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Collection Summary

Repository: Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries

Creator: Grove, Elsa Butler, 1884-1969

Title: Elsa Butler Grove Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1914-1969

Bulk Dates: 1919-1924

Quantity: 4.4 cubic feet (8 boxes)

Abstract: The collection contains records of Elsa Butler Grove's work with the American Red Cross in the years after WWI, first with the Vassar Red Cross Relief Unit in Verdun, France, and later with the American Red Cross Commission to Western Russia and the Baltic States.

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Biographical Note

Elsa May Butler was born in St. Louis, Missouri on May 16, 1884, the daughter of William Morton Butler (1855-1923), a teacher, and Marie (Lange) Butler (1861-1935), a German immigrant. A 1905 graduate of Vassar College, Grove received her master's degree from the Washington University School of Social Work in 1914 and was a fellow at Bryn Mawr from 1915-1916. She later became a student at Columbia University Graduate School of Political Science, where she studied economics, sociology, and anthropology.

Grove devoted much of her life to medical social work. During the First World War, she worked at Hahnemann Hospital in Philadelphia, taught Social Economics for the Vassar College Training Camp for Nurses in the Summer of 1918, and served various roles for the Y.W.C.A and the American Red Cross. In October 1919, she was elected by the Vassar Unit Committee to the position of Vice-President of the Vassar College Red Cross welfare unit in Verdun, France. She sailed to France in December of 1919 and worked in Verdun to manage both the medical dispensary and "Goutte de Lait" milk station. She was decorated by the French government for her services managing the "Goutte de Lait," which provided French children with pasteurized milk and greatly decreased infant mortality in Verdun during its operation.

On June 14, 1921, Grove began a one-year position directing social work for the child relief units in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania for the American Red Cross Commission to Western Russia and the Baltic States. By August of 1920, the three Baltic States had each signed peace treaties with Russia to end both civil and international conflict and secure their independence from Russia. During this period of service, Grove spent the majority of her time stationed in the capital city of Riga, Latvia, where she took extensive notes on the conditions witnessed by the inhabitants of Latvia. Her observations provide an account of the difficulties of

conducting health work overseas, in terms of those administering aid as well as those who are receiving the assistance.

After her return to the United States in 1922, Grove taught hospital service at Teacher's College of Columbia University, Fordham University, Dillard University, Smith College, and Mt. Sinai Hospital (1923-1942). She served as President of the Vassar College Class of 1905 from 1935 to 1940, and was active in numerous professional societies, including the New York Urban League, the National Institute of Immigration Welfare, and the American Association of Social Workers.

In preparation for Vassar's 100th Anniversary, Grove took a determined interest in the campaign for the establishment of a Women's Archives at Vassar College. It was her considered belief that the gathering of an extensive collection of materials relating to the role of women throughout history would serve as a valuable tool in the betterment of Vassar's academic resources.

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Scope and Content Note

The collection contains records of Elsa Butler Grove's work with the American Red Cross in the years after WWI, first with the Vassar Red Cross Relief Unit in Verdun, France, and later with the American Red Cross Commission to Western Russia and the Baltic States. It includes correspondence with family, Vassar alumnae and Vassar Unit members, and French colleagues and acquaintances; records and reports of the work of the Vassar Unit; diaries documenting Butler's time abroad in Europe; typescript articles about government, children, women, labor, and charity work in the Baltic States based on her work there; photographs of Grove and Verdun; miscellaneous maps, booklets, and clippings about Grove or the locations she visited; and various items of realia collected by Grove, including two artillery shell cases, Red Cross medals, and her Red Cross uniform.

Correspondents include Elsa's parents, William Morton Butler (1855-1923) and Marie Lange Butler (1861-1935), as well as her three sisters: Alice E. Butler Lange (1890-1974), Cora L. Butler Conant (1883-1977), and Clare W. Butler (1887-1981), who also graduated from Vassar in 1909 and went on to pursue a career in medical social work.

