years of the Colorado affiliate, whereas there is only a single newsletter for the North Dakota Press Women.

- f. 158-160 Colorado Press Women
 - f. 158-159 1941-1969, n.d.
 - f. 160 *Bulletin*, 1949-1971
- f. 161 Idaho Press Women, 1949-1951
- f. 162-165 Illinois Woman's Press Association, 1939-1951, n.d.
 - f. 162 1939-1951, n.d.
 - f. 163-165 *Pen Points*, 1938-1952
- f. 166-167 The Woman's Press Club of Indiana
 - f. 166 1939-1942
 - f. 167 *Woman's Press Club Bulletin*, 1937-1942
- f. 168-170 Iowa Press Women's Club
 - f. 168-169 1939-1951, n.d.
 - f. 170 *Iowa Press Woman*, 1939-1950
- f. 171 Kansas Press Women, 1940-1960
- f. 172 Kentucky Press Woman's Club, 1941-1942
- f. 173-174 Minnesota Press Women
 - f. 173 1941-1950
 - f. 174 *Gopher Tidings of the Minnesota Press Women*, 1943-1950
- f. 175 Mississippi Press Women, 1941-1954
- f. 176 Nebraska Women's Press Club, 1946-1950
- f. 177 New England Woman's Press Association, 1940-1945
- f. 178 New Jersey Women's Press Club, 1939-1942
- f. 179-181 Woman's Press Club of New York City, 1938-1942
- f. 182 North Dakota Press Women, 1950

National Federation of Press Women Series (con'd)

- f. 183 South Dakota Press Women, 1949-1950
- f. 184 Texas Woman's Press Association, 1940-1950, n.d.
- f. 185 Washington Press Women, 1949
- f. 186 Wisconsin Women's Press Club, 1940-1941, n.d.

Missouri Women's Press Club Series

The **Missouri Women's Press Club** series is arranged by type of material and chronologically therein. The materials consist of administrative papers, newspaper clippings, convention materials, publications, and correspondence. The strength of this series is that it covers the founding and the early years of the Missouri Women's Press Club, especially the growth and activities of the club during the 1940s.

Bless helped organize the Missouri Women's Press Club in 1936 and served as the organization's first president. She also was instrumental in the club becoming a state affiliate of the NFPW. The name of the club changed in 1959 to the Missouri Press Women.

The administrative materials include the constitution, the organization's history, bylaws, and membership rosters. The clippings focus on various activities of the MWPC, especially their annual meetings and their involvement with the NFPW. The correspondence focuses on administrative issues within the MWPC.

Of particular interest are the minutes from the initial meeting concerning the organization of the club. These minutes offer insight into what kind of organization the women wanted the press club to be and how it would be structured.

Life Lines was the newsletter of the Missouri Women's Press Club. For additional issues of this publication, please see *Missouri Press Women, Papers, 1961-1985 (C3967)*.

- f. 187 Administrative, 1939-1975
- f. 188-189 Clippings, 1938-1976, n.d.
- f. 190 Correspondence, 1941-1972, n.d.
- f. 191 Meeting Minutes, 1936-1948, n.d.
- f. 192 Meeting Programs, 1937-1975
- f. 193 Miscellaneous, 1947-1965
- f. 194-198 *Life Lines*
 - f. 194 1941-1949
 - f. 195 1950-1958
 - f. 196 1959-1965
 - f. 197 1966-1970
 - f. 198 1972-1975

Organizations Series

The **Organizations** series is arranged by organization and then by type of material. The materials consist of meeting programs, publications, and clippings of other organizations with which Bless was involved including Theta Sigma Phi, the Missouri Press Association, National Editorial Association, and the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Organizations Series (con'd)

The *Missouri Publisher* and *Missouri Press News*, publications of the Missouri Press Association, are included. Of particular interest is the almost complete run of the *Missouri Press News* from 1937 to 1952. Additionally, there are convention brochures and programs from several National Editorial Association meetings that Bertha and B.J. Bless, Jr., attended.

