

MSS. Collection #106

Ralph L. Lewis Papers, ca. 1917-1955. 4 boxes (57 folders), ca. 1500 items.

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

INTRODUCTION

The Ralph L. Lewis Papers pertain to the life and accomplishments of Ralph Lewis, who was elected to city council in 1933 and became mayor of Greensboro in 1939. Lewis also had a long-standing and distinguished military career, earning multiple commendations as well as the rank of colonel. The bulk of the materials focus on Lewis' military and political careers, while a small amount relate to his personal life.

The collection includes correspondence, photographs, diaries, recordings, printed materials such as pamphlets and booklets, newspaper clippings, maps, and various military documents, including personnel file from when Lewis was stationed in Trinidad. Research areas include: World War I, World War II, especially the home front, military life, and foreign military bases, such as Trinidad and Aruba, military procedures, Greensboro politics and high society, and national politics.

Arrangement: The Ralph Lewis Papers are organized into eleven series according to subject and document type. Within each series, materials are organized by document type, then alphabetically. The series are: **Correspondence, Diaries, Financial, Genealogy, Legal, Literary, Military, Photographs, Printed Materials, Recordings, and Scrapbook.**

Provenance: The collection was presented to the GHM on December 30, 1991, by Ralph L. Lewis, Jr., and assigned the accession number 1991.190.1.

Processing: Stephen Catlett began processing this collection. The final arrangement and finding aid were completed by Christine Dumoulin, Archives Assistant, in March 2004.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ralph L. Lewis was born on December 7, 1893, in Westchester County, New York, the son of Frank D. Lewis and Josephine Deems. At the age of sixteen, Ralph and his family moved to Greensboro, where he lived for forty-five years. He graduated from Greensboro High School in 1912. For the next several years, he played baseball for the Greensboro Patriots and semi-professional basketball.

In 1917, he began his military career by enlisting in the National Guard and worked as a member of the 31st Ambulance Company. In 1918, he attended Infantry Officers School. Lewis spent the next thirty-six years in the armed services. His impressive career includes working as an instructor of officer training at Fort Gordon in Augusta, GA, commanding officer of air bases

in the Caribbean, such as Trinidad and Aruba during World War II, and finally retiring as a Colonel. During his career, he was awarded many commendations, including a Legion of Merit medal and several ribbons from the Army.

Lewis was also active in Greensboro politics and was elected to City Council in 1933. In 1939, he was elected Mayor of Greensboro, a position he held until he was called up for active duty in the National Guard in September, 1941. He also ran a second time for city council in 1955 prior to his death.

As a civilian, Lewis worked primarily in the real estate and insurance business. He was connected for 12 years with the J.E. Latham Company and took over the business in 1937. Lewis' civic activities were numerous, serving as president of the King Cotton Hotel, Greensboro Country Club, and as deacon of the First Presbyterian Church. He was married to Laura Lynn Wiley and had one son, Ralph L. Jr. Ralph Lewis passed away on May 30, 1955, from a heart attack.

Biographical Sources: The biographical information was gathered from newspaper clippings, Ralph's funeral diary, and various military records within the collection.

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

The types of materials in this collection include correspondence, photographs, military records, printed materials such as newspaper clippings, magazines, and booklets, sound recordings, diaries, scrapbooks, and financial records such as receipts. The bulk of the items pertain to Ralph's military and professional careers with some materials relating to his civic involvement and family life. The family materials mostly pertain to Ralph's wife, Laura Lynn "Larrie" Lewis and their son, Ralph Jr.

The materials pertaining to Lewis' political career include correspondence, photographs, and printed materials such as newspaper clippings, pamphlets, and bulletins. A letter from Mayor E.B. Jeffress congratulating Ralph on his assistance with Lindbergh Day on October 17th, 1927 (1:6) and a letter from the League of Women Voters invite Lewis to a candidates meeting for those running for city council on April 16, 1955 (1:8). There is also a primary bulletin from April 24th, 1939 listing candidates for Greensboro city council (9:3) and a municipal ballot (9:2). Photographs include Ralph shaking hands with an unidentified city official and a formal portrait by Harrell's Studio (8:2).

Several series contain materials documenting Lewis' long military career, the majority from World War II. Series 1 contains correspondence while he was stationed in Trinidad, British West Indies. One letter from Larrie, discusses a speech made by President Roosevelt before the governing board of the Pan-American Union proclaiming an "unlimited national emergency" (1:2). An appreciation letter to Lewis from a Mrs. Whitsett says she was proud of him as a "representative of our town" (1:7). Printed materials include army transport tickets, programs, and a training circular from Camp Sevier (7:8). Other documents include property issue slips (7:6), notes Lewis kept while stationed in Trinidad (6:2), and retirement records (7:14).

The photographs are a combination of family and military images. The family photos are mostly of Larrie, Ralph Jr., and family friends. There are several photos taken after a heavy snow fall, possibly at their house on Cridland Rd. in Greensboro (8:1). There are also images of Ralph

Jr. as a child and as a young adult (8:2). The military photos are a combination of images from Fort Moultrie and from Trinidad (8:3).

