

# Alice Winifred O'Connor Papers, 1846?-2000?

**Repository:** Lawrence History Center

**Accession Number:** 2011.070

**Creator:** O'Connor, Alice Winifred, 1886-1968

**Quantity:** 7 Bankers Boxes, 1 Document Box, and 1 Nonstandard Flat Box

**Processed By:** Jennifer Williams

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**Access:** Open for research.

**Provenance:** The collection was donated to the Lawrence History Center by Karen Herman in 2000.

## Biographical Note

Alice Winifred O'Connor was born on June 11, 1886 in Lawrence, Massachusetts to John P. and Susanna (Brassill) O'Connor. John was a police officer in the Lawrence Police Department and Susanna was a housewife. Alice O'Connor was one of four children, her older sisters being named Mary, Susanna, and Eleanor. O'Connor was raised in Lawrence, graduating from the Oliver Grammar School in 1899, Lawrence High School in 1903 (as valedictorian), the Lowell Normal School in 1905, and the Lawrence Training School for Teachers in 1906. After graduation from the Training School she continued to live with her parents at 19 Logan Street while working as a teacher at the Lawrence School Department headquarters, located at 177 Haverhill Street. The classes there focused on teaching students who did not speak English. Later in her teaching career O'Connor worked at the Prospect Street and Oliver Schools.

In 1918 O'Connor was hired as the Executive Secretary for the Massachusetts Department of Education's Division of Immigration and Americanization. O'Connor's duties as Executive Secretary varied widely, including assisting with budget formation and the creation of the annual report, typing correspondence for the Director of the Division, filing paperwork, meeting immigrants as their ships docked in Boston Harbor, collecting statistics regarding immigration in Massachusetts, and assisting immigrants who came into the office. She also ensured that all naturalization paperwork was properly filled out.

In the 1920s O'Connor began to take language and social work classes, graduating from Boston College in 1927 with a degree in social work. O'Connor also attended many different conferences and luncheons related to social work, immigration, naturalization, and Americanization. Her duties at the Division became more complex throughout the decade, as she took on the role of a social worker. This included speaking in front of local clubs, associations, religious groups, and college classes. Her talks usually centered on the work of the Division and the plight of immigrants in Massachusetts. She also attempted to allay fears that immigrants were attempting to turn the United States into a communist country.

O'Connor was dedicated to her job, often working late at the office or from home at night and on the weekends. She also had high expectations for the other Division employees. She would

often note in her professional diaries when her coworkers were late, took long lunches, engaged in inappropriate behavior, displayed incompetence or dishonesty in their work, or conducted non-work related activities in the office. She would then report her findings to the Director of the Division and/or confront the offending employees herself. This often caused controversy and arguments to break out between O'Connor and her coworkers, who resented her interference.

In June of 1929 O'Connor graduated with an LLB from Portia Law School in Boston, which was a school designed specifically for women. Only a few weeks after graduating from law school O'Connor was given a promotion from Social Worker to the Supervisor of Social Service. Her new responsibilities included holding meetings with office employees to discuss any issues they might be experiencing, techniques for working with immigrants, and caseloads. She also took charge of college students and Works Project Administration (WPA) participants who were working in the office.

Throughout the 1930s O'Connor obtained more influence in the Division. She was often summoned by the Commissioner to discuss such important issues as the reorganization of her department, appointing a new director, and budget concerns. She also visited branch offices in order to analyze their efficiency. Furthermore, the Supervisor of Adult Alien Education, Mary Guyton, frequently asked O'Connor to speak to her classes or temporarily take charge of a class when the teacher was ill. O'Connor also began to branch out into other organizations and associations. She became a member of the National League for American Citizenship as well as the Massachusetts Federation of Women's Clubs. She was a very active member, not only attending meetings but also giving talks and serving on special committees.

In 1940 the position of 'Director of the Division of Immigration and Americanization' was eliminated and the Supervisor of Social Service became the executive position. Thus O'Connor became the senior official on the Division staff, reporting directly to the Board. O'Connor was responsible for corresponding with officials in other state and national departments, formulating budgets with the Massachusetts Ways and Means Committee, assigning and reviewing employee work, holding staff meetings, managing the daily goings-on of the main office, and hiring new employees.

