

The Smith-Wallace Collection:
A Long Island Love Story

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In today's day and age, it is common to encounter a man and a woman spending time together in a platonic relationship. Although speculation of these relationships being something more often occurs, it is never looked at negatively if the relationship is truly and strictly friendly. It took much social modification throughout the years for our society to reach this point. "Opposite-sex friendships offer unique benefits, including insight into how the other gender thinks, and contribute to our mental and physical well-being."¹ In the early twentieth century, social mores often prevented men and women from being friends. It was very difficult for two people of the opposite gender to form a close relationship, and the two typically only interacted if they were interested in pursuing a romantic relationship. Although these obsolete social rules were constricting and unfair by comparison to today's social standards, they allowed for beautiful romances to bloom in more romantic ways than we see today because social romances were more cultivated and nurturing.

In the year of 1914, two young college students, one at Harvard University, and the other at Smith College began exchanging letters back and forth from over 100 miles away [Figs. 1-3]. Thus began the tale of a blooming friendship that eventually leads to a marriage filled with love, passion and ultimately despair. This friendship began sometime before 1914. Earl Stewart Wallace was born in 1891 in Drayton, North Dakota to parents Henry William Wallace and Charlotte Larter Wallace. He was a man of many interests and intellectual talents. Wallace grew up in Drayton with his two sisters and his brother. Before attending Harvard University to become an attorney, he attended the University of Minnesota. Earl had many different hobbies

¹ Flora, "Just Friends", 6

including camping outdoors and traveling. He was also musically inclined. Earl, tall and lean, was a very caring man who focused on his studies and was very dedicated to his work.

However, these traits ultimately led to his downfall [Fig. 4]. Marjorie Boynton Smith was born on January 27th, 1894 to her parents Samuel Raynor Smith and Ella Boynton Smith in Freeport, New York. There, she grew up with her one brother, Harold. Originating from Freeport, Long Island, the Smiths were a very nautical family by default and owned a boat named after Marjorie, The Mardy. Marjorie kept her brunette hair short and was a fair sized young woman [Fig. 5].

Marjorie fit the typical characteristics of women in the early twentieth century and kept most of her emotions to herself, but not always. Before attending Smith College, Marjorie attended Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn, New York. In 1882, Marjorie's father, Samuel Smith moved from Freeport, Long Island to a small town in North Dakota named Drayton. While he lived in Drayton, he met the Wallace family and befriended them. After a few years, the two families partnered a business with each other. They put everything they had into the First National Bank of Drayton. It is because of the business partnership that Earl Wallace and Marjorie Smith came to know one another. The archived letters between Earl and Marjorie are presently located in the Special Collections that belongs to the Hofstra University Archives.

Most of the letters that can be found in the collections are from Earl that were kept by Marjorie. However, there are letters from Marjorie that were kept by Earl but can only be from 1916. The photos that are also included in the Special Collections provided an inside look to the Smith-Wallace relationship that the letters never gave. Earl Wallace loved camping and the outdoors and there are plenty of pictures to prove it. The many pictures include the couple on camping trips all across America. Earl passed his love of nature on to his beloved [Fig. 6 – Fig 6-3].

“All Friendships begin with a spark of mutual attraction, and sometimes that attraction extends to the physical”² From the very beginning it was very clear that Earl Wallace was overly enthusiastic in his pursuit of Marjorie. It can be assumed that he actually really did care for her when he showed his zealousness towards her in his letters. Their first letters that are in the archives between Marjorie and Earl were very formal and it was clear that Earl included some harmless flirting. Their first letter dated October 4th, 1914 says,

Although I have not learned that you are back at Smith again this year, I assume that you are. The day of the Princeton-Harvard game being scheduled for November 7th, (Saturday). Do you think that you can come? With me. I hope that everyone is well in Freeport. Will you offer my kindest regards to “Lizzie”- you know whom I mean.³