The printed materials contain items such as maps, directories, certificates, magazines and newsletters, and pamphlets. There are items relating to the Greensboro Country Club, including golf score cards, a membership list, and invitations (9:7). The newspaper clippings relate primarily to events in Greensboro and events surrounding World War II. An earlier clipping announces the 31st Ambulance Corps to report for duty at Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia (9:14). Others report on Lewis' arrival to Trinidad for duty (9:16), an increase in the size of the housing commission (9:15), and what local community members thought of Winston Churchill (9:18).

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

1. Correspondence. 8 folders (ca. 120 items). 1918-1955.

This series contains a combination of personal and professional correspondence. Prior to 1941, the correspondence is scant and consists mostly of personal letters and administrative notices from the military. The personal correspondence is mostly letters from Ralph's wife, "Larrie" while he was stationed overseas and are personal in nature. These letters give researchers a look at local and national events prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Larrie writes frequently of feeling lonely while he's away. A letter from May 11th says, "Maybe writing to you will ward off that "Sunday afternoon feeling" (1:1). There are also interesting accounts of how military wives conducted their lives on the home front. Larrie frequently relays events of the day to Ralph. She writes in a letter from September 16th that "all afternoon the roar of Army motors as a convoy passed Wendover & went out to the Battleground for encampment" (1:2). A letter to Ralph dated June 4th, 1941 discusses the harsh conditions in Trinidad being reported and that they "believe you're doing right by our boys" (1:7). Lewis writes to the editor of the *Greensboro Daily News* stating he "did not want the boys to be represented as softies or spineless" (1:7). The miscellaneous correspondence contains an interesting letter from Ralph to Larrie, giving explicit instructions on taking care of the house and making preparations for her and their son, Ralph Jr., to join him in Trinidad (1:4).

2. Diaries. 3 folders (3 items). 1941-1955.

The three diaries in this series document different times in the life of Ralph Lewis. The first one is a 1941 diary, which documents various events while Ralph was in the military stationed in Trinidad. A 1952 real estate diary, which contains information on properties that Lewis sold, including plats and addresses. Finally, there is his funeral diary containing his birth and death information, floral honoraries, and friends and family who came to the service. There were several prominent Greensboro residents in attendance, such as Herman Cone, E.L. Faulconer, C.M. Vanstory, and John Kellenberger (2:1).

3. Financial. 1 folder (3 items). 1926-1948.

This series contains mostly receipts pertaining to the Lewis family and Ralph's real estate ventures. There are tax receipts for the Lewis home at 1118 Cridland Road, a list of assets and

liabilities for the company, Lewis & Stevenson, and a receipt from Hanes Funeral Home pertaining to the death of a Paul G. Trogdon.

4. Genealogy. 1 folder (2 items). No Date.

This genealogy traces the lineage of the Bernhardt and Linn families from Europe to North Carolina. The families may be related to Laura Lynn, but it is unclear. The information pertains primarily to marriages and children.

5. Legal. 1 folder (1 item). 1955.

The item in this series is a resolution passed by the City of Greensboro acknowledging the death of Colonel Ralph L. Lewis and that he will be missed.

6. Literary. 2 folders (3 items). 1945.

Folder one contains a humorous address to 1st Lieutenant Everett N. Decker from the Service Club & Cafeteria after his death and an address titled "A Challenge to 1945 Christianity" (6:1). The second folder contains miscellaneous notes written by Lewis relating to various activities, possibly on the military bases of Trinidad or Aruba (6:2).

7. Military. 15 folders (ca. 250 items). 1918-1955.

This series contains materials encompassing Lewis' long and distinguished military career. The correspondence is mostly personal, written by friends and contemporaries. Ben Cone wrote to Lewis on June 13, 1941 giving his appreciation for "the Guilford County boys in raising fund to operate the USO" (7:3). Lewis also received several telegrams congratulating him on his promotion to Colonel and "Godspeed from the citizens of Greensboro (7:3). The commendations consist of several letters of appreciation and general orders recommending Lewis for several awards, including a Legion of Honor medal and several ribbons for his outstanding service (7:4). Other orders include travel authorization of dependents, assuming command of station of Chacachacare Island in Trinidad (7:6), debit slips, and clearance sheets (7:7). The printed materials consist of items such as cigarette ration cards (7:9), newspaper clippings (7:10) a 1911 booklet of infantry drills (7:11), and a 1953 roster of reserve units (7:15). The roster includes both white and colored units. Of particular interest are the retirement records for Lewis including immunization and physical exams, a letter to Mrs. Lewis regarding death benefits, a 1955, booklet outlining U.S. Air Force Retirement payments, and a statement of service (7:14).

8. Photographs. 3 folders (ca. 220 items). 1897-1954.

The images in this series relate to both family and the military. There are images of Ralph Lewis during his tenure as mayor and while in the military. One image shows Ralph with the 28,000,000th Ford car assembled and receiving an award at city hall (8:2). Another is of Ralph in a team portrait while playing for the Greensboro Patriots (8:2). The military photos consist of multiple images from Fort Moultrie, including the deck of a gun boat, and men on a carrier ship

(8:3). There are also images of Ralph seated at his desk, a military parade, and of the officers club in Trinidad during an event (8:3).

