

A Guide to the Elizabeth "Libby" Custer Papers, circa 1930s-1997 SC 0077

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Elizabeth "Libby" Custer Papers, circa 1930s-1997 SC 0077

Author: Victoria Edwards and Tracy Harter

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820 Madison Drive
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Profile Description

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Revision Description

2013-11-21	Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.
2017	Collection renumbered.
2020-03-27	Minor revisions to finding aid.

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SC 0077

Unit ID

/repositories/4/resources/237

Unit Date

circa 1930s-1997

Language

English

Abstract

The Elizabeth "Libby" Custer Papers, ca. 1930s-1997, comprise business and personal records relating to the Custer family business, Virginia Valley Processors, Inc., of Hinton, Virginia.

Creator

Custer, Elizabeth "Libby" Wampler, 1913-2019

Extent

0.2 cubic feet 1 box

Repository

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

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The copyright interests in this collection have been transferred to the James Madison University Special Collection Library. For more information, contact the Special Collections Library Reference Desk (library-special@jmu.edu).

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated in April 2008 by Libby Custer of Hinton, Virginia.

Processing Information

In order to streamline the process of applying collection numbers, Special Collections staff completed a large-scale renumbering campaign in the spring of 2017. **This collection was previously cataloged as SC 2002.**

Preferred Citation

[identification of item], [box #, folder #], Elizabeth "Libby" Custer Papers, ca.1930s-1997, SC 0077, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Bio/Historical Note

Elizabeth Libby Wampler Custer was born on March 27, 1913 in Dayton, Virginia to Charles Wampler Sr. and Sadie Zigler Wampler. The Wampler family has been one of the most influential families in the Rockingham County, Virginia area. Libby's father was a pioneer in poultry raising and was considered the founder of the modern turkey industry. In 1927 he and two brothers established the Wampler Feed and Seed Company. One of nine children, Libby worked in the family business from a young age. She later attended Juniata College, a Church of the Brethren liberal arts college in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. She married Harry Lawson Custer (November 17, 1909 to February 22, 1981), a Fulks Run native, on October 12, 1934, and continued working with him in their poultry processing business, Virginia Valley Processors, Inc. They had three children, Kay, Stephen and Judy.

Throughout her life Libby also expressed herself through painting. Between 1935 and 1959 Libby occasionally took classes taught by Olive Delp Graham at Bridgewater College. In 1964, at the age of 41, Libby participated in the first adult education class offered by Harrisonburg Public Schools under Mrs. Carrie K. Showalter. Over the years, Libby has painted various properties, homesteads, and scenic vistas at the request of friends and family, often on unconventional materials such as planks of wood, reflecting her pragmatism: "You can paint on anything." An exhibit of her work and a reception in her honor was hosted in 2007 by the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society, where she continues to volunteer.

Harry Custer and Virginia Valley Processors, Inc.

The history of Virginia Valley Processors is part of a larger "family tree" of poultry and other business

ventures. After starting a small business in 1928, Custer made a name for himself as a distributor of poultry and eggs in the Washington, D.C. area in the 1930s. In 1942, Custer bought property in Hinton, Virginia, where he had decided to settle. After serving in the Navy during World War II, Harry made a living hauling live poultry and established H.L. Custer Poultry in 1947, originally operating from a barn on the property. The business flourished, with Custer distributing poultry to markets in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia, as well as entering into business ventures in West Virginia. In 1956, he and two associates, Homer and Jim Long, organized as Virginia Valley Processors, Inc., which operated from a plant on the property in Hinton through the 1960s. By 1970 the company merged with his father-in-law's company, Wampler Feed and Seed, Inc., and other Wampler family operations which were reorganized as Wampler Foods, Inc. The Hinton plant thus became the processing division, with Custer serving as vice president and a member of the board of directors.

A 1984 merger with poultry processor Horace W. Longacre resulted in the formation of Wampler-Longacre, Inc. Shortly after another acquisition in 1988, the company reorganized as WLR Foods, Inc., and continued to acquire several other businesses in the decades that followed. In 2001, Pilgrim's Pride, Inc., acquired WLR Foods, Inc. In 2004, after a reported three year loss, Pilgrim's Pride, Inc., announced the pending closure of the Hinton plant. This prompted swift action by the newly formed Virginia Poultry Grower's Cooperative, Inc., in its successful efforts to purchase the plant. The Hinton plant continues to operate today under the Virginia Poultry Growers Cooperative, Inc.

Scope and Content

The Elizabeth "Libby" Custer Papers, ca. 1930s-1997, comprise business and personal records relating to the Custer family business, Virginia Valley Processors, Inc., of Hinton, Virginia. The collection is arranged in three series: Account Books, Publications and Clippings, and Digitized Material.