In the late 1930s and into the 1940s O'Connor and her coworkers became aware of the need to combat hostilities and fears surrounding foreigners in the United States. Tensions in Europe were constantly increasing, and by the end of 1941 the United States had entered World War II. Many citizens feared the infiltration of immigrant groups by undercover agents from enemy countries. O'Connor began to receive visits from FBI agents and the Governor's Defense Committee regarding these groups, including the American Civic League.

O'Connor also worked with immigrants who feared being labeled adversaries of the United States. In one instance, she was visited by a representative from the Children's Aid Society about a young German boy who wanted to change his enemy alien status to 'Austrian.' These issues were discussed in conferences attended by O'Connor, such as that of the National Council on Naturalization and Citizenship in March of 1943. She participated in presentations on the difficulties immigrants faced during war time, as well as the relationship between the war, the government, and the foreign born. During this time O'Connor once again reached out to

participate in other organizations. She became a director of the International Institute as well as the Associate Director of the National Citizenship Education Program.

After the end of World War II, O'Connor became increasingly involved in helping refugees from Europe. She attended, and gave, several talks discussing the prejudices and other difficulties displaced persons faced, as well as the continued responsibility of the United States to help them. By 1948 she was a member of the Massachusetts Displaced Persons Commission, at one point serving as its executive secretary. O'Connor continued to work on the Displaced Persons Commission into the early 1950. Indeed, she wrote reports for the Commission as well as spoke to different groups about displaced persons and the contributions they made to the United States.

The early 1950s was also a time when O'Connor and her coworkers at the Division were combating national fears of a communist takeover by immigrants coming into the United States. O'Connor collected articles discussing the number of Communists in Massachusetts as well as blacklisted organizations. She also attended hearings for immigrants suspected of communist tendencies and held conferences in her office in order to discuss repealing the McCarran Act. In 1953 O'Connor was honored for all of her service to immigrants and displaced persons by receiving an honorary Doctorate of Law from Emanuel College. She became a notary public in 1954.

In 1956 O'Connor retired from her position as Supervisor of Social Service for the Division of Immigration and Naturalization. A reception and dinner were held on June 13<sup>th</sup> of that year to celebrate and honor her thirty-eight years of service. Also in 1956, O'Connor was appointed Chairman of the Division's Advisory Board. She remained very active in the Division's affairs through this position, visiting the office frequently, speaking at local colleges, clubs, and associations, and attending Board meetings. She remained the Chairman of the Board until 1962.

O'Connor was a very religious individual, attending mass every Sunday throughout her life as well as on holidays until she was too ill to do so. She often wrote religious quotes in her diaries and sometimes noted days on which she did not pray. She was also very close to her family. She lived her entire adult life in her family home at 19 Logan Street, spending a great deal of time with her sisters and nephews. They would often go shopping together as well as participate in family dinners. O'Connor also made friends with her coworkers at the Division. She and Mary Guyton became very good friends, often spending their lunch breaks together as well as meeting for dinner and drinks. In many cases they would also invite other coworkers from throughout the state government to accompany them. O'Connor remained friends with many of these individuals even after her retirement.

O'Connor experienced multiple health issues throughout her years at the Division. This included abscessed teeth, fractured bones, and painful arthritis. After her retirement these health issues intensified, and by 1963 she spent more and more time at home and in Methuen's Bon Secours Hospital. She often complained of dizziness, nausea, exhaustion, and forgetfulness. She died in 1966 of cerebral thrombosis and was buried at the Immaculate Conception Cemetery in Lawrence, Massachusetts. She never married nor had children.

## Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the collection consists of professional records created between 1918 and 1966.

There are several letters regarding such subjects as immigration laws and the Displaced Persons Commission, but the majority of the materials are professional diaries. These diaries contain notes in O'Connor's handwriting concerning the everyday goings-on of the Division of Immigration and Naturalization's main branch in Boston, O'Connor's work in the Division, her participation in other organizations and associations, the work of other employees in the Division, important events and laws relating to immigration and naturalization, and her opinions on all of these subjects. She also touches upon the subjects of communism, the Great Depression, and World War II. She includes personal information in the diaries as well, especially in her companion diaries. This information includes her illnesses and doctor's appointments, local events in her hometown of Lawrence, Massachusetts, time spent with family and friends, and her religious beliefs. In many of the diaries she also writes quotes related to such subjects as religion and leadership qualities. Between the pages of the diaries O'Connor has inserted programs, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, correspondence, and other materials related to her professional and personal life.

