William B. Ricks Collection

Scope and Content Note

The William B. Ricks Collection is an archive of personal letters, photographs and other effects belonging to Rev. Dr. William B. Ricks. Most of the collection’s contents are from the 1930s to the 1950s. “Daddy” Ricks worked endlessly to promote the Sigma Chi fraternity in the South. A notable part of the collection is a 1948 presentation album of correspondence with fellow Sigma Chi’s celebrating Rev. Dr. Ricks’ contributions to the fraternity. The album includes correspondence from prominent Sigma Chi members consulting Ricks on personal matters. This is a testament to the respect that Sigma Chi members had for Rev. Dr. Ricks.

The contents of the collection are arranged into four boxes: personal correspondence, photographs, portraits of William B. Ricks, and personal ephemera. The letters in the collection are arranged chronologically and by person. The photographs are arranged by subject. The personal ephemera include newspaper clippings, awards, personal correspondence with fellow Sigma Chi, Rev. Ricks’ Holy Bible and a presentation album from 1948. Ricks’ personal correspondence with family members, particularly with his daughter, provides an excellent insight into the personal character of Ricks’ personality, creed and philosophy.

Biographical Sketch

Rev. Dr. Ricks was born on April 3, 1866 on a plantation in Nash County, North Carolina. He was the son of George and Sarah Ann Elizabeth Vick Ricks, one of the earliest Methodist families in eastern North Carolina. In 1885, Ricks enrolled at the University of North Carolina. There, he became a charter member and organizer of the Alpha Tau Chapter of Sigma Chi Fraternity. In 1889, Ricks earned his law degree from the university, and was admitted to the Bar in Virginia.

Ricks began his law career in Virginia, where he worked at a firm that would be called Batchelor, Ricks and Winbourne, but he only practiced law for two years. He enrolled in the School of Theology at Vanderbilt University and received his Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1894. While at Vanderbilt, Ricks helped found the Alpha Psi Chapter of Sigma Chi in 1891. Following graduation, Ricks did postgraduate work at the University of Chicago. He earned his Doctor of Divinity degree from Kentuckv Wesleyan College.

Reverend Ricks worked across the South as a pastor. His first pastoral charge began in 1894 in Jonesboro, Arkansas. He also served in Helena, Arkansas (1899-1903), Louisville, Kentucky (1903-1906), Bowling Green, Kentucky (1906-1910), Nashville, Tennessee and Columbia, Tennessee. During World War I, Ricks directed a YMCA camp at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. At the end of the war he was appointed General Missionary Secretary of the Methodist Church, one of its top ranking jobs. He was also the Presiding Elder of the Cumberland District, as well as the Director of the Bishop’s Crusade (1936-1938). Reverend Ricks retired from active church work in 1940.
Ricks’ commitment to Sigma Chi Fraternity lasted throughout his life. He was very active in the national organization, helping establish 45 new chapters in the United States and Canada. Ricks held various national offices including Grand Praetor (40 years) and Grand Tribune (6 years). In 1941, he was elected the 31st Grand Consul of the fraternity, its highest office. Ricks served in this position for two years. Throughout his career of nearly 50 years, Ricks visited almost all of the fraternity’s 124 active chapters. He was affectionately known throughout the fraternity as “Daddy” Ricks, and was also given the titled, “Father of Sigma Chi in the South.” Other accomplishments include participating on the “Put-in-Bay Committee,” which revised the fraternity’s constitution in 1896. In 1897, Ricks attended the Nashville Grand Chapter meeting to enact the changes. On May 2, 1939, Ricks gave the principal address at the unveiling of the Marble Monument at Jonesboro, Georgia, in honor of the Constantine Chapter of Sigma Chi, organized on that battlefield during the Civil War. He also gave the address at the dedication of the monument to James Parks Caldwell, one of Sigma Chi’s seven founders, at Biloxi, Mississippi.

Ricks was also deeply devoted to his family. On January 1, 1903, Ricks married Nora Neal of Lebanon, Tennessee. They had two children, Frederick Neal Ricks and Mary Elizabeth Ricks Nagle. He had to grandchildren by his daughter: William Wesley Nagle and Elizabeth Cameron Nagle.

William B. Ricks died in 1963. He is buried in Lebanon, Tennessee.

Provenance Statement

The William B. Ricks Collection was purchased by the Vanderbilt University Special Collections in 2011.

Literary Rights Statement

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Box 1

Series 1: Outgoing Correspondence

Outgoing correspondence to Mary Elizabeth Nagle and Wesley M. Nagle

Folders:
1. To Wesley M. Nagle
   April 1937 – June 1953
2. To Wesley and Mary
   June 1937 – June 1943
3. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
   September 1936 – June 1941
4. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
   October 1942 – August 1945
5. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
   March 1946 – April 1949
6. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
   April 1949 – July 1952
7. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
   August 1952 – May 1954
8. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
   July 1954 – August 1954
9. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
   October 1954 – November 1955
10. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
    January 1956 – May 1958
11. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
    May 1958 – July 1958
12. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
    December 1958 – June 1959
13. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
    June 1959 – May 1960
14. To Mary Elizabeth Nagle
    February 1961 – January 1963
15. To the Nagles, and children
    March 1954 – November 1962
    September 1954 – July 1959
16. To William Wesley Nagle
    February 1958 – May 1958
17. To William Wesley Nagle
    October 1958 – April 1961
18. To Elizabeth Cameron Nagle
    June 1952 – June 1958
19. To Irene/J. R. Coulter and Nora Ricks
    1919 – 1934

Outgoing correspondence to Elizabeth Cameron Nagle and William Wesley Nagle
Folders:
16. To William Wesley Nagle
    February 1958 – May 1958
17. To William Wesley Nagle
    October 1958 – April 1961
18. To Elizabeth Cameron Nagle
    June 1952 – June 1958

Outgoing correspondence to Nora Ricks and Irene Coulter

Folders:
19. To Irene/J. R. Coulter and Nora Ricks
    1919 – 1934

Box 2

Series 2: Photographs

Photographs of William B. Ricks, youth to manhood

Folders:
1. Carte-de-visite, 3 cabinet card photos
2. 4 Cabinet photos
3. 2 Seated portraits
4. 3 Portraits, one WWI era photograph

Photographs of William B. Ricks, later years

Folders:
5. Older photos, 3 portraits
6. IFC Conference photo, 1948 Order of Constantine photo, 3 undated portraits

Photographs of Ricks & Nagle family, and law partner

Folders:
7. Photos of Mary Elizabeth Nagle in childhood and at wedding
8. Photos of Mary Elizabeth Nagle in youth and as a young adult
9. Larger photos of Mrs. William B. Ricks (assumed)
10. Oversized photos of son or Wesley M. Nagle, photo of Douglas Batchelor

Printed ephemera

Folders
1. Personal
2. Mary Elizabeth Nagle ephemera
3. Sigma Chi memorabilia

Box 3

William B. Ricks’ Holy Bible
5: William B. Ricks’ Presentation album

**Box 4**
Incoming Correspondence from Sigma Chi members

*Folders by year:*
1. 1941, 1947, 1948
2. 1949
3. 1950
4. 1951
5. 1952
6. 1953
7. 1954
8. 1955
9. 1956, 1957
10. 1958-1963

**Box 5**
Assorted oversized portraits/photographs

*Folders*
1. Oversized photographs of William B. Ricks, later years
2. Photographs of Mary Elizabeth Nagle
3. Misc. oversized photographs; certificate for William B. Ricks