From this letter it is quite obvious that they have “inside jokes” that other people don’t understand. (In the Biographical Notes provided by the Special Collections, there is no one that could be found with the name Lizzie or Elizabeth in their family trees.) When Earl invites Marjorie to the game at Harvard and from his letters it is unclear if she attends. However in the next letter he talks about her chaperone which reveals that she did in fact attend. The “date” at the game that Earl had worked so hard to plan had to be chaperoned by another person. This gives the impression that an arranged marriage may be developing. There is no mention of a courtship in any of the letters and at this point in time from what outsiders know, they are just friends. Earl doesn’t mention why or who the chaperone is, but it can be inferred that the Smith family sent the chaperone. If they really had an independent relationship that was not planned by

² Flora, “Just Friends”, 2

³ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

their family one would think that Marjorie would have attended the match that her “friend” invited her to by herself. If the couple wasn’t purposely being courted would a chaperone have been necessary? However, something to be noted that is found in the Collection’s Biographical Note said that, “Her father [Marjorie’s] moved to Drayton, North Dakota in 1882, where he grew to know the Wallace family, with whom he had a familial connection”. This may be a hint at an arranged marriage between Earl and Marjorie. One can assume this was part of an arranged marriage because it was very common among wealthier families in the twentieth century to pick the spouses of their children, usually someone the parents found suitable. In one of the first letter exchanges between the couple, dated from 1914, Earl says, I attend to arrive in Freeport, so that you may be able to (or may not be able to) meet me. From this quotation, an outsider cannot draw the conclusion of whether or not Marjorie and Earl have met before. Something else that should be brought to attention, is that Marjorie was raised in Freeport on Long Island and Earl was raised with his siblings in Drayton, North Dakota. How could they have possibly had a close relationship before the correspondence living so far away from one another?

In many of his letters, Earl explicitly protests to Marjorie that he is making more of an effort than she is. This may also be another indication that there’s an arranged courtship. There is a long period of time where Marjorie does not answer his letters and he lets her know that he is annoyed with her. He’s not particularly rude about it but he does use sarcasm to express how he feels which gives the letters a touch of humor. He mentions quite often how their letters cross because he writes another letter before Marjorie is able to respond to his first letter. It is unknown why she doesn’t write back as often as he wants her to. It could be a matter of her

being busy with her schoolwork or it could just be that she doesn't really like him. The first account of letters being crossed is on January 19th, 1915. The letter states,

Where letters cross, a balance is struck and the new account may be opened at either of the correspondence. You owe me a letter just as much as I.O.U. I have been waiting for two weeks to "receipt payment of the obligation-but no such luck So now I am writing you as sort of a "dimmer"... I shall find more time to write—provided you write me in return.⁴

From this letter, an outsider can conclude that Marjorie is writing as often as Earl would like her to. He is sort of scolding her for not writing him back as if they had some sort of agreement before the correspondence starts that they were to write to each other as often as they could and she is obviously not holding up her end of the bargain. Then, in a letter from January 24th, 1915, Earl writes,

Again our letters have crossed...Nevertheless, we both believe in being a little stubborn, do we not? (Answer in chorus) "Yep!!!" Any wonderment I may have for not having heard from you in the past decade is quickly dispelled upon reflection.⁵

Here, it is obvious that he uses exaggeration to further address his frustration of Marjorie's lack of response. He cloaks his scolding of Marjorie with humor and jokes. At least he can admit that he can be stubborn, although it probably did not go over well that he called the girl he is trying to win over, "stubborn".

⁴ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith-Wallace Box 1

⁵ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith-Wallace Box 1

In Marjorie's defense she does "try", maybe not as much but she does try her best from what we can assume from Earl's letters to her in the beginning of their relationship. In a letter dated from February 11th, 1915, it is revealed that Marjorie suggests for Earl to come to Northampton the following week. He says,

I have been trying to make arrangements to come to Northampton as you suggested, next week, but I find that I cannot get away at this time. ⁶

This quote from Earl proves that Marjorie is trying to make their relationship work. In an earlier letter from November the year before, Marjorie makes hotel reservations for Earl to come visit her up at school. He tells her that he will try his best, and he does because it is exposed that he does visit her within the next few letters. Marjorie making plans for Earl to come visit her more than once thus showing that maybe she does have some sort of real feelings for Earl and wants to get to know him better and make an effort in their relationship. However, she only expresses desire to see him when it is convenient for her.

