

Margaret Hepburn and Cecil Snyder

[Archive] World War I Letters

Freehold, New Jersey: 1914-1924



A correspondence of 380 letters between Margaret Hepburn while attending Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts and her future husband Cecil Snyder while he was serving with the National Guard and Army in World War I. Most of the letters include their original envelopes near fine. Also included are four photographs of Army barracks, a button, two coins, and a military metal. All items housed in two metal boxes that belonged to Margaret.

A collection of love letters to Margaret Hepburn while attending Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts from her sweetheart Cecil Snyder during his tour of duty in the First World War. The letters range from 1914 through 1924 with a large number of them between 1917 and 1919. Margaret and Cecil were both from Freehold, New Jersey and were close friends, with Cecil writing to Margaret while she attended college and he was involved with the war effort back home. The early letters don't allude to much in the way of romance with Cecil referring to Margaret as his "dear friend" and often discussing other women with her. Much of the letters from 1916 and 1917 focus on Margaret's family in Freehold and the war effort. Cecil is unsure if the U.S. will enter the war at all but is willing to do his part should the moment arise. A letter dated January 24, 1917 reads, "I've just been reading, or rather studying, the President's last speech, on 'Peace without Victory,' etc. That must be a bitter pill for the British to swallow. It certainly is a most remarkable document, but I'm afraid his ideas are entirely too idealistic for the modern world. However, here's hoping!" During this time Margaret was studying sociology and music at Smith, where she would graduate in 1918. Cecil began his military career with the National Guard but during the course of 1917 he decided to switch and reenlist in the infantry and attend officers training school. Joking about this he writes, "my discharge has come through – so I'm a soldier boy no more! This is the life! I can tell them all where to go – till I reenlist."

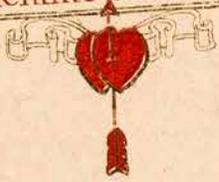
By the summer of 1917 Cecil had “won” Margaret and was writing more effusive letters to her. It was also then that he was sent from Trenton to Fort Meyers, Virginia where his duty became more “active” and he was enrolled in the 12th Officer Training Company. From Fort Meyers he moves to Camp Lee in Petersburg, Virginia where he gets a job as an officer at a training barracks. His letters from this time discuss classes he was taking, their friends back home, and Margaret’s accomplishments in school. After graduation in 1918 Margaret was deciding whether to apply to a nursing program at Vassar and received a letter from one of the instructors advising her on some of her questions about applying including could a married woman join. “I cannot tell you how much I admire your spirit and devotion to your fiancé and your country in trying to decide this momentous question.” The letter also says, “In the next place neither we nor a hospital would wish to hold you if your husband came home wounded and you would surely be free to give up without any suspicion of you being a ‘quitter’.”

Soon after in 1918 Margaret married Cecil but he is still enlisted and writes to her as often as before. In a February letter from that year he writes, “my dear wife, which means a whole world of things, Marge.” Another letter from around this time reads, “two letters and a telegram in one day – for no special reason but that I love my wife!” Cecil was sent to France after training and preparation. He writes to Margaret that “I’m anxious to get settled to work and to live. I’ve been “existing” quite long enough. Nearly thirty years. Gee! But that sounds ancient to me.” In response to Margaret saying she has “four grey hairs” Cecil writes, “I don’t think I’ve developed a single “worry” sign, guess the reason for that might be that our big worries over here didn’t last long enough at any single time to have any lasting effect – generally being limited to the time it took to get from one shell hole to the next! Sometimes thirty yards would look like a mile at that! But all that talk about the ‘terrible suspense of the hours before going over the top’ – is a lot of hot air! Or else my imagination is, or rather was, on vacation at those times – and I’m glad it was, for you would get scared often enough after you started out.” Later that year Cecil was sent home and reunited with his new wife.

After the war the couple had a daughter Anne in 1920 and later moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin to “further Cecil’s career.” It was in Wisconsin, according to her biographical notes at Smith, that Margaret “began volunteering at the Orthopedic School in Kenosha in 1931.” A decade later she “became a charter member of Kenosha Hospital Auxiliary.” She went on to the board of the Committee of Hospital Auxiliaries of the American Hospital Association and was involved in “International Hospital Federation meetings in Sweden in 1956 and Belgium in 1962.” In the 1950s she became the Kenosha Hospital’s full time Director of Volunteers and expanded the use of volunteers in the hospital to assist with patient comfort.

These letters draw an insight into the education and love life of an accomplished woman as well as offering a detailed account of the First World War from an American perspective. [BTC#417214]

Valentine Greetings.



Wagoner J. Leslie Bishop
Co. D, 317 Ammunition Train,
American Expeditionary Forces.



Sunday - Feb 16 - '19

7⁴⁵ PM

just three weeks ago at this
time that you were writing
to me my dear - from the
date of your last letter.
And I also have the "open
fire" that you spoke of,
too - tho here it is a
necessity and not a
luxury, as at home - being
the other method of heating

H. C. D. Snyder
Co. 9 319 854
Am. E. F.

Official Mail



Mrs C. D. Snyder
Monument Pl
Freehold
New Jersey
U.S.A

C. D. Snyder
12th St Prof

Monday - 6¹⁵ PM

Dearest - I don't know what
has gone wrong with me
this afternoon - perhaps it
is the effect of this beautiful
fall day, for it has been perfect
- and I've wanted to be
with you, dear, so much -
that I've been scarcely able
to



Miss Margaret Hepburn
Freehold
New Jersey



