

TITLE: Rena Mathews Collection

DATE RANGE: 1858-1962

CALL NUMBER: MS 125

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1 box, .5 linear ft

PROVENANCE: This collection was donated to the Arizona Historical Society by Mrs. Jack (Mabel Mathews) Weadock, in March 1961 and February, 1963.

COPYRIGHT: Requests for permission to publish materials from this collection should be addressed to the Arizona Historical Society.

RESTRICTIONS: This collection is unrestricted.

CREDIT LINE: Arizona Historical Society-Tucson, MS 125 – Rena Mathews Collection

PROCESSED BY: Unknown. Finding aid transcribed by Mary Flynn in 2014.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Rena Mathews was born in Reno, Nevada, on February 10, 1874, the daughter of pioneer California artist Mrs. Tillie Shearer. She was raised in Mentone, California, where her mother operated the railroad telegraph station. In 1894, she married John D. Mathews (1870-1944), son of pioneer San Bernardino sheriff Ben Mathews. They settled in San Bernardino in 1895, where J.D. Mathews taught school. At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, he resigned his teaching position to serve in the army.

Returning to civilian life in 1900, J.D. Mathews held several engineering posts with the railroad in California, Arizona, and Sonora, Mexico. In 1900, he worked for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad and was responsible for determining railroad location, construction, and maintenance between Naco and Cananea, Sonora. In 1906, he moved to Oakland, California, to help reestablish the Southern Pacific Railroad tunnel, work which had been destroyed by the earthquake. Later, he became construction engineer for the Southern Pacific de Mexico, and was headquartered in Empalme, Sonora, where he worked to extend the line south to the Yaqui River. Wherever his engineering jobs took her husband, Rena Mathews followed with her four children, often living in railroad boxcars attached to her husband's work train.

In 1909, J.D. Mathews became Division Engineer of the Tucson Division of Southern Pacific Railroad. For ten years, the family lived in Tucson, residing on "Railroad Row" on South Third Avenue.

During her stay in Tucson, Rena Mathews was active in civic, charity, and women's organizations. She helped establish the Arizona Children's Home in 1912, and worked to open the Comstock Hospital in Tentville, east of Tucson. Her other memberships included the Tucson Women's Club, Organized Charities, The Mothers' League, Arizona Health League, Arizona Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Arizona Archaeological Society.

In 1918, J.D. Mathews was named Engineer of Maintenance for Southern Pacific de Mexico. During this period, the family lived in Nogales, Arizona, and in Empalme, Sonora. In 1920, they returned to Tucson. J.D. Mathews was transferred to Southern Pacific's headquarters in San Francisco in 1925. He retired in 1931, and moved to San Bernardino.

After her husband's death in 1944, Rena Mathews maintained residences in Tucson and San Bernardino. She died in Tucson on May 3, 1962. She had four children, Mabel Mathews (Weadock), John Wallace Mathews, Chester Mathews, and A. Donald Mathews.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: The papers of Rena Mathews consist of one box of manuscript material arranged in five series: (1) Correspondence, 1894-1958; (2) Diary, 1927; (3) Manuscripts, 1912-1939; (4) Printed Matter, 1909-1962; (5) Miscellany, 1858-1923.

The bulk of the collection consists of manuscripts and printed matter which document Rena Mathews' life as the wife of a railroad construction engineer and as an active participant in civic affairs in Tucson (1909-1918). A considerable amount of manuscript material relates to her travels with her husband on the railroad.

Series One, Correspondence, 1894-1958, consists of letters written by Rena Mathews to her family, as well as letters addressed to her by various civic organizations. Topics include her marriage, her family, life in Mexico, her husband's career, railroad journeys to New York City and Washington, D.C., and her affiliations with the Organized Charities, the Woman's Club, Arizona Children's Home, and the Arizona Pioneer's Historical Society.

Series Two, Diary, 1927, consists of Rena Mathews' account of an automobile journey taken with her husband through California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. In the diary she describes their itinerary, with a detailed reaction to the Grand Canyon and the Navajo Indian Reservation, as well as their meetings with friends and family in Arizona. Contained in the diary is a two-page description of the Picture Rocks, near Tucson.

Series Three, Manuscripts, 1912-1939, consists of journal entries, texts to speeches she delivered, autobiographical sketches and miscellaneous notes written by Rena Mathews. Her autobiographical manuscript, "The Claim of Being a Western Pioneer," recounts her life as the daughter of a pioneer artist and the wife of a railroad engineer (folder 3). Other autobiographical material related to her description of life in Empalme, Mexico in

1920 (folder 5), and her observations and personal experiences while traveling with her husband's work train in Western Mexico in 1920 (folder 6).