Earl has various ways of flirting in his letters and showing his affection towards Marjorie. One way of showing his affection towards her is sending her gifts. In letters from early 1915, he talks about how he sent her candy. He knows that the candy is not the greatest tasting candy in the world and knows that a better kind could have been sent to her but he lightens the mood about the bad candy with jokes—again showing that he has a very humorous side. Unfortunately Earl learns from a relative Marjorie was not answering because she fell ill. This results in him

⁶ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith-Wallace Box 1

feeling bad that he had scolded her for not answering him. He makes a joke, blaming the candy for her illness,

I am sure now—absolutely sure—that the candy I sent you was not the best you ever tasted. I almost suspect that in the candy lay the cause of your illness... Next time I shall send you a teddy bear or a rocking horse.⁷

He signs this particular letter with “Yours, Earl.... Write if you live.” This shows Earl’s true personality. He really does care for Marjorie. He does not like the fact that she was sick and feels bad that he could not do anything to help her. Although unsure of his intentions with the teddy bear or rocking horse, whether it was sarcasm or not, those are both things that if received by loved one would make a girl swoon. It seems as if he is trying to get back on her good side. He also uses humor and sarcasm to get himself out of uncomfortable situations showing even further who he is. This is Earl trying to hide his anxieties about Marjorie’s reciprocation of feelings.

A letter from October 29th, 1915, is one that is particularly interesting. Not only does it stand out because of Earl’s scolding of Marjorie, but he also quotes her in it. These are the first words that we actually get. While these words aren’t directly coming off the paper that she wrote them on, we finally get a glimpse of what she is like and why Earl is so upset that she is not writing back as much as he would like her to.

Dear Marjorie,

⁷ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

Cheer up! There is no cause for alarm in the suddenness of this reply to your last letter. I assure you of this at the outset so that you will have no fear that I am again about to solicit a correspondence of more or less regularity. The flat failure of the suggestion of such a thing last year still [undecipherable words] Lights here are on top throughout the night and need not be off though it is now one a.m. but I shall turn 'em off anyway for I do not "feel like writing" Yours Sincerely, Earl S.W⁸

From this letter, we find out a lot about Earl and Marjorie as people. To start, it shows that he had asked her in previous letters that they would correspond with each other in a timely and regular manner. Here, we also see a bit of Marjorie. Because he puts "feel like writing" in quotation marks, it shows that this is a quotation from one of her previous letters. Since Earl did not save any of Marjorie's letters until late in their correspondence, we can only assume that Marjorie told him she doesn't write back often because she does not feel like writing as much as he does. This gives an outsider even more of a reason to assume that they were set up in a courtship because he is eager to write and she makes it clear from this quotation that she, at this point in time, is not as interested and invested in the relationship as Earl would like her to be. In this particular letter, Earl is insolent towards Marjorie. Earl comes off as rude when he says that the lights do not need to be turned off, but he will turn them off anyway. If he would have kept them on for even just a little longer, he could've have written Marjorie ad longer letter.

At this point in time, Marjorie and Earl's have been exchanging letters for about two years. However, they are still just friends. It is not until late 1915 and early 1916 where the nature of their relationship changes. Again, these next few letters are difficult to decipher because we have no idea what Marjorie had sent to him in return. Before the important letters to come, he states that he really wants to see her and almost demands that they make time for each

⁸ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

other so they can have face to face conversations. A letter from December 15th, 1915 Earl makes it a point that they see each other by saying,

You have never before in all your experience been so wrong—nor I so wronged. I have a lecture in a few minute(s), and this note must therefore be very brief, but I want you to know as early as possible that I am coming up to North Hampton Tuesday afternoon (next) between trains so that you may have ample time to make any plans. I shall arrive in Hamp a few minutes before four Tuesday afternoon and shall hope to see you shortly thereafter for I must leave late that evening. Please make no plans for a large reception or anything to such a thing, nearly all the time I shall have there I want to spend in explaining that I am no the schemer your letter calls me. I trust however that it will take not more than a few minutes; but I want to feel sure that I have reserved time and fall back upon.⁹