Series 1: Account Books, 1951-1955, includes payroll accounts, live poultry purchases, and refrigeration expenses during transport. The original covers were removed and the pages retained. One payroll account book records the names, hours worked, and rates of pay of female employees from February 18, 1955 until December 21, 1955, while a second account book documents the names, hours worked, and rates of pay of male employees from April 29, 1955 until December 30, 1955. Information regarding a possible temporary closing of the plant is also present. An account book regarding a possible temporary closure of the plant is also present. An account book regarding live poultry purchases between May 17, 1954 and December 21, 1955, documents the seller, type of poultry (i.e. toms, hens, culls, chicks) and amount paid. Pages from the account book of Cassco Ice consists of twenty pages that document expenses for transporting refrigerated dressed poultry to various named vendors, including dates, lot numbers, number of boxes, and cost. The last three pages contain entries from 1951-1952 recording stock purchases, listing stocks, shares purchased, cost, and dividends.

Series 2: Publications and Clippings, 1939-1997, consists of photocopies of articles and brochures relating to the local poultry industry and its history. One folder contains seven issues of the Wampler Foods, Inc., publication "Turkey Talk." Another folder of material pertains to the takeover of one of the Virginia Valley Processors' New York customers, Murray Packing Company, in 1963 allegedly by an organized crime family under the auspices of Berkshire Foods. As a result, Virginia Valley Processors suffered an unrecoverable loss of \$200,000. Also notable in this series are biographical information relating to Harry Custer's 1973 Virginia Poultry Federation awards and a typed memorial after his death in 1981, a news clipping regarding Charles W. Wampler Jr.'s 1997 Lifetime Achievement Award in Industry from the Science Museum of Virginia, and an undated article about a longtime employee of the Hinton plant, Sissy Obaugh.

Series 3: Digitized Materials, ca. 1930s-1960s, consists of photocopies of digital images from a scrapbook Mrs. Custer loaned to Carrier Library Special Collections. Images pertain to the early days of Virginia Valley Processors, Inc., various employees, and family. Digital images are available for viewing in Special Collections. An itemized list of these images is also available.

Related Material

Wampler Family Papers, 1798-1962, SC 0150, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Wampler Business Records, 1916-1972, SC 0202, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

WLR Foods records, 1984-2002, SC 0112, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Keywords

Family-owned business enterprises -- Virginia
Poultry industry -- Virginia -- Hinton
Poultry -- Shenandoah River Valley (Va. and W. Va.)
Poultry -- Breeding
Poultry -- Hatcheries
Poultry -- Processing
Poultry -- Management
Poultry -- Economic aspects -- Virginia -- History
Poultry -- Virginia -- Rockingham County -- History
Poultry industry -- Virginia -- Shenandoah River Valley (Va. and W. Va.) -- Periodicals
Hinton (Va.) -- Industries -- History
Rockingham County (Va.) -- History
Virginia -- History, Local
Shenandoah River Valley (Va. and W. Va.) -- History -- 20th century
Magazines (periodicals)
Account books
Newspaper clippings
Wampler family
Custer, Elizabeth "Libby" Wampler, 1913-2019
WLR Foods, Inc. -- Periodicals
Custer, Harry Lawson, 1909-1981
Virginia Valley Processing, Inc. (Hinton, Va.) -- History

Alternative Form Available

Digital images of photographs and other material were made from a scrapbook retained by the donor. Images are available in Special Collections.

Bibliography

Wampler Family Papers, SC 0150, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA. "Harry Custer Receives Award." *Turkey Talk*, Vol 2:21 (May 31, 1973): 1. "Libby Custer Art Exhibit On Display now at HRHS." *Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society Newsletter*, Vol 29:2 (Spring 2007): 9. Wampler, Charles W. *My grandfather, my grandchildren and me: an autobiography of Charles Wampler*. Harrisonburg, Va.: Dayton, Va.: Shenandoah Press, 1968. Virginia Poultry Growers Cooperative website. <http://www.vapoultrygrowers.com/VPGC-Web/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=1> (accessed November 5, 2009).

Location of Originals

Libby Custer retained the original scrapbook from which digital images were created.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in three series:

- Account Books, 1951-1955
- Publications and Clippings, 1939-1997
- Digitized Materials, circa 1930s-1960s

Description of Subordinate Components

Account Books

Unit ID 1

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/685

Unit Date 1951-1955

Language English

Payroll, Women

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/688

Unit Date 1955

Mixed Materials [1000886523] 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Payroll, Men

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/689

Unit Date 1955

Mixed Materials [1000886523] 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Language English

Poultry Purchases

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/690

Unit Date 1954-1955

Mixed Materials [1000886523] 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

Language English

Cassco Freezer Account

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/691

Unit Date (undated, c. 1951)

Mixed Materials [1000886523] 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)

Language English

Publications and Clippings

Unit ID 2

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/686

Unit Date 1939-1997

Turkey Talk

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/692

Unit Date 1972-1973, 1985

Unit Date 1985

Mixed Materials [1000886523] 1 (box)

Container 5 (folder)

Language English

Murray Packing Co.

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/693

Unit Date 1963-1964

Mixed Materials [1000886523] 1 (box)

Container 6 (folder)

Language English

General**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/694**Unit Date** 1939-1997**Mixed Materials [1000886523]** 1 (box)**Container** 7 (folder)**Language** English**Digitized Material****Unit ID** 3**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/687**Mixed Materials [1000886523]** 1 (box)**Container** 8 (folder)**Language** English