

**Nettie Dorothy (nee Irle) Mills  
Papers, 1918-1919, 2007**

**COLLECTION 2**

Compiled by Jennifer Wood  
Fall, 2007

**Provenance**

The Papers of Nettie Dorothy (nee Irle) Mills were donated to the Champaign County Historical Archives, The Urbana Free Library, in April 2007.

**Physical Description**

1 box (.5 linear ft.)

**Access**

The records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

**Scope and Content Note:**

Letters written by Nettie Dorothy (nee Irle) Mills (1896-1970), a young American nurse, to her parents George G. and Mary F. (nee Arnold) Irle, of Somer Township, Champaign County, Illinois, during her service with the Army Nursing Corps (ANC)/American Expeditionary Force in World War I. The letters (1918-1919), covering the end of the war and the first months of demobilization, were written from northern Illinois, New York City, and various base hospitals in France, and describe Irle's experiences with the American (and occasionally German) soldiers in her care; her travel, living conditions, and concerns for family and friends; and also touch upon specific historical events such as the reaction to Germany's surrender and the international influenza epidemic of 1918-19. The collection also includes a printed transcription of the letters; photocopies of Irle's Army service papers, and a photograph of her in ANC uniform, c. 1918; and a letter from George Irle to the editor of the *Urbana Daily Courier*, requesting that the *Courier* publish copies of two of his daughter's letters from France.

Nettie Dorothy Irle was born April 18, 1896, one of four children of George G. and Mary F. (nee Arnold) Irle. Her maternal and paternal grandparents were born in Germany, but her father had been born in Pennsylvania and her mother in Illinois. George Irle's parents settled in Champaign County as pioneer farmers in the 1860s, and he and Mary continued to farm in Somer Township. Nettie's siblings included sister Anna (nee Irle) Pierce and brothers George W. and William Irle. [Note: There is some suggestion that she may also have had one or more adoptive or foster brothers]. After graduating in 1917 from the Burnham City Hospital School of Nursing (Champaign, Ill.), Irle served with the ANC from August 1918 until May[?] 1919. Irle married Lowell H. Mills in 1920, and they had two sons, James L. and Jack I. Mills. In her later nursing career she worked in the Champaign County office of Dr. Finch. She died in Champaign County on June 21, 1970, and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

The letters written by Irle to her parents during her service with the ANC reflect a youthful, active, adventurous, and practical-minded young woman enjoying her new experiences but sometimes still missing her family and their life on a small Midwestern farm. She describes the concrete details of her daily life as a nurse, relates scenes from the places that she visits, and comments on customs and scenery that seem odd or exotic to her, such as the wooden shoes still being worn at that time by French country people. Her account does not emphasize the trauma and hardship of war, for herself, her patients, or the French citizenry, as the fighting is very nearly over by the time she arrives overseas. She does, however, observe and recount various

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instances of attitudes and behavior of recuperating soldiers that suggest their intense experiences. Her concern for her family and friends is apparent throughout, as she inquires about their activities, worries periodically about the prevalence of the influenza in Champaign County, and chides them for not writing to her more often.

A transcription of the letters is also provided as an aid to researchers, as Irle's handwriting, though exuberant, is not always very legible. (Please see transcript [Folder 32] for additional notes.)

Container Listing

Folder 1: Ancillary Material

Irle's Army Service Papers, August 7, 1918 - May 14, 1919

Photograph of Irle (photocopy), in Army Nursing Corps uniform, n.d. (c. 1918)

[*Note: Irle refers to photographs taken of her while in the ANC in her correspondence.*]

Folder 1A: *Stories of WWII and the Korean Conflict, Jack I Mills Sr. Includes Stories of Nursing in WWI, Reminiscences of Dorothy Irle Mills.* Compiled by Jack Irle Mills Jr., December 2007 (Accession 2008-0011).

Folders 2-31: Correspondence

August 13, 1918

August 19, 1918

August 25, 1918

August 31, 1918

September 1, 1918

September 4, 1918

September 12, 1918

September 15, 1918

September 18, 1918

September 28, 1918

October 23, 1918

November 5, 1918

November 16, 1918

November 26, 1918

December 1, 1918

December 8, 1918

December 16, 1918

December 17, 1918

December 30, 1918

January 6, 1919

January 10, 1919 (George Irle to editor of the *Urbana Daily Courier*)

January 17, 1919

January 25(?), 1919

February 16, 1919

February 23, 1919

March 14, 1919

April 10, 1919

April 17, 1919

April 26, 1919

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May 11, 1919

Folder 32: Correspondence Transcription, August 13, 1918 – May 11, 1919