This letter is very important in regards to their relationship. It is the start of what is to come in their future. Firstly, the reason that he wants to meet with her is that she called him a “schemer”, which means that he had to have done something that we do not know about to cause her to call him that. A person must do something to earn the title of schemer. Next, he tells her what date and time he will be arriving in her town and tells her that she must be available to see him. He does not care if she has plans that day, and he specifically tells her that she should not make any because all her time that day will be reserved for him and his convincing. He thinks that by telling her this now, he is giving her enough time to make arrangements so that she is able to meet with him. What he has to tell her and convince her must be exceptionally important because he is being so demanding. The rest of the letter goes on to say,

Can you take dinner with me? As to an acceptable place, I leave that to your choice, if there is much a thing as choice in eating places in North Hampton. My time is now very limited and so I will not attempt an explanation in this letter and this is I think just as well for matter would no doubt be worse if I should explain here in detail. Please qualify your statement that you will not write again, at least to this extent. Write me of when and where I may see you Tuesday afternoon and

⁹ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

will you do so at once so that I may know as soon as possible. In great Haste,
yours, Earl.¹⁰

In this second half of the letter, Earl seems a little more at ease now because he posed the question that will eventually lead to their meeting. He asks if they can get dinner, but he lets her pick the place, and even makes a slight joke about it. The only other thing he asks of her is that she send him a letter back saying where she is choosing to get dinner. She has no choice to tell him if she can actually go or not. This can be considered somewhat overbearing. The next letter in the Smith-Wallace correspondence is where it is clear that Earl really does have strong feeling from Marjorie. This letter is from the Tuesday night that they had dinner. In the previous letter, Earl asks for Marjorie to meet him for dinner and in this one we find out that she obviously did give him a restaurant for them to meet at. Before Earl sends this particular letter from December 21st, 1915, he writes a draft of it that includes cross outs and sentences that he chooses to rewrite. It is written on hotel stationary from Hotel Kimball. He even numbers the pages on the draft. Most of the things that he crosses out are not legible or decipherable but the final draft that he sends Marjorie is. (Something that makes an outside wonder is how the first original draft made its way back to the final copy that Marjorie kept.) From the first line, the letter begins to be interesting. Earl begins,

Tonight at dinner you told me that you understand me better than I understand you and I know that you do. For I feel that you realize exactly where I stand towards you; while I—for the life of me—cannot know your position. I can but hope that it is as I would have it—I can but fear that it is not as I would have it.¹¹

¹⁰ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

¹¹ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

Just from the first line of this very long, well thought out letter we understand that Earl is confessing his love to Marjorie, and he fears that she does not love him back. He even states that he knows that she knows that he loves her. He then goes on to say,

I have given you nearly every possible opportunity, I think, to understand me; while you have gone only so far as to east me adrift on a boundless sea of indefinite uncertainty and to me you are and enigma complete in every detail—and the more puzzling the more I know you. The uncertainty of it all is maddening. I cannot wait any longer for the solution; I cannot wait for your long letter, which might, I have hoped assist in the solution. I must know now; I have waited all too long. Years ago- nine years ago we determined tonight, though it seems as yesterday, I first saw you—then a mere slip of a girl. I was then but a youngster but I have carried that memory to this day. Should you ask me I would give you the picture in detail I could even tell you what you wore that morning. That image came recurring back to me again and again as I grew to manhood. I wondered how I should find you in later years. I knew that I should find you. And then I came to Freeport two years ago September on me way to Cambridge and I saw you only a few minutes that evening but there was the beginning of the end – the end which lies in this maddening uncertainty.¹²

It is now clear that Earl is confessing his love to Marjorie. He explains that he fell in love with Marjorie from the moment he saw her—love at first sight. This also answers the question of whether or not they knew or talked to each other before the correspondence started in 1914. They met seven years before they started exchanging letters and then did not see each other again until a short time before they started exchanging. He describes it as the “beginning of the end”. From the moment that he saw Marjorie in September of 1913 he wanted her to love him back. He then proceeds to end the letter with,

But from all the chaos, Marjorie, there evolves one thing that stands out as an eternal certainty and that is what I have said you already well know. I want you,

¹² Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

Marjorie – I have always wanted you and I shall never cease fighting for you until I have you forever. I will not discourage no matter what you answer. Nothing can stop me now – in spite of the many reasons, which are forever recurring to me why you should refuse me. I have pondered these many reasons again and again but they shall not stay with me, I shall overcome them. I will never give up. Please do not delay for an instant. If you could know the torture of every hour that must pass before your letter can possibly reach me, you could not hesitate. I want you simply to ask me to come to Freeport on my way back. I shall then understand that your answer is as I want it to be. And I shall come to Freeport as fast as trains can carry. With Love, Earl¹³