The collection also contains O'Connor's personal and family history records. Personal records include photographs of O'Connor and her close family, her 1914 thesis on immigrants in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and newspaper clippings regarding O'Connor's career and family members. These materials date from approximately 1910 to 1983. The historical family documents detail the history of the O'Connor, Brassill, and Sullivan families. Records include genealogies, photograph and autograph albums created by O'Connor's ancestors, death certificates, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and scrapbooks. The subjects of these materials, which date between 1846 and 1926 (approximately), are the recreational and work activities of O'Connor's ancestors, descriptions of the places in which they lived, their marriages and deaths, and their immigration to the United States.

## Arrangement

- Series I. Professional Records, 1918-1966
  - Subseries I. Diaries, 1918-1929
  - Subseries II. Diaries, 1930-1939
  - Subseries III. Diaries, 1940-1956
  - Subseries IV. Diaries, 1957-1966
  - Subseries V. Correspondence, 1952?-1957
- Series II. Personal Papers, 1900?-2000?
  - Subseries I. Images, 1900?-2000?
  - Subseries II. Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings, 1944-1983
  - Subseries III. Theses, Booklets, and Diaries, 1903-1914
- Series III. Historical Family Papers, 1846-1988?
  - Subseries I. O'Connor Family Papers, 1871-1988?
  - Subseries II. Brassill Family Papers, 1846-1926?
  - Subseries III. Sullivan Family Papers, 1897-1968

## **Series I. Professional Records, 1918-1966**

### **Subseries I. Diaries, 1918-1929**

#### **Boxes 1 & 2**

This series contains eleven diaries created by Alice O'Connor (the diary for 1919 is missing). The majority of the entries are handwritten notes by O'Connor, but there are also newspaper articles, correspondence, and obituaries. The materials focus on the activities of Alice O'Connor in her capacity as the executive secretary and then social worker for the Division of Immigration and Naturalization, but also include the work of the Director (Mrs. Nathaniel Thayer), statistics of applications received and cases handled by the department, meetings, and the shortcomings of O'Connor's coworkers. There are religious and inspirational quotes written on many of the pages, some in Italian and Russian. O'Connor's health problems are also a frequent topic. The subjects in the subseries include immigration, immigration laws, national and regional fears of communism, discrimination against and living conditions of immigrants, regional and national conferences relating to social work and immigration, and the process of naturalization.

### **Subseries II. Diaries, 1930-1939**

#### **Boxes 2 & 3**

This subseries includes ten diaries created by Alice O'Connor which contain handwritten entries, newspaper articles, poems, obituaries, meeting announcements, budgets, and memoranda. These materials depict Alice O'Connor's duties as the Supervisor of Social Service in the Division of Immigration and Naturalization in the 1930s, as well as her interactions with coworkers and supervisors, her role as supervisor for college students and WPA workers, her participation in other organizations and departments, speeches and talks she gives, classes she teaches, and her opinions on the political and social issues taking place nationally, regionally, and in her own office. The activities of her coworkers and supervisors are detailed as well. Some of her personal activities and beliefs are also included, such as family gatherings, O'Connor's religious views, the goings-on in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and the time she spends Christmas shopping. Subjects in the diaries include the restriction of immigration into the United States, the effects of the Great Depression on immigrants, citizens, and the government, the treatment of immigrants by the government and civilians, and politics and politicians.

### **Subseries III. Diaries, 1940-1956**

#### **Boxes 3, 4, and 5**

This subseries includes seventeen diaries created by Alice O'Connor. They contain handwritten entries, national and state legislation, programs, correspondence, and O'Connor's business card. These materials depict Alice O'Connor's duties as the executive staff member of Division of Immigration and Americanization. This includes her many speaking duties at clubs, associations, and schools, working with the Massachusetts Ways & Means Committee to decide upon a budget for the Division, holding staff meetings, hiring, assigning work to, and assessing employees, meeting with the Division's Advisory Board, and her duties as a member, director, and special committee participant of other organizations. The subjects in the subseries include World

War II, war refugees, the treatment of immigrants during the war (including internment camps and investigations), communism, the McCarran Act, the International Institute of Boston, the National Citizenship Education Program, and the Massachusetts Displaced Persons Committee. There are also many references to O'Connor's personal life, including her social outings with coworkers and family members, her health problems, her church attendance, and her activities in her hometown of Lawrence, Massachusetts.

