

Inventory of the

Lyford-Davis Family
Winnebago County, Illinois

Collection

In the

Regional History Center

RC 356

INTRODUCTION

Carrie Meyer, her grandfather's elder cousin was Elmo Davis, donated the Lyford-Davis Family Collection to the Regional History Center on October 21, 2016. Additional materials were donated by Meyer on January 24, 2017 and August 17, 2017.

Property rights in the collection belong to the Regional History Center; literary rights are dedicated to the public. Researchers have access the digital transcripts of May Lyford-Davis's (1896-1944) and Emily Lyford's (1907-1915) diaries, but researchers are not permitted to have copies of the transcripts per the donor's request.

Linear feet of shelf space: 2.25; 160 MB (213 files)
Number of containers: 4
Northern Illinois Regional History Center
Collection 356

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The core collection consists of the records of the Lyford-Davis Family from 1858 to 1951. It contains family diaries, ledgers, calendars, card games, photographs, and books. The collection documents the Lyford-Davis family life in their Midwestern farming community. The diaries document daily events and are mostly complete. Also in the collection are research notes and working papers for Carrie Meyer's books about the family; the 2005 and 2007 publications are included in the collection.

The materials are arranged (loosely) by record type or creator and then date. May's diary of 1938 is absent from collection.

Digital files of diary transcripts for May Lyford-Davis (1896-1944) and Emily Lyford (1907-1917) as well as working papers for Carrie Meyer's *Founding farmers: roots of agriculture and industry in northern Illinois* are available to researchers in the Center's Reading Room.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The grandparents and parents of Elmo and May family moved to Winnebago County in the late 1830s. May Lyford and Elmo "E.M." Davis were both born in 1873 and grew up on family farms in the same community. May and Elmo married in 1901 and started their farm in the old Guilford Township (now part of Rockford) cross from Elmo's parents farm. They didn't birth children of their own but they had nieces, nephews, and the children of their friends. Their extended family and friends were very much involved in their daily lives. May and Elmo interacted with other local farmers who were a part of a type of threshing and machinery circle that lasted until the late 1930s. The Davis' were business savvy people and were able to accumulate wealth, including

enough savings to allow them to continue operation through the hardships of the Great Depression. May cared for the garden and cooking chores while Elmo cared for majority of the more difficult farm labor such as grinding feed, cultivating, and loading corn.

May's dairies are a prominent part of the collection and contain details about farm and family life. She recorded daily activities and weather patterns from 1896 until her death on February 24, 1944. Examples of recorded events include a furnace fire on September 11, 1941 as well as electricity being disconnected for about fourteen hours due to a strong windstorm on July 25- 26, 1941. Records of major advancements in technology, which lead to dramatic changes in society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are also common topics found in the dairies. An example of such advancements is a change to the modes of travel: buggy rides in 1900 to gas powered automobiles in 1901. Over the years May suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, eye problems, and bouts of pneumonia. Eventually she lost her ability to walk due to rheumatoid arthritis and Elmo helped carry or drive her around for support. Although she struggled to walk she still managed to do light housework requiring the use of her hands as well as sew and continue to write in her dairies. Elmo eventually took over the household duties and began penning diary entries for May in the late 30s when she was too ill to write. May's death was recorded in her last diary entry by Elmo in a February 25, 1944. Her death made it difficult for Elmo to live alone so he moved from their farm to their house located in Rockford, Illinois. The Lyford boys farmed the land while Elmo made improvements. He continued to travel and visit family and friends in his spare time. Later in 1955, Elmo died of pneumonia and left the land to a daughter of his cousin Fred Davis.

SUBJECT TRACINGS

Agriculture
Dairies, 1870-1909
Dairies, 1910-1960
Farm Life
Great Depression
Winnebago County (Ill.)

COLLECTION INVENTORY

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1	1	“Clay Not Dead but Soulless” n.d.
	2	<i>Days on the Family Farm</i> , Carrie Meyer, 2007
	3-4	Photo Negatives taken by Elmo Davis, 1927-1929, n.d.
	5	Family Photographs, 1900s
	6	Joseph Davis Ledger, 1865-1890
	2	1-6
3	1	Diaries (possibly recorded by Joseph Davis), 1858-1890
	2	Emily Lyford Diaries, 1907-1917
	3	Family Card Games
	4	Elmo M. Davis Ledger, 1910- 1919
	5	Family Records and Books: Album Book, 1886-1887 Address Books, n.d. Diary, n.d. <i>Daily Light of the Day Path, a devotional text book</i> <i>As A Man Thinketh</i> , James Allen, ca. 1920
	6	May L. Davis Diaries, 1896-1920
4	1	May L. Davis Diaries, 1921-1944
	2	Diary transcripts for May and Emily; working papers for <i>Founding Farmers</i> , Carrie Meyer, 2005 (2 USB Drives)
<u>ADDENDUM</u>		
5	3	Research notes, Carrie Meyer May L. Davis:
	4	Investment records, 1930-1940
	5	Journal
	6	Recipe book
	1-2	Elmo M. Davis: Financial Records, 1895-1900, 1945-1951
	3	Financial Records and Quotes Journal, 1915-1929
4	Standard Oil Invoices Company, Cherry Valley (IL), 1930	
	5-7	Ledgers at Havenpark, 1939-1944
	8	Receipt books, Elmo M. and May L. Davis, 1940-1943