- f. 199 Missouri Press Association Meetings, 1926-1943
- f. 200 Northwest Missouri Press Association, 1925-1948
- f. 201-209 *Missouri Publisher*
 - f. 201 1923-1924
 - f. 202 1925
 - f. 203 1926
 - f. 204 1927
 - f. 205 1928
 - f. 206 1929-1930 July
 - f. 207 1930 August-1931 May
 - f. 208 1931 July-December
 - f. 209 1932
- f. 210-231 *Missouri Press News*
 - f. 210 1937-1938
 - f. 211 1939 January-June
 - f. 212 1939 July-December
 - f. 213 1940
 - f. 214 1941 February-July
 - f. 215 1941 August-December
 - f. 216 1942 January-June
 - f. 217 1942 July-November
 - f. 218 1943
 - f. 219 1944
 - f. 220 1945
 - f. 221 1946
 - f. 222 1947
 - f. 223 1948 January-April
 - f. 224 1948 May-December
 - f. 225 1949 January-May
 - f. 226 1949 June-December
 - f. 227 1950 January-May
 - f. 228 1950 June-November
 - f. 229 1951
 - f. 230 1952, 1981
 - f. 231 1983-1985
- f. 232-234 Theta Sigma Phi
 - f. 232 1961-1974, n.d.
 - f. 233 *The Matrix*, 1941
 - f. 234 *The Headliner* and *Communicatrix*, 1949-1974

Organizations Series (con'd)

- f. 235-236 National League of American Pen Women, 1946-1971
- f. 237-244 National Editorial Association
 - f. 237-240 Conventions, 1942-1946
 - f. 241-244 *National Publisher*, 1942-1947
- f. 245 University of Missouri School of Journalism, 1917-1961
- f. 246 *The Alaska Woman*, 1942
- f. 247-249 *Colorado Editor*, 1942-1961
- f. 250 *The Iowa Publisher*, 1939-1959
- f. 251 Missouri Newswriters' Association, 1948
- f. 252-254 *The Oklahoma Publisher*, 1941-1946
- f. 255-256 *Texas Press Messenger*, 1941-1942
- f. 257 *The Wisconsin Press*, 1942

Bless Family Series

The **Bless Family** series is arranged by type of material and then chronologically. The materials consist of clippings, certificates, correspondence, and speeches pertaining to the Bless family, especially their work on the *Weston Chronicle* and the publication of *Weston, Queen of the Platte Purchase*.

The certificates include many of the awards that Bless received for her newspaper work, including honors for her editorials, advertising, and news stories. The clippings focus primarily on articles about Bless and her family in local newspapers. The correspondence pertains primarily to the *Weston Chronicle* and Bless's writings on the status of the rural newspaper. There are a few personal letters included in the folder. The speeches include rough drafts and final copies of speeches prepared by Bless for various conventions and speaking engagements.

- f. 258-259 Awards, 1938-1974, n.d.
- f. 260 Clippings, 1936-1970, n.d.
- f. 261 Correspondence, 1941-1983
- f. 262 Miscellaneous, 1940-1953, n.d.
- f. 263-264 Speeches, 1940-1942, n.d.

Miscellaneous Series

The **Miscellaneous** series is arranged by type of material and chronologically therein. The materials consist of photographs, publications, and travel brochures. Of particular interest is a menu from the Tip Top Tap dining car on the Hiawatha railcar along the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific railroad. The publications consist primarily of books that were given to Bless by members of NFPW or by other friends. Also included is the *Eureka Newspaper Guide*, published in 1894, that lists all of the newspapers being published in the United States. The travel brochures describe Houston, Texas, and Missouri towns, including a brochure about a tour of Missouri organized exclusively for travel writers in the early 1950s.

- f. 265 Miscellaneous, 1930-1967, n.d.

Miscellaneous Series (con'd)

- f. 266 Photographs, c. 1940s, n.d.
 f. 267-271 Publications
 f. 267 *Eureka Newspaper Guide*, 1894
 f. 268 c. 1941-1942
 f. 269 1942
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