The family photos are mostly personal of Laura Lynn Lewis and Ralph Lewis Jr. There are images of Laura Lynn entertaining at home, on vacation at a beach (8:2), and walking with her son down an unidentified street (8:1). The images of Ralph Jr. are as a child and a young adult, including in his military uniform, with friends (8:1), and a formal class portrait (8:2).

9. Printed Materials. 26 folders (ca. 200 items). 1917-1954.

This series includes a combination of military items, such as newspaper clippings, cards, pamphlets, and certificates, personal items, and items relating to Lewis' political and civic involvement. There are several membership cards, including an American Red Cross and Trinidad Country Club card (9:4). Newspaper clippings relating to the city of Greensboro including the arrival of the "trackless trolley" in 1934, a 1939 proposal to create a municipally operated public golf course, and debate over a city ordinance potentially allowing the erection of a prison camp (9:15). The military clippings include an article on Mrs. Lewis at Fort Moultrie discussing army life, the arrival of Col. Lewis to the military base at Trinidad, and an article on the death of flying ace George Preddy (9:16). There is a booklet titled "Tips for Train Travel" to aid soldiers traveling during war time (9:1), two copies of *Time* magazine from 1941 (9:10), and an interesting pamphlet called "Know Your Candidates" from the 1955 city council race in Greensboro (9:23). There are also several certificates acknowledging the completion of several Army extension courses, certificates of service, and honoring Lewis' appointment as Colonel (9:5).

10. Recordings. 1 folder (2 items). Ca. 1955-1962.

This series consists of two 33 1/3 records. The first one titled "Greatest Moments in Sports" contains excerpts from such sports legends as Babe Ruth, Joe Lewis, Red Barber, Jesse Owens, and Lou Gehrig. The second recording "America's First Man in Orbit," recounts astronaut John Glenn's voyage in the booster rocket carrying the Mercury Space Capsule "Friendship."

11. Scrapbook. 1 folder (1 item). 1937-1938.

This scrapbook contains newspaper clippings, documenting when Lewis opened a new real estate and insurance company, taking over the J.E. Latham Company in 1937. The clippings consist of announcements, such as Lewis' company opening up for business and various properties that he was responsible for selling.

FOLDER LISTING

Series	Folder	Contents	
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	2	"	-- Mrs. Ralph Lewis (1941 September-November)
	3	"	-- Mrs. Ralph Lewis (1945-1946)
	4	"	-- Mrs. Ralph Lewis -- Miscellaneous
	5	"	-- Ralph L. Lewis (1918)
	6	"	-- Ralph L. Lewis (1927)
	7	"	-- Ralph L. Lewis (1940-1949)
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5	1	Legal	-- Resolution (1955)
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7	1	Military	-- Army Extension Courses
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	7	"	-- Personal Orders File
	8	"	-- Printed -- Bulletins -- <i>Training Circular 10</i> (May 23, 1918)
	9	"	-- Printed -- Cards
	10	"	-- Printed -- Newspaper Clippings (1940)
	11	"	-- Printed -- Pamphlets (1911)
	12	"	-- Printed -- Pan American World Airways (1944-1946)
	13	"	-- Printed -- Programs (1940-1946)
	14	"	-- Retirement
	15	"	-- Roster
8	1	Photographs	-- Family
	2	"	-- Family
	3	"	-- Military
9	1	Printed Materials	-- Booklets (1940-1945)
	2	"	-- Broadsides (1939)
	3	"	-- Bulletins (1939)
	4	"	-- Cards (1941)
	5	"	-- Certificates (1923-1946)
	6	"	-- Directories (1939-1940)
	7	"	-- Greensboro Country Club (1945-1955)

	8	“	-- ID Cards (1945-1946)
	9	“	-- Magazines -- <i>The Snapshot</i> (1939-1940)
	10	“	-- Magazines -- <i>Time</i> (1941)
	11	“	-- Manuals -- <i>Manual of Interior</i> (1917)
	12	“	-- Maps -- City of Greensboro (ca. 1930)
	13	“	-- Miscellaneous
	14	“	-- Newspaper Clippings (1917)
	15	“	-- Newspaper Clippings (1931-1939)
	16	“	-- Newspaper Clippings (1940)
	17	“	-- Newspaper Clippings (1941-1949)
	18	“	-- Newspaper Clippings (1952)
	19	“	-- Newspaper Clippings (No Date)
	20	“	-- Newsletter -- <i>The Jaycee Projector</i> (1940)
	21	“	-- Newspapers -- The Trinidad News
	22	“	-- Pamphlets -- "A Complete Home Financing Service"
	23	“	-- Pamphlets -- "Know Your Candidates"
	24	“	-- Pamphlets -- "Lest We Forget"
	25	“	-- Pamphlets -- "Passenger Procedure on Aircraft"
	26	“	-- Programs
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11	1	Scrapbook	

Index to the Ralph L. Lewis Papers (ca. 1917-1955)

Note: The numbers following the name/subject entry – e.g. 1:1 – indicate in which Series#:Folder# (or, if no “:”, Series only) that name/topic can be found.

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