Earl ends the letter with a true assertion of love and romance towards Marjorie. He put everything on the line to confess how he truly feels about Marjorie. The years of writing may or may not pay off with Marjorie's response letter. The fact that Earl wrote a draft first before sending Marjorie the letter really shows that he wanted this particular letter to be special for Marjorie. Doing this paid off because in Earl's next letter to Marjorie, it seems as if her response to him was everything he wanted and more. His next letters are filled with passion and pure love. He can barely contain himself with excitement and joy because she has told him that she loves him in return. His letters become almost revealing of his emotions. He pours his heart and soul out into his letters to her from now on because he is no longer afraid of what she may say back. The never ending madness of uncertainty is now over. At times like this, Marjorie's letters would be brilliant to have because Earl mentions her response and how "sensible" she was. It would be very interesting to know what she actually wrote. The undated response starts,

Your magnificent letter, little woman, came to me but an hour and a half ago. I have read it again and again. I have done nothing but read it since it came to me—I shall keep it forever with me. I now am struggling to control myself and I want so to be sensible in this letter, as you have been in yours, but my whole being is aflame with emotion while is almost devouring. My mind is alive with thoughts that you must know; my struggle is to give thee coherent expression. I

¹³ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

must and shall be calm. My happiness is not capable of expression, Marjorie – it is mightier than myself. And this, even though you have not yet given me your final word – you have told me that you love me and for me this is final enough. I want to come to you at once, I want to hear it from your very lips, I want to see it in your very eyes. And when I hear you and look deep into the windows of your soul that knows no falsehood, then I shall not only know but I shall never question. Your letter almost breathes, it is so alive with your personality, but it cannot satisfy me. And so I am coming to Freeport on my way East, though you have not asked me. I cannot tonight, but tomorrow I am and I shall have you in spite of eternity itself. ¹⁴

Because of these last two letters from Earl, the thought of them being an arranged couple almost vanishes from perspective. Earl writes so beautifully and if they were set up by their families he most likely would not write in such a magnificent and intimate way. He also admits that he loves her and always has since he saw her which pushes the thought of an arranged marriage even further away. Her reciprocating his love completely removes the idea. As an outsider looking into this relationship and reading these letters, it almost feels as if we are intruding because these letters were meant for Marjorie's eyes and Marjorie's eyes only.

The year is now 1916, and we finally get a glimpse at what Marjorie is like as we have her first letter on February 14th, 1916. They are now engaged [Fig. 7]. We know this because in her letter, Marjorie talks about how she attended a wedding earlier that month that she absolutely hated. She disliked the way everything was set up and how it did not run smoothly. She assures Earl that their wedding will be absolutely nothing like the one that she attended. In this letter, she also tells Earl that she was busy all day writing letters and that's why his was brief (only five pages), and now she is tired. She mentions this because she tells Earl that she was going to write to his mother, but she will not do it now while she is tired because she wants to give her a

¹⁴ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

lengthy letter with quality writing. Something that particularly sticks out in this letter is something that Marjorie admits she is afraid to tell Earl—she has a slight cold. Marjorie says,

Dear I have confession to make to you. Promise me you won't be angry or worried. I have a little cold. I must have caught it because I was tired for I haven't had one for some time. I am taking good care of it however so I ought to get over it quickly, for this season I have stayed in most of the day. ¹⁵

These are the first direct quotes that we get from Marjorie and she is gentler than one would think. From Earl's responses, he made her seem careless and not very affectionate. These quotes from Marjorie prove that she does in fact care what Earl thinks and she knows that he is concerned for her well-being, especially now that they are getting married.