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Arrangement

The collection is organized into seven series.[Top](#)

Access and Use

Access

This collection is open for research according to the [regulations of the Vassar College Archives and Special Collections Library](#) without any additional restrictions.

Restrictions on Use

Permission to quote (publish) from unpublished or previously published material must be obtained as described in the [regulations of the Vassar College Archives and Special Collections Library](#).

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Related Material

Related Materials

- [Vassar College Training Camp for Nurses Records](#)
- [Vassar Red Cross Relief Unit Collection](#)

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Subject Headings

Names:

- Butler, Clare W., 1887-1981
- Haight, Elizabeth Hazelton, 1872-1964
- Kenyon, Helen, 1884-1978
- Lambie, Margaret
- Little, Lida A.
- Stimson, Julia C. (Julia Catherine), 1881-1948
- Townsend, Fanny P. Simpson, 1881-1970
- Valentine, Gertrude C.,

Organizations:

- American National Red Cross
- Vassar College. Associate Alumnae
- Vassar Red Cross Relief Unit

Subjects:

- Charities--Baltic States
- Children--Baltic States
- Humanitarian assistance--Baltic States--20th century
- Humanitarian assistance--France--20th century
- Humanitarian assistance--Latvia--20th century
- Labor and laboring classes--Baltic States
- Medical social work--Europe
- Medical social work--France--Verdun
- Medical social work--Latvia
- Social work with children
- Women social workers
- Women--Baltic States
- World War, 1914-1918--War work--Red Cross

Places:

- Baltic States--Politics and government--20th century
- Baltic States--Social conditions--20th century
- France--Description and travel--20th century
- France--Economic conditions--20th century
- France--Social conditions--20th century
- Latvia--Description and travel--20th century
- Verdun (France)--Description--Views

Document Types:

- Artillery shell cases
- Certificates
- Clippings
- Clothing
- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Medals
- Paper money
- Passports
- Photograph albums
- Photographs
- Plaques
- Postcards
- Printed ephemera
- Prints (visual works)
- Realia
- Scrapbooks

VCL Categories:

- Travel
- War and War Crimes

[Top](#)**Encoding Information**

Encoded by Emma Gronbeck, December 2025.

[Top](#)**Administrative Information****Preferred Citation**

Elsa Butler Grove Papers, Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries.

Processing Information

Original processing date unknown.

Container list updated by Laura Streett, April 2007.

Materials created or collected by Elsa Butler Grove which were at some point added to the Vassar Red Cross Relief Unit Collection were removed from that collection and added to the Elsa Butler Grove Papers in 2025. The collection was then re-processed to incorporate these materials by Emma Gronbeck, January 2026.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Elsa Butler Grove, June 1956.

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Series List

[Series I.](#) Correspondence, 1914-1936

Arranged alphabetically by name.

[Series II.](#) Vassar Unit Records, 1919-1921

Arranged alphabetically by file title.

[Series III.](#) Writings, 1914-1936

Arranged alphabetically by file title.

[Series IV.](#) Miscellaneous Documents, circa 1915-1954

Arranged alphabetically by file title.

[Series V.](#) Photographs, 1919-[1936?]

Arranged alphabetically by file title.

[Series VI.](#) Printed Materials, 1920-1969

Arranged alphabetically by file title.

[Series VII.](#) Realia, 1919-1920

Arranged alphabetically by item.

Container List

Series I. Correspondence, 1914-1936

Folder 1.1	Bondeaux, E. to Grove, Elsa Butler, 1920, 1935 [3 letters]
Folder 1.2	Butler, Marie Lange to daughters, 1914 Jul 29 [1 letter]
Folder 1.3	Butler, William Morton to Butler, Marie Lange, 1914 Jul 3-30 [6 letters]
Folder 1.4	Conant, Cora Butler to Butler, Marie Lange (and unidentified), 1919, undated [3 letters]
Folder 1.6	Grove, Elsa Butler to/from American Red Cross, 1920-1922 [4 letters]
Folder 1.5	Grove, Elsa Butler to Brezee, Edna, 1920 Jan [2 letters]
Folder 1.7	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler, Clare W. (sister), 1914, 1920-1921, undated [5 letters, 1 envelope]

