Background on Clinton Brann

Born in Knoxville, Iowa, in 1891, Clinton Brann was building a career as a dentist when he was drafted into the 17th Field Artillery of the American Expeditionary Forces in 1917. Deployed to France in the spring 1918, leaving behind his family.
fiancée, Brann provided dental care to front line troops during several of the major campaigns of that year, including the Aisne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne, and Lorraine offensives, spending some time in the trenches himself, earning himself promotion to Captain and an appointment in the Army Dental Corps. For seven months after the Armistice, his regiment remained in Europe as part of the occupation forces, and it was not until the early summer 1919 that Capt. Brann finally returned home to resume his increasingly complicated life.

While overseas, Brann began seriously courting a second woman, Rhea Oppenheimer. Although the two fretted constantly how their families would react to the prospect of a mixed marriage -- he was Presbyterian, she was Jewish -- and worried whether they could ever have a future together, they persisted. By October 1918, their epistolary relationship had grown to the point that Clinton broke off his prior engagement and the couple pressed their families to approve of their plans to marry. When announcing his intentions to his mother, Brann explained that any objections "will do no good whatever," while Rhea took pains to ease tensions with her future mother-in-law, confessing her love for Clinton. Their tactics seem to have worked. Martha Brann replied to say that she had no objection to their union, assuring Rhea she would "make a great Presbyterian," and three months after Brann returned home in the summer 1919, the couple wed with the blessings of both families.

Brann went on to become a successful dentist, eventually becoming President of the Iowa State Dental Society in 1940. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he returned to active duty with the Army, finally retiring in 1948 with the rank of Colonel. The Branns had two children, Barbara (born March 19, 1922) and Vincent born Feb. 19, 1927). Clinton Brann
died in 1961 at the age of 70, and was survived by Rhea by twenty-six years.

**Scope of collection**

In two regards, the Brann collection presents an unusual glimpse into families affected by the First World War. First, Brann’s letters home offer a sense of his unusual role in the service, as a junior officer and dentist, and second, his letters are marked by his unusual relationship with Rhea Oppenheimer and their concerns over the future prospects for a mixed marriage. The collection also includes a wealth of photographs of the Branns’ life together, a family scrapbook, and a handful of mementoes and miscellaneous documents.

Brann’s letters to Rhea while in France (hers to him have not survived) are peppered with personal anecdotes and veiled news, but above all with a young man’s desire to return home to see his love. The anguish both felt over what they perceived to be the futility of pursuing a relationship is palpable throughout, as is their deep longing for one another.

**Series descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series 1. World War I</th>
<th>1917-1922</th>
<th>16 folders</th>
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</table>

Clinton Brann wrote regularly to his wife while serving with the 17th Field Artillery during the First World War, and it appears that Rhea saved most, if not all, of his correspondence. His letters were filled with passionate longing, humorous asides, and good-natured teasing (Clinton seemed to especially enjoy teasing Rhea about all of the French and American girls he met while stationed near the Front), though he occasionally ventures into deeper reflections on the war. His letters provide a small window into what life was like for a junior medical (dental) officer, a very different experience than for many men on the Front, and insight into a time when a difference in creed was considered a significant obstacle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series 2. Rhea Oppenheimer Brann</th>
<th>1902-1986</th>
<th>7 folders</th>
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</table>

Items collected by Rhea Brann, representing artifacts of forty years of her life before and after marriage. The items include an address book, class yearbook, the register from Clinton’s memorial service, and materials relating to their wedding.
Materials relating to Clinton Brann's military service and career in dentistry, as well as genealogical information. Also included are a few mementoes collected by Brann, including an Iron Cross brought home from the war.

The photographs in Series 4 are organized in two distinct groups. First is the "Early Marriage Album", which document Clinton and Rhea Brann's life together before approximately 1940. These include family photographs and a few pictures taken in Europe during the First World War. The second set of images, mostly snapshots, document the Branns' life after 1940. Also included is a series of postcards sent home from France during the war, and a few photographs from the 1990s, documenting the family home and the graves of Clinton's parents.

An oversized bound volume, Rhea's scrapbook contains a typically wide variety of items, including photographs, newspaper clippings, and other small keepsakes. Among other items is a commencement program for Brann's daughter, Barbara, when she graduated from Grinnell College in 1944. Among the recipients of an honorary degree that day was Senator, soon to be Vice President, Harry S. Truman.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1918 Dec.</td>
<td>Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919 Jan.</td>
<td>Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919 Feb.</td>
<td>Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919 Mar.</td>
<td>Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919 Apr.</td>
<td>Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea</td>
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<td>1919 May</td>
<td>Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919 June</td>
<td>Brann, Clinton letters to Rhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Brann, Rhea letters to/from Martha Brann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-1922</td>
<td>Misc. Letters and Postcards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Realia (Brann’s dog tag as 1st Lieutenant, D.O.R.C.; Iron Cross)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Series 2. Rhea Oppenheimer Brann (1902-1986) 7 folders

- Address Book: 1986, Box 1: 16
- Autograph Book: 1902, Box 1: 17
- "The Girl Graduate": 1911, Box 2: 1
- Memorial Book for Clinton Brann: 1961, Box 2: 2
- News clippings: 1917-1961, Box 2: 3
- Papers: 1915-1982, Box 2: 4
- Wedding: 1919, Box 2: 5

### Series 3. Clinton Brann (1891-1961) 6 folders

- American College of Dentistry: Certificate of membership: 1940, OS 4
- Iowa State Dental Society: Certificate of appreciation: 1940, OS 4
- Legal records: 1891-1961, Box 2: 6
- Military records: 1917-1948, Box 2: 7
- Professional records: 1937-1945, Box 2: 8
- Realia (key chain pendant from Eli Brann, 1902; fraternity pins): ca. 1902-1915, Box 3

### Series 4. Photographs (1893-1995) 9 folders
Early Marriage Album 1893-1916 Box 2: 9
Early Marriage Album 1920-1922 Box 2: 10
Early Marriage Album 1927-1928 Box 2: 11
Rhea and Clinton Brann Early Marriage Album 1930-1940 Box 3: 1
Postcards and Misc. 1917, 1995 Box 3: 2
Unbound 1940-1942 Box 3: 3
Unbound 1944-1953 Box 3: 4
Unbound 1954-1959 Box 3: 5
Unbound (Photocopies) 1940-1959 Box 3: 6

Series 5. Scrapbook 1940s 1 item

Scrapbook 1940s OS 4

Administrative information

Access
The collection is open for research.

Provenance
The Clinton Brann collection was donated by Melvin B. Carlson along with the papers of Clinton's son, Vincent. Since there was a considerable amount of material pertaining to both Clinton and Rhea that covered very different ground, the material was split into two separate collections.

Related Material
See also the papers of Vincent Brann (FS 094), Clinton's son and a Professor of Theater at UMass Amherst.

Language:
English

Acknowledgments
Digitization was made possible through the generous support of the Neal Shipley Fund and Lloyd Bonfield.

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Cite as: Clinton T. Brann Papers (MS 594). Special

Digitized content
The World War I correspondence and other materials have
been digitized and may be viewed online through SCUA's digital repository, Credo.

Processing Information

Processed by Micah Schneider, March 2009.

Search terms

Subjects

- Courtship.
- Dentists--Iowa.
- World War, 1914-1918--Medical care.

Names

- Brann family.
- Brann, Clinton.
- Brann, Rhea Oppenheimer.

Genre terms

- Photographs.
- Scrapbooks.

Link to similar SCUA collections

Family  Photographs  World War I