The correspondence of Marjorie stops shortly after this letter. There are a few after this but they do not have any relevance to their story. They mostly just talk about their days and when they are going to see each other again. The letter exchanging stops here because Marjorie graduates from Smith College and Earl from Harvard in mid-1916. While they were engaged, Earl moved to Minneapolis to work as a lawyer. They were engaged for a little over a year, but lived in completely different states. While living in Minnesota, Earl joined the army in early 1917. Their wedding took place in Freeport on May 5th, 1917. They welcomed their first son Henry Wallace eight months later on January 5th, 1918 [Fig. 8]. Then in August of 1918, Earl was shipped to France as part of the United States forces in the First World War. He returned in January of the next year. They then moved to Minneapolis so Earl could work. Just a few weeks after moving, Earl's brother in law passed away. Earl was put in charge of managing his late brother-in-law's estate. On top of settling the estate, he worked as an attorney. Earl was named

¹⁵ Hofstra Special Collections Smith-Wallace Box 1

president of the First National Bank of Drayton—the family business. In March of the next year, Marjorie gave birth to their second son Stewart Raynor Wallace [Fig. 9]. It became apparent to Earl's loved ones that he was becoming stressed and all the work was taking a toll on him. In September of 1921 Earl had a nervous breakdown and quit his job. Two months later, Earl told his wife that he was going to the barbershop, but he never returned. His abandoned car was discovered near a river, but his body was nowhere to be found. After months of investigation and Earl's body was finally recovered in January of 1922. It was clear that Earl had committed suicide—a tragic ending to a beautiful love story. Because of Earl's death, Marjorie took her two sons and moved back to Long Island to be with her family. She decided to go back to school and get her teaching degree and then taught in various schools all over Long Island. Marjorie also volunteered during World War II. Additionally she took a particular interest in researching her family tree—essentially putting together the genealogy of this collection without even knowing. Marjorie never remarried. She passed away on March 14th, 1992 while living in Florida [Fig. 10].