#### **Subseries IV. Diaries, 1957-1966**

##### **Box 6**

This subseries includes ten diaries containing newspaper articles, obituaries, and correspondence. These materials focus on O'Connor's work as the Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Division of Immigration and Naturalization after her retirement in 1956 until she steps down from the role in 1962. They also increasingly focus on her personal life, including her attendance at church and other religious events, time spent with friends and family, the deaths of people close to her, and her failing health. There are also religious and inspirational quotes as well as reminiscences about earlier times in O'Connor's life. The entries become increasingly sparse as O'Connor's health worsens and she spends more and more time in the hospital and in bed.

#### **Subseries V. Correspondence and Citations, 1952-1957**

##### **Box 8**

This subseries contains three letters as well as one citation. All of the letters are to O'Connor, and focus on different subjects. The first is from a man named "Mike" who gives O'Connor advice on how to record and update immigrant case files. It is undated. The second letter is from Walter H. Bieringer, who was the Chairman of the Massachusetts Displaced Persons Commission. In the letter he thanks O'Connor for all of her efforts on the Commission, and asks her to accept the gift of a watch as the Commission's expression of appreciation. This letter was written in 1952. The final letter was written in 1957 by Senator John F. Kennedy. He thanks O'Connor for her thoughts and encouragement regarding his desire to pass a new immigration bill. Only a photocopy of the letter is available. Finally, the subseries contains two different copies of a 1953 citation from Emmanuel College awarding O'Connor an honorary Doctorate of Law.

### **Series II. Personal Papers, 1900?-2000?**

#### **Subseries I. Images, 1900?-2000?**

##### **Box 8**

This subseries contains multiple photographs, mostly of Alice O'Connor and her close family members, including her sisters, cousins, nephews, and mother. Most of the photographs are candid shots taken outside. There are also formal portrait photographs of both O'Connor and her mother. Other photographs include those taken of Alice with her coworkers at the Division of Immigration and Naturalization. They were given to O'Connor by her coworkers or her supervisors, one being a former governor of Massachusetts. There are also two photograph albums detailing O'Connor's 1910 trip to the United Kingdom. Finally, the subseries includes a colorful certificate from the St.

Francis Purgatorial Society. It states that O'Connor is a perpetual member of the Society and that upon her death the Society will hold a High Mass in her honor.

Note: Original images have been removed for preservation reasons. Photocopies have been left within the collection.

## **Subseries II. Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings, 1944-1983**

### **Box 8**

This subseries contains letters and postcards dating between 1944 and 1963, newspaper clippings dating from 1952 to 1983, as well as Alice O'Connor's death certificate from 1968. Most of the letters and postcards were written by O'Connor, although one was written by Dennis E. Callahan, who was the Secretary of the School Committee in 1944. The letters/postcards discuss O'Connor's views on the thesis she wrote in 1914, advice given to the Boston Police Department regarding the Boston Strangler case, the death of Eleanor O'Connor in 1944, O'Connor's pleasure with the weather during one of her vacations, her opinions on former Governor Leverett Saltonstall, and the history of Irish Immigration in Boston. The copy of O'Connor's death certificate shows that she died on May 1<sup>st</sup> of 1968 due to cerebral thrombosis. The three newspaper clippings discuss the exhibition of artwork created by Eleanor O'Connor in 1952, Alice O'Connor's death in 1968, and unsung heroines from Greater Lawrence (one being Alice O'Connor) in 1983.

## **Subseries III. Theses, Booklets, and Diaries, 1903-1914**

### **Boxes 6, 7, and 8**

This subseries consists of the Lawrence High School Bulletin on the class of 1903, a booklet containing photographs of important places and buildings in Lawrence, several of Alice O'Connor's diaries dating between 1910 and 1954, as well as the thesis she wrote in 1914. The High School Bulletin focuses on the classes of 1903, of which Alice O'Connor was the valedictorian. It includes the text of her Farewell Address to her class as well as a class prophesy saying that O'Connor would become very wealthy. The Lawrence booklet has a short history of the city as well as photographs of the mills, business districts, housing complexes, public buildings, and other important sites. O'Connor's 1914 thesis discusses the situation of immigrants in Lawrence. It includes the history of immigration in Lawrence, a description of the current population of immigrants, the places these immigrants worked, the discrimination they faced, and relief agencies available to immigrants in need of help.

O'Connor's diaries include one that describes her July, 1910 vacation to England. She discusses the many people she meets on her trip, the historic places she visits, as well as many of the activities in which she participates on the boat to England and during her travels on land. The other four diaries, which date between 1928 and 1954, contain inspirational and religious quotes from various sources, poems, and details of O'Connor's personal life in 1936 and 1946.

