Guide to the Betsy Plank collection on Helen Keller
MSS.2397

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists’ Toolkit
October 14, 2014
Describing Archives: A Content Standard
# Table of Contents

Summary Information ........................................................................................................................................... 3

Biographical/Historical note ............................................................................................................................. 4

Scope and Contents note .................................................................................................................................... 4

Administrative Information ............................................................................................................................... 5

Controlled Access Headings ............................................................................................................................. 5

Collection Inventory ......................................................................................................................................... 7
### Summary Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Repository</strong></th>
<th>University Libraries Division of Special Collections, The University of Alabama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creator - Collector</strong></td>
<td>Plank, Betsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creator - Author</strong></td>
<td>Thomson, Polly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>Betsy Plank collection on Helen Keller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>after 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent</strong></td>
<td>0.2 Linear feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>Materials about Helen Keller and her companions, Annie Sullivan Macy and Polly Thomson. Much of the correspondence is written by Polly Thomson to Adelyn Hood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Preferred Citation note

Betsy Plank collection on Helen Keller, University Libraries Division of Special Collections, The University of Alabama
Biographical/Historical note

Helen Keller, daughter of Arthur H. and Kate Adams Keller, was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, on June 27, 1880. At the age of 19 months, she contracted possibly either scarlet fever or meningitis. Whatever the illness was, it left her deaf and blind. When Helen was seven, the Kellers hired Anne Sullivan, a former student of the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts, to teach Hellen how to communicate again.

After studying at the Perkins Institute from 1888 to 1894, Helen and Anne moved to New York where Hellen attended the Wright-Humason's and Horace Mann's schools for the deaf. In 1896, Helen entered the Cambridge School for Young Ladies before being admitted to Radcliffe College. She graduated in 1904, becoming the first deaf blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. In order to communicate with others as conveniently as she could, Helen learned to speak and spent much of the rest of her life giving speeches and lectures. She became an advocate for people with disabilities, she was a suffragist, a pacifist, and a radical socialist. In 1920, she helped found the American Civil Liberties Union. She wrote twelve books including her autobiographies, *The Story of My Life* (1903) and *The World I Live In* (1908).

After her marriage to John Macy in 1904, Anne Sullivan's health began failing in 1914. Polly Thomson, a young woman from Scotland with no experience with deaf or blind people, was hired to keep house. She eventually worked as their secretary, and later, after Anne Sullivan's death in 1936, as Helen's constant companion. The two travelled widely, raising funds for the blind. In 1957, Polly suffered a stroke and never fully recovered. A nurse, Winnie Corbally, originally brought in to care for Polly, stayed on with Helen after Polly's death in 1960. Winnie was Helen's companion for the rest of her life. Helen herself suffered a series of strokes in 1961 and spent the remaining years of her life at her home, Arcan Ridge, in Easton, Connecticut. She died on June 1, 1968, a few weeks short of her eighty-eighth birthday.

Betsy Plank, was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1924. She graduated from the University of Alabama with a bachelor's degree in history and a minor in English literature. Known as the first lady of public relations, she held many public relations positions over a career spanning six decades. She was the first female president of the Publicity Club of Chicago; she helped create the Public Relations Student Society of America, the student affiliate of the Public Relations Society of America; and she became the first woman to be elected president of the Public Relations Society of America. Betsy Plank died in 2010.

Most of the letters in this collection were written to Betsy's maternal aunt, Adelyn Hood Phipps.

Scope and Contents note
The collection contains correspondence, newspaper clippings, and photographs of Helen Keller and her companions, Annie Sullivan Macy and Polly Thomson. Much of the correspondence is written by Polly to Adelyn Hood, concert violinist and friend of Helen's. The photographs include several snapshots (some of which have been enlarged) taken in probably the early 1930s showing Helen standing in snow with three other people, most likely Annie Sullivan Macy, John Macy, and Polly Thomson. There is also a studio portrait of Helen, Annie, Polly, and their dog, Sieglinde, inscribed to Sweet Adeline (Adelyn Hood) by all three.

The other materials in the collection consist of handwritten prayers, inspirational newspaper clippings, and greeting cards, most likely collected by Adelyn Hood. There are also photocopies of a studio portrait of Miss Hood (identified by the donor) holding her violin.

Administrative Information

Publication Information
University Libraries Division of Special Collections, The University of Alabama October 2010

Conditions Governing Access note
None

Provenance
gift of Betsy Plank, 2011

Processed by
Martha Bace, 2014

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- American Foundation for the Blind.
Genre(s)

• Correspondence

Personal Name(s)

• Keller, Helen, 1880-1968
• Sullivan, Annie, 1866-1936

Subject(s)

• Blind
• Women social reformers
## Collection Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>2397.001</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inscribed photograph</td>
<td>2397.001</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>2397.001</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous documents</td>
<td>2397.001</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopies</td>
<td>2397.001</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>