Folder 1.8	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler, Marie Lange (mother), 1914-1916 [6 letters, 1 postcard]
Folder 1.9	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler, Marie Lange, 1919 Oct-Dec [8 letters]
Folder 1.10	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler, Marie Lange, 1920 [9 letters, 2 envelopes]
Folder 1.11	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler, Marie Lange, 1921 [3 letters, 3 postcards]
Folder 1.12	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler, Marie Lange, 1922, undated [3 letters, 1 postcard]
Folder 1.13	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler, William Morton (father), 1920-1921 [3 letters]
Folder 1.14	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler family, 1918-1919 [4 letters]
Folder 1.15	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler family, 1920 Jan-Feb [5 letters]
Folder 1.16	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler family, 1920 Mar-Jun [7 letters]
Folder 1.17	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler family, 1920 Jul-Dec [6 letters]
Folder 1.18	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler family, 1921 [10 letters]
Folder 1.19	Grove, Elsa Butler to Butler family, 1922 Jan-Mar [2 letters]
Folder 1.20	Grove, Elsa Butler to Conant, Cora L. Butler (Mrs. G. H.) (sister), 1920, undated [10 letters, 2 postcards, 8 envelopes]
Folder 1.21	Grove, Elsa Butler to/from Kenyon, Helen, 1920 [11 letters, 1 postcard]
Folder 1.22	Grove, Elsa Butler to Lambie, Margaret, 1920, 1936 [2 letters, 1 postcard]
Folder 1.23	Grove, Elsa Butler to/from MacCracken, H. N., 1920 Aug-Oct [4 letters]
Folder 1.24	Grove, Elsa Butler to Others, 1920 Jan-Aug [10 letters]
Folder 1.25	Grove, Elsa Butler to Others, 1921-1924, undated [6 letters]
Folder 1.26	Grove, Elsa Butler to Ritchie, Henrietta (aunt), 1918, 1920 [7 letters, 3 postcards, 1 letter with knitting sample]
Folder 1.27	Grove, Elsa Butler to Schweinitz, Marguerite de, 1920 Aug-Oct [2 letters]
Folder 1.28	Grove, Elsa Butler to Townsend, Fanny, 1919 Nov - 1920 Oct, undated [18 letters, with reports]
Folder 1.29	Lange, Alice Butler (sister) to Butler, Marie Lange, 1914 Jan-Aug [8 letters, 1 postcard]
Folder 1.30	Lange, Alice Butler to Conant, Cora L. Butler, 1914 [1 postcard]
Folder 1.31	Others to Grove, Elsa Butler, 1914, 1919-1921 [11 letters]
Folder 1.32	Letter fragments from Elsa Butler Grove, 1918, undated

Series II. Vassar Unit Records, 1919-1921

Folder 2.1	Goutte de Lait and Vassar Unit records, 1920-1921
Folder 2.2	Instructions from the Vassar Unit Committee, 1919 Dec
Folder 2.3	"Report of the Work of the Vassar Unit," 1919-1920
Folder 2.4	Scrapbook - "Advice given bearing on Work in France," correspondence and notes, 1919 Dec - 1920 Oct
Folder 2.5	Scrapbook - "La Dispensaire" and "Goutte de Lait," records, 1919-1920
Folder 2.6	Scrapbook - "Forming the Committee," correspondence and notes, 1920
Folder 2.7	Scrapbook - "French correspondence forwarded by Fanny Townsend," 1919-1920
Folder 2.8	Scrapbook - "Luxembourg," correspondence and notes, 1920 Aug
Folder 2.9	Scrapbook - "Monsieur de Goeljen/Holland," correspondence, 1920 Aug-Nov
Folder 2.10	Scrapbook - "Summary of Work of the Vassar Unit," 1919 Feb-Aug