Note: Several of O'Connor's professional diaries have a considerable amount of personal information and activities within them.

### **Series III. Historical Family Papers, 1846-1988?**

#### **Subseries I. O'Connor Family Papers, 1871-1988?**

##### **Boxes 8 and 9**

This subseries consists mostly of photographs depicting Alice O'Connor's ancestors from the O'Connor family. The photographs are mainly located in photograph albums and cases, with only a fraction of the people being identified. Some of the names listed include John E Sweeney (a first cousin of one of the O'Connors), Mary Sweeney, Mary O'Connor (Alice O'Connor's Aunt), Maurice Mahoney, Maggie Leary, Charles O'Donnell, John Joyce, Ellen O'Connor, Abigail O'Connor (Alice O'Connor's Aunt), John Higgins, Timothy Sweeney, John P. O'Connor (Alice O'Connor's father), Mary O'Connor Sullivan, and Annie Hart. Aside from the photographs there are also handwritten notes on the descendants of Matthew O'Connor and birth, marriage, and death dates for multiple members of the O'Connor, Brassill, Coakley, Sweeney, O'Donnell, and Sullivan families.

The other documents mostly focus on Alice O'Connor's close family. The records include her mother and father's death certificates, their wedding announcement, a probate court document declaring Susanna O'Connor the administrator of Mary A. Sullivan's estate, photocopies of handwritten notes detailing important dates in John P. O'Connor's life, a letter to Susanna T. O'Connor (Alice O'Connor's sister) with genealogical information concerning the date her mother came to the United States, a booklet created by Susanna O'Connor containing handwritten recipes, and a police journal kept by John P. O'Connor detailing crimes committed in Lawrence in 1888 and 1889. Finally, there are three books, all owned by John P. O'Connor: *Regulations for the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia* from the 1870s; *Historical Sketch of the Old Sixth Regiment*, published in 1885; and a copy of the 1871 *Lawrence City Directory*.

#### **Subseries II. Brassill Family Papers, 1846-1926?**

##### **Box 8**

This subseries documents the history of the Brassill Family from approximately 1846 to 1926. The majority of the records are genealogy documents, including handwritten family trees, copies of immigration records, wills, baptismal records, and copies of diary entries. There are also legal records focusing on Honora F. Brassill of Lawrence, who was the executor of Bridget Brassill's will in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other legal records include deeds and wills dating as far back as 1864. These records focus on Honora F. Brassill, Bridget Brassill, Johanna Brassill, and Patrick Brassill. The subseries also includes a set of materials focusing on the Coakley family, whose members married into the Brassill family. These records focus mostly on the wedding of Jan Coakley to Richard H. Forshay and life of Marjorie (Putnam) Coakley. The records include newspaper clippings, wedding announcements, and letters from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally, the subseries contains two photograph albums. One of these albums holds 19<sup>th</sup> century portrait photographs of Brassill, O'Connor, and Joyce family members, although most photographs are not identified. Named individuals include Abigail O'Connor, Nora



Brassill, Susanna Brassill, and Jennie Joyce. The album was owned by Katie A. Brassill. The other photograph album contains candid images of men and women at the beach, on boats, and near log cabins. None of the people are identified, but a family member has written a question in the front cover wondering if they were relatives from Rockport.

### **Subseries III. Sullivan Family Papers, 1897-1968**

#### **Box 8**

This subseries mostly contains records relating to the buying and selling of 19 Logan Street by Michael F. and Mary A. Sullivan. This includes deeds, correspondence, and certifications of payment for the mortgage of the house. These documents date from 1897 to 1918. There is also a 1968 appraisal of the property, along with a picture, by Rudolph S. Dietrich for John S. Sullivan. Michael F. Sullivan's 1926 to 1928 Broadway Savings Bank book is also included, as well as that of Richard J. Sullivan for 1926.

The subseries also contains two autograph books owned by Susanna Sullivan. They contain the autographs of such known individuals as President Calvin Coolidge, President William Howard Taft, President Herbert Hoover, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Finally, there is a scrapbook containing newspaper clippings related to the Sullivan family in Lawrence, including obituaries, work activities, World War I, and the school system. Names mentioned include Captain Michael F. Sullivan, John S. Sullivan, and Richard J. Sullivan. It dates from 1919 to approximately 1945.