MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Manuscript Collections

MILDRED M. SEBO:
An Inventory of Her Papers

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Title: Mildred M. Sebo papers.
Date: Undated and 1920-2002 (bulk 1929-1937).
Abstract: Personal papers of a Winona County (Minn.) woman relating primarily to a private summer camp for “junior” adolescent girls aged 10-16 years that she operated on Balgillow Island in Lake Wabana, Itasca County (Minn.) from 1929 to 1936 or 1937.
Quantity: 1.2 cu. ft. (1 box and 1 oversize folder).
Location: See Detailed Description section for box and folder locations.

BIOGRAPHY OF MILDRED M. SEBO

Mildred Mathilda Sebo was born on January 21, 1892 in Homer Township, Winona County, Minnesota to Ole Nels and Anna Mathia Myhre Sebo. She was educated at Upper Cedar Valley rural school; Winona High School; and Winona Normal School, where she earned a teaching certificate. She initially taught first and second grade and music at Rose Creek School, Mower County. She later moved to Minneapolis where she taught seventh and eighth grade English, art, and music at Greeley and Jackson public schools.

By the mid-1920s Sebo had become dissatisfied with teaching, in large part because of what she considered the inappropriate manner in which the school system dealt with adolescents, and decided to try to establish a summer camp for “junior” adolescent girls aged 10-16 years in northern Minnesota. She purchased Balgillow Island in Lake Wabana, Itasca County and opened the American Girl Camp there in June 1929. She took a leave of absence from teaching during the 1929-1930 school year and resigned her position in the summer of 1930.

Sebo operated and directed the American Girl Camp through the 1936 or 1937 season, after which the effects of the Great Depression made it too difficult financially for enough parents to send their daughters to camp. An adult camp for “senior” girls and women had been held following the “junior” girls season since the early 1930s, and after the cessation of the girls camp program, Sebo continued to operate a vacation retreat for adults and
families during the summer and fall seasons during the latter 1930s and 1940s. During these years she also spent time on the island during the spring and winter months. By the late 1940s, however, Sebo could no longer return to Balgillow Island for extended periods of time. She was living in the city of Winona and caring for her mother, who had suffered a disabling stroke. The property was sold ca. 1956.

During the 1930s and 1940s Sebo worked at a variety of jobs away from the island during the off-season for paying guests—as Winona County 4-H agent, at the Girls Residence School in St. Paul, as membership chair at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and as a teacher at Lewiston (Mower County, Minn.) High School (during World War II). She was also instrumental in the founding of the Winona County Historical Society (1935), served as its first secretary and sometime curator, and was elected to the board of directors (1950). Following her mother’s death in 1954, Sebo moved to the Twin Cities. She worked in the Macalester College registrar’s office until 1965, when she retired. She lived in Minneapolis until 1988, when she returned to Winona. Mildred Sebo died in Winona on September 13, 1994, at the age of 102.

**SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION**

The collection includes biographical and autobiographical information; correspondence and memoranda; diary transcripts; Sebo’s stories about and reminiscences of Balgillow Island; her reading notes and writings; numerous photographs; camp brochures, stationery, forms, and financial records; campers’ and counselors’ records; issues of the camp newspaper and newsletter; programs and mementoes; maps; a scrapbook; and a guest book. They illuminate Sebo’s ideas about and plans for the “junior” girls camp and document its programs and activities, Sebo’s financial difficulties due to the Depression, her experiences on and away from the island, and her own and others’ feelings about Balgillow Island. There is also some information on the adult camp and the adult and family retreat.

**RELATED MATERIALS**

There are items pertaining to the American Girl Camp in the Minnesota Historical Society sound and visual and museum collections. An historical pageant narrative by Mildred M. Sebo is available in the Society manuscript collections.

**INDEX TERMS**

*This collection is indexed under the following headings in the catalog of the Minnesota Historical Society. Researchers desiring materials about related topics, persons or places should search the catalog using these headings.*

**Topics:**
- Camps – Minnesota – Itasca County.
- Camps for girls – Minnesota – Itasca County.
- Teenage girls – Recreation – Minnesota – Itasca County.
- Outdoor recreation – Minnesota – Itasca County.
Places:
   American Girl Camp (Itasca County, Minn.).
   Balgillow Island (Itasca County, Minn.).
   Wabana, Lake (Itasca County, Minn.).

Types of Documentation:
   Photographs.
   Reminiscences.
   Visitors’ books.

Occupations:
   Camp counselors.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Preferred Citation:
[Indicate the cited item and/or series here]. Mildred M. Sebo Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.
See the Chicago Manual of Style for additional examples.

Accession Information:
Accession number: 15,898

Processing Information:
Processed by: Deborah Kahn, September 2006
ID number: 6242512

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Note to Researchers: To request materials, please note both the location and box numbers shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
</table>
Financial records, undated and 1929-1936. 3 folders.
Camp newspaper and newsletter, 1929-1932.
Programs, mementoes, and other papers, undated and 1931-1937.
Scrapbook, 1929.
Pen and ink hand-drawn map of Balgillow Island showing the camp’s layout, undated.

Pencil drawing of the camp logo, undated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Balgillow Island:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+306</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Correspondence and other papers, undated and 1931-1964. 2 folders.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The content of some correspondence may be camp-related.</td>
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<td>Reminiscences and stories, undated and 1957-[ca. 1958].</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Dream House” plans, [1937?].</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Photographs:
Most of the photographs depict the American Girl Camp and Balgillow Island. However, some undated, unidentified items may not have been taken on the island.

Mildred Sebo, undated and 1920, [ca. 1927].
Loose photographs, undated and 1929-1949. 4 folders.

Enlarged photographs on mat board, undated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Loose negatives, undated.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+306</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Photograph album, undated and 1931.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photographs mounted on birch bark, undated. 2 folders.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photograph of Mildred Sebo framed in birch bark, 1946.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>