Figures

Figure 1

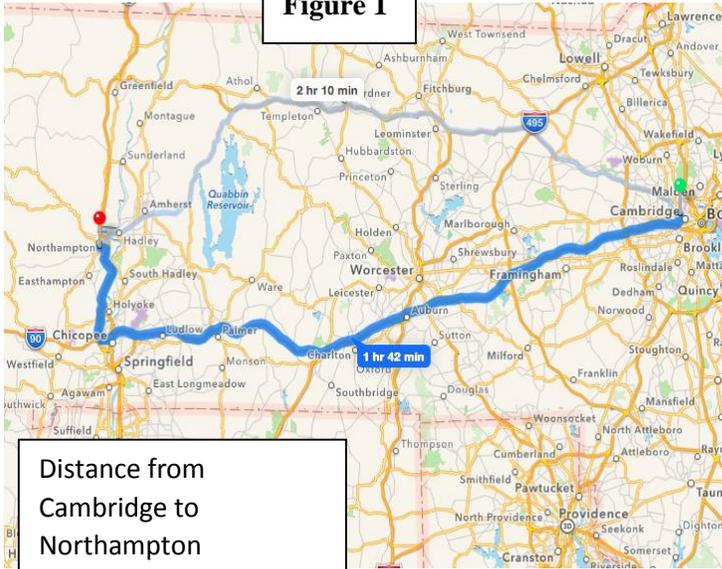


Figure 2

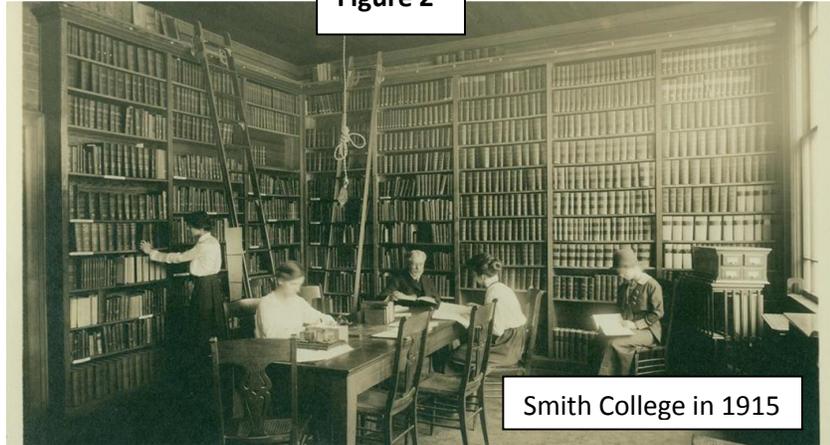


Figure 3

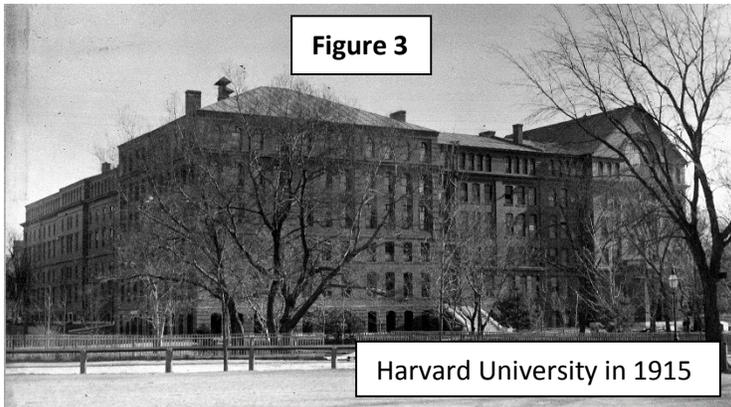


Figure 4

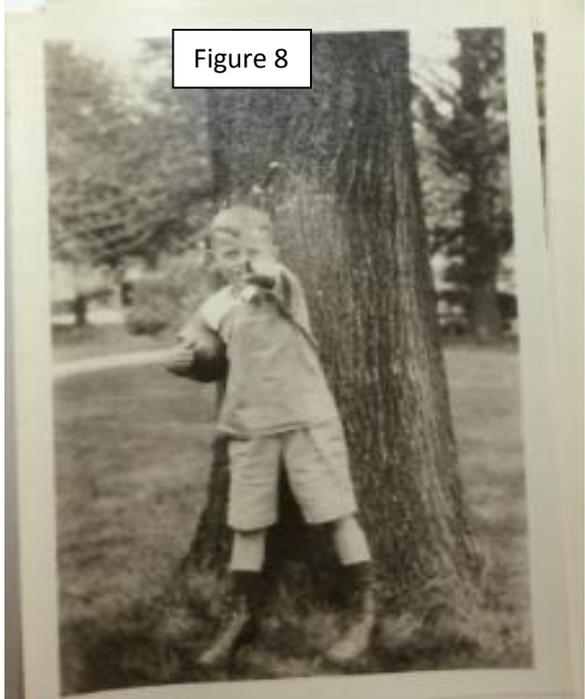


Figure 7



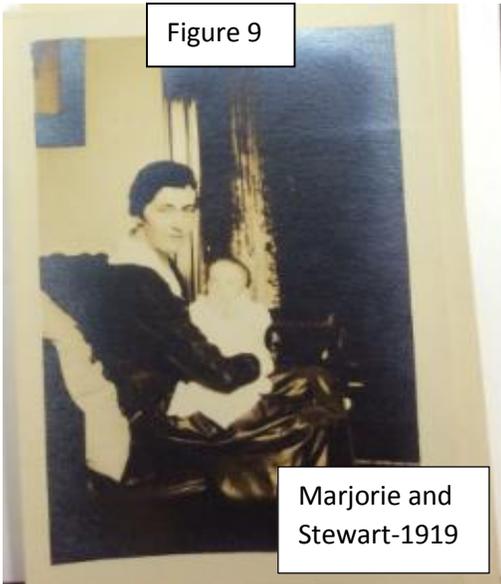
Engagement notice cut out by Marjorie and sent to Earl.