Series III. Writings, 1914-1936

Folder 2.11	Diary - Trip to Europe, 1914 Jun 28-Sep 3
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- Folder 2.12 Diary - Trip to Europe, enclosures, 1914 Jun-Sep
- Folder 2.13 Diary, 1919 Dec 13 - 1920 Dec 1
- Folder 2.14 Diary, enclosures, 1919 Dec - 1920 Dec
- Folder 2.15 Diary, 1921 Jan 1-Nov 23
- Folder 2.16 Notes on Baltic States - Outline of Notes, 1921-1922 [cc, 1 p.]
- Folder 2.16 Notes on Baltic States - Letts, 1921-1922 [TS, 3 p.]
- Folder 2.16 Notes on Baltic States - Latvia, 1921-1922 [TS, 4 p.]
- Folder 2.16 Notes on Baltic States - Before the War, 1921-1922 [TS, 5 p.]
- Folder 2.16 Notes on Baltic States - The War, 1921-1922 [TS, 3 p.]
- Folder 2.17 Notes on Baltic States - Experiment in Government, 1921-1922 [TS, 5 p.]
- Folder 2.17 Notes on Baltic States - Municipal Bankruptcy, 1921-1922 [TS, 1 p.]
- Folder 2.17 Notes on Baltic States - The Policy of Self-Protection, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 copies, 3 p. each]
- Folder 2.17 Notes on Baltic States - Railroad Travel, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.18 Notes on Baltic States - Fuel Situation, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.18 Notes on Baltic States - Lettish Language, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.18 Notes on Baltic States - Interpreters, 1921-1922 [TS, 3 p.]
- Folder 2.18 Notes on Baltic States - The Returning Population, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 copies, 4 p. each]
- Folder 2.19 Notes on Baltic States - Russians, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.19 Notes on Baltic States - Widows, 1921-1922 [TS, 3 p.]
- Folder 2.19 Notes on Baltic States - Orphans, 1921-1922 [TS, 1 p.]
- Folder 2.19 Notes on Baltic States - Orphanages, 1921-1922 [TS, 5 p.]
- Folder 2.19 Notes on Baltic States - Schools, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.19 Notes on Baltic States - University Students, 1921-1922 [TS, 1 p.]
- Folder 2.20 Notes on Baltic States - Rural Child Labor, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.20 Notes on Baltic States - Unemployment, 1921-1922 [TS, 1p]
- Folder 2.20 Notes on Baltic States - Lettish Women's Corps, 1921-1922 [TS, 1 p.]
- Folder 2.20 Notes on Baltic States - Public Charities, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.20 Notes on Baltic States - Lettish Private Organizations, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.21 Notes on Baltic States - German Charities, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.21 Notes on Baltic States - General Impressions, 1921-1922 [cc, 2 p.]
- Folder 2.21 Notes on Baltic States - American Contact, 1921-1922 [TS, 3 p.]
- Folder 2.21 Notes on Baltic States - The Attitude of the Letts Toward Foreign Charities, 1921-1922 [TS, 1 p.]
- Folder 3.1 Notes on Baltic States - Some Reflections on American Philanthropy Overseas, 1921-1922 [TS, 15 p.]
- Folder 3.2 Notes on Baltic States - Running an Office Overseas, 1921-1922 [TS, 4 p.]
- Folder 3.2 Notes on Baltic States - Case Work, 1921-1922 [TS, 3 p.]
- Folder 3.2 Notes on Baltic States - American Red Cross...Clothing Distribution in Latvia, 1921-1922 [TS, 7 p.]
- Folder 3.2 Notes on Baltic States - Lesson VII, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 3.2 Notes on Baltic States - A Letter to the American Red Cross Commission, 1921-1922 [TS, 1 p.]
- Folder 3.2 Notes on Baltic States - General Conclusions Regarding Health Work Overseas, 1921-1922 [cc, 2 p.]
- Folder 3.2 Notes on Baltic States - Foreign Agencies, 1921-1922 [TS, 2 p.]
- Folder 3.3 Poems written by students at L'École de Vacherauville, 1920 Jul
- Folder 3.4 "Verdun, 1920-21: Memoir of a Return to Verdun" by Elsa Butler Grove, 1936