Folder 4 contains the texts of nine speeches Rena Mathews delivered to the History and Drama Sections of the Tucson Woman's Club between 1912 and 1915. Subjects covered in these addresses include "Mother as a Voter," (woman's suffrage); the history of Cordova, Spain; the Spanish conquest and rule of Chile; the Spanish Parliament of Cortes; "Martin Opitz and His Influence on German Literature"; George III of England; political conditions in the reign of Nicholas II of Russia; the Teutonic Order in Germany; and the British Shakespearean actor, Henry Irving.

Folder 7 consists of a notebook of short pieces, original and copies, about life in the desert. Folder 8 contains a miscellaneous collection of Spanish and English poems and songs, and research materials about Mexican customs collected by Mrs. Mathews as part of a 1939 club presentation in California. Miscellaneous manuscripts in folder 9 contain poems, sermons, and short stories written or collected by Rena Mathews, mostly on religious topics. It also contains a bound booklet of Arizona desert poetry entitled "Archerations" (1916); a poem and inscription about the beauty of the desert, presented by Rena Mathews to her husband; two short stories entitled "Hobbies" and "With Apologies"; and a religious skit entitled "I Haven't Time."

Series Four, Printed Matter, 1909-1962, consists of newspaper clippings, pamphlets, and addresses which document Rena Mathews' social and civic activities in Tucson and Arizona. Folders 10 and 11 contained biographical newspaper clippings of Rena and J.D. Mathews. Folder 12 includes materials related to the history of the Arizona Children's Home. News clippings, resolutions, and receipts in folder 13 document some of the concerns and activities of women's organizations in the 1910's. Folder 14 contains two addresses by Dr. Merrill P. Freeman to the Arizona Archaeological Society on the topics of Coronado's Expedition in 1540, and the origin and derivation of the name Arizona.

Series Five, Miscellany, 1858-1923, contains Rena Mathews' childhood autograph book (folder 15); the Mathews' Mexican passports (1918-1920) (folders 16 and 17); ten items of Mexican currency (1914-1915) (folder 18); a sketchbook containing caricatures of Arizona Eastern Railroad employees (folder 19); Rena Mathews' charter membership certificate in the Arizona Archaeological Society (folder 20); receipts and checkbook stubs for charitable donations and membership dues (folder 21); and two devotional prayer books and a book of religious poetry written in the nineteenth century (folder 22).

Related materials in the Rena Mathews collection include over 3000 indexed negatives and 13 albums of still pictures of Southwestern landmarks, railroads, and the Mathews family, which are housed in the library's photography division and accessible through a separate finding aid.

CONTAINER LIST:

Box	Folder	Title	Dates
1	1	Correspondence	1894-1958
	2	Diary: Travels Through California, Nevada, Utah & Arizona	Oct 17-Nov 5, 1927
	3	Manuscript: "The Claim of Being a Western Pioneer" (Autobiography)	
	4	Manuscript: Addresses Before Tucson Woman's Club	1912-1915
	5	Manuscript: "Life in Empalme, Mexico"	1920-1921
	6	Manuscript: "My Trip on the West Coast of Mexico"	1924
	7	Manuscript: "The Deserts"	
	8	Manuscript: "Las Posadas"	1939
	9	Manuscript: Miscellaneous	
	10	Printed Matter: Rena Mathews Biographical Clippings	1917-1962
	11	Printed Matter: J.D. Mathews Biographical Clippings	1918-1925
	12	Printed Matter: Arizona Children's Home	1911-1956
	13	Printed Matter: Arizona Federation of Women's Clubs	1909-1924
	14	Printed Matter: Arizona Archaeological Society	1913, 1917
	15	Miscellany: Autograph Book	1887-1890
	16	Miscellany: Passports – Rena Mathews	1918, 1920
	17	Miscellany: Passports - J.D. Mathews	1918, 1919
	18	Miscellany: Mexican Currency	1914-1915
	19	Miscellany: "Sketches of Railroad Employees"	1916
	20	Miscellany: Membership Certificate, Arizona Archaeological Society	1916
	21	Miscellany: Financial Receipts – Miscellaneous	1916-1923
	22	Miscellany: Devotional Books	1858, 1889