Figure 8



Henry playing in the backyard, 1925

Figure 9



Marjorie and Stewart-1919

Figure 10



Marjorie 1950- Age 56

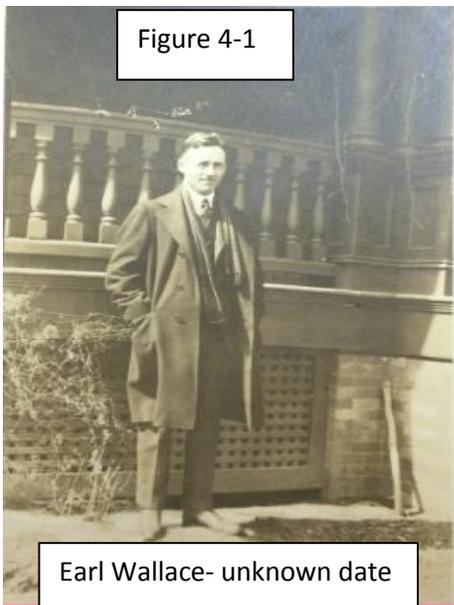


Figure 4-1

Earl Wallace- unknown date



Figure 5

Marjorie Smith-
Freshman year at
Smith College-1912

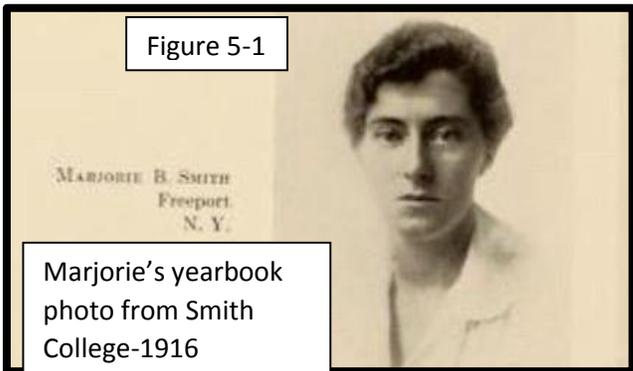


Figure 5-1

Marjorie's yearbook
photo from Smith
College-1916



Figure 6

Earl on a camping trip-
1919

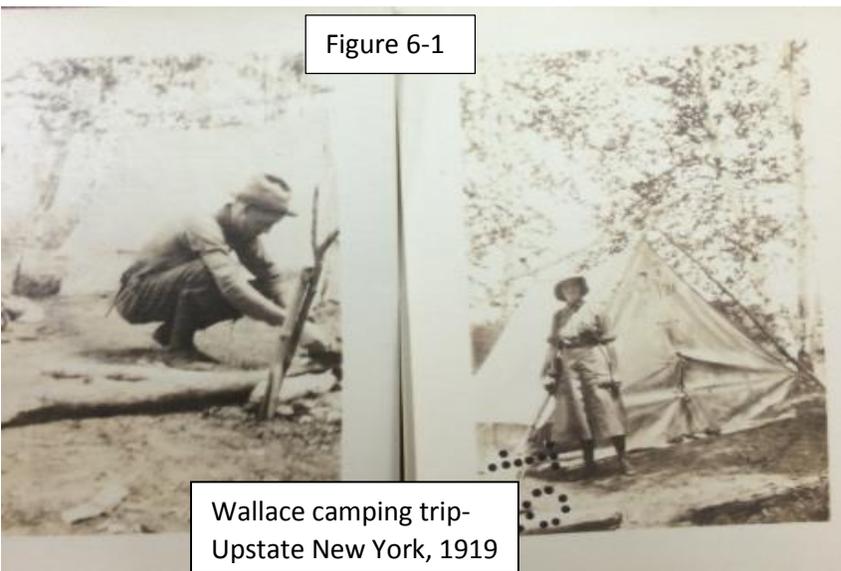


Figure 6-1

Wallace camping trip-
Upstate New York, 1919

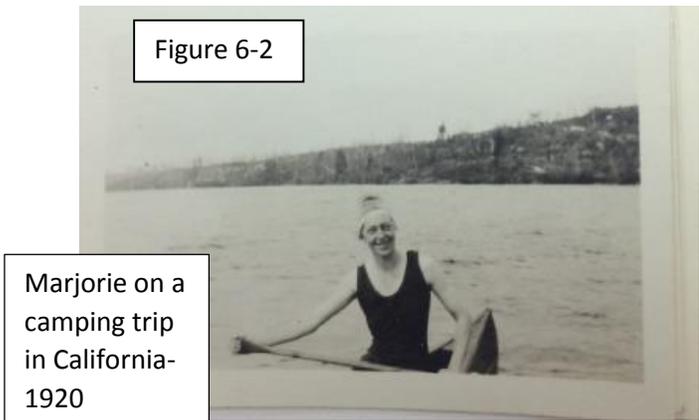


Figure 6-2

Marjorie on a
camping trip
in California-
1920

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