Series IV. Miscellaneous Documents, circa 1915-1954

Folder 3.5	Bank Note - Austro-Hungarian, circa 1915
Folder 3.6	Bank Note - Russian, circa 1918
Box 7 (Oversize)	Certificate of appreciation from the city of Verdun with color reproduction of painting by Huygens at the top, 1920 Dec 23 [framed]
Folder 3.7	"Experience Outlines" (resumes) of Elsa Butler Grove, 1942, 1953
Folder 3.8	Miscellaneous documents and ephemera, 1921-1924, undated
Folder 3.9	Passports and travel papers, 1919-1922
Folder 3.10	Print - Rheims Cathedral, circa 1920

Series V. Photographs, 1919-[1936?]

Folder 3.11	Elsa Butler Grove, 1920, undated
Folder 3.12	"La Ferme Madalaine," 1920
Folder 3.13	Goutte de Lait and Verdun, with captions, 1920
Folder 3.14	"Holland(?)" (Set G), [1921?]
Folder 3.15	"Mlle Moitry" ("Sage femme" at the Goutte de Lait), 1920, undated
Box 4	Photograph Album - The Azores, Paris, Holland, 1919 Dec - 1920
Box 4	Photograph Album - Romagne, Montfaucon, Coblenz, Verdun, [1920 Jun?]
Box 4	Photograph Album - Verdun, the Vassar Farm, Charny, Dugny, Eix-Abaucourt, etc., 1920
Box 7 (Oversize)	Photograph of Verdun looking across the Meuse River, undated [framed]
Box 4	Scrapbook - France and Verdun, 1920-1921
Folder 3.16	Verdun, with captions, 1919-1922
Folder 3.17	Verdun (Set A), 1920, [1936?]
Folder 3.18	Verdun (Sets B and C), circa 1920
Folder 3.19	Verdun (Set E), circa 1920
Folder 3.20	Unidentified, undated

Series VI. Printed Material, 1920-1969

Folder 3.21	Clippings, 1920
Folder 3.22	Clippings, 1945-1958
Folder 3.23	Clippings and articles by/about Elsa Butler Grove, 1920-1921, 1969
Folder 3.24	"The Baltic Republics," Baltic American Society, 1922 [1 pamphlet]
Folder 3.25	Guides to French Cities, 1920 [4 pamphlets]
Folder 3.26	"Holland-America Line Passenger List," 1921 Jun 4 [1 pamphlet]
Folder 3.27	Maps of the Baltic Republics, circa 1921 [2 maps, 1 with photocopy]
Folder 3.28	"The New Jersey Club Woman," Vol. XXI, No. 4, 1946 Dec
Folder 3.29	Postcards of France, 1920
Folder 3.30	Postcards of France (annotated), 1920

Series VII. Realia, circa 1919-1920

Box 8 (Oversize)	American Red Cross uniform of Elsa Butler Grove, including hat, jacket, and skirt, circa 1919
Box 5	Ammunition shell containing certificate from the Ville de Verdun awarded to Margaret Tupper (VC 1906) for her service in "La Goutte de Lait," circa 1920
Box 5	Ammunition shell containing certificate from the Ville de Verdun awarded to Ida P. McKean (VC 1896) for her service in "La Goutte de Lait," circa 1920
Box 6	Copper and wood plaques entitled "Verdun et ses Champs de Bataille par le Capitaine d'Art, Gerard," circa 1920 [2 plaques]
Box 8 (Oversize)	Medals - Red Cross of America, France, and Estonia, circa 1920 [4 medals]
Box 6	Metal bands taken from shells found on the battlefield at Verdun and used as napkin rings, circa 1920 [2 bands]
Box 8 (Oversize)	Vassar Unit armbands, blue, circa 1919 [2 arm bands]

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