

BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

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Ruth Ulam Frutchey and Harlan Clark

WWII Love Letters

Ohio: 1942-1944

\$2000



A collection of over 370 letters with their mailing envelopes, giving both sides of a correspondence between Ruth Ulam Frutchey and Harlan Clark. Also included are check stubs, a couple of portrait photographs and a few letters from Harlan C. to Ruth in the 1950s, written during a road trip. All letters are very good or better with some light wear and soiling to envelopes.

At the beginning of their writing, Mrs. Frutchey is the head laboratory technician at Millard Fillmore Hospital in Buffalo, New York and later is employed in a similar role at a tubercular sanitarium in Youngstown, Ohio and the Youngstown Hospital Association. She began her career in nursing and later moved into lab research and testing; Mr. Clark was an engineer and project crew leader for Curtiss-Wright Corporation at their Columbus, Ohio location. By the end of World War II, Curtiss-Wright was the largest aircraft manufacturer in the United States, supplying whole aircraft in large numbers to the U.S. armed forces.

The basis for the Ruth-Harlan friendship starts through mutual friends, led to sharing books and reviews of shows and movies seen, comparing notes and feelings, and gradually realizing a connection that culminated with their romantic involvement. Ruth was very unhappily married and Harlan is sympathetic and interested in her; as time passes and the friendship deepens, Ruth's marriage falls irrevocably apart after attempts at patching it up – a poignant note from her describes one of these sessions in which Ruth and her husband try to reach compromise, on her part, to give up being so angry and on his, “giving up brunettes”. Ruth finally divorced her husband of ten years (the divorce papers are here) and quietly marries Harlan. The ‘signs of affection’ between the two are physically given by the many letters ‘signed’ by Ruth with her lipstick-kisses, and with a lovely little poetry-and-photo letter she sends to Harlan expressing her fondness for him. On his part, he arranges for their sometimes clandestine meetings, paying for trips to meet, buying her a new hat, taking her to shows and dances, dining, sailing. Perhaps most telling is the frequency of correspondence, sometimes letters going back and forth twice a day.

Although the love story is the underlying theme throughout, at the same time both were committed professionals in their fields. Ruth writes concerning her laboratory work, fellow employees and employers, the lab conditions and professional activities. Being a woman in a scientific field it is imperative that she prove herself and she takes pride in her work. From Harlan, much of the correspondence is on similar work-related themes and undertakings at Curtiss. When the possibility of a job with a different employer is offered midway through the correspondence, it was impossible for him to switch jobs from Curtiss, as he was ‘essential to their war effort,’ according to them. He further discusses his work as a senior engineer on various projects which included armament group leader, working on a new type of machine gun installation, and armament design changes. He also comments on the morale at the plant, fellow employees and bosses, visits from higher-ups, and frustration with incompetence.

The war is an overarching aspect of their communications. It becomes tough to travel and visit when gasoline is rationed and trains and other transport are limited, and they both work long and tedious hours due to war needs at their respective employments. Many of the younger people having been drafted or moved, there is difficulty and expense associated with telephone calls and the fact that up until their marriage, they were living with other people and so had little chance for private communication, which became very precious to them both.

A letter from Harlan dated March 13, 1944 reads, “...the Engineering Department is in a turmoil at the moment. The draft situation has the boys on pins and needles. No one seems to be certain as to the situation in view of the fact that the replacement schedule expires on March 27 and will not be renewed. However, engineers are on the critical list and will receive occupational deferment as long as any other classification does...”; on the same date, Ruth writes of a death in her family and of her love for Harlan ‘...I know this is rather a bad bit but I don't seem ever to have time and peace for contemplation - except when I'm with you. - and when with you do I contemplate? No - I tease, laugh, fight or make love to you...”

An extensive and interesting exchange between two people, balancing their emotions with their vital government occupations. Their written relationship giving much background to the tempo and relationship difficulties of the times during World War II. [BTC#394416]