

**FINDING AID 3605**

FONDS 3605  
OMAR AND RETTA GIFFORD KILBORN FONDS

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**OMAR KILBORN AND RETTA GIFFORD KILBORN FONDS. – 1889-1967. – 40 cm of textual records. – 259 photographs.**

Omar Leslie Kilborn (1867-1920) was a Methodist minister and medical missionary to China. He was born near Frankville, Ontario on November 20, 1867. He graduated in Medicine from Queen's University in 1889 and did further studies in Scotland and Germany.

In 1890 while pursuing postgraduate work in Heidelberg he volunteered as a medical missionary to China. In the same year he was appointed as one of the first missionaries to Szechwan. He departed together with his first wife, Jennie Fowler, from Vancouver in October 1891 and arrived in Shanghai a month later. In February 1892 they proceeded to Chengtu, arriving there in May. In July, two weeks after they settled in their own rented house, Jennie died of cholera.

Dr. Kilborn was ordained in Chengtu in 1897 by a special commission of Montreal Conference. He helped establish a hospital for men and helped found the West China Union University (WCUU) where he served as the first chairman of its Senate. He was also one of the organizers of the Chinese Red Cross Society in Szechwan, serving the sick and wounded during the Chinese Revolution in 1911 for which he gained the esteem and trust of the Chinese community. A linguist, he wrote "Chinese Lessons" which was used by beginner students of the Chinese language until the 1930s. He also authored a book on missionary work.

He died of pneumonia while on furlough in Canada in 1920.

Mary Alfretta Gifford (1864-1942) was born on May 11, 1864 in Meaford, Ontario. She graduated in Medicine from Trinity Medical College. She went to Szechwan, China in 1893, the first woman medical missionary sent by the Woman's Missionary Society (WMS). Upon her arrival in Shanghai, she became acquainted with Dr. Kilborn and got engaged to him shortly thereafter. They were married in Chengtu in 1894.

Family duties took much of her time so that she severed her relationship with WMS after a year's term. Nevertheless, she continued to serve. She founded a hospital for women and children and during her practice became aware of footbinding and the injuries it caused. Together with two other women, she sought to have it banned and lived to see the day when it was abolished by law. It is acknowledged that her greatest contribution to the mission field was the treatment of children's diseases.

The hospitals founded by the Kilborns, where they also served as members of the teaching staff, were the teaching hospitals of the Faculty of Medicine of the WCUU. Dr. Gifford Kilborn was also her husband's co-worker. She assisted him especially in the operating room.

After her husband's death, she returned to West China under the Methodist Board of Missions and much later was transferred to the Woman's Missionary Society working as staff at the Faculty of Medicine and the Canadian Mission Hospital for Women and Children until her retirement in 1933. Dr. Retta Kilborn died in Toronto in 1942.

The Kilborns had four children, Leslie Gifford, Constance Ellen, Cora Alfretta, and Roland Kenneth all of whom served in China in various capacities.

Fonds consists of the following series; 1) Records of Omar Kilborn, 1889-1920; 2) Records of Retta Gifford Kilborn, 1896-1939; 3) Records of the Descendents of Omar and Retta Gifford Kilborn, 1893-1967; and 4) Photographs, [190-?]-[194-?].

*See also F3167 for records of Constance Kilborn Walmsley and F3304 for the records of Leslie Kilborn.*

**SERIES 1: RECORDS OF OMAR KILBORN. – 1889-1920.**

Series consists of a personal chronology, 1889-1898, Diaries and Journals, 1906-1917, Correspondence, 1889-1920.

<b>Acc.</b>	<b>Box-File</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
2011.105C	1-1	Personal chronology	1889-1898
	1-2	Diaries	1906-1913
	1-3	---	1913-1917
	1-4	Correspondence	1889-1920
	1-5	--- with Orlando Joliffe	1915-1920
2019.106C	TR-11	Journals, notes and telegrams	1901-1908

**SERIES 2: RECORDS OF RETTA GIFFORD KILBORN. – 1896-1939.**

Series consists of diaries and notes, 1911-1936; correspondence from Omar Kilborn, 1901-1939; personal ephemera, 1896-1942.

<b>Acc.</b>	<b>Box-File</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
2011.105C	1-6	Diaries and notes	1911-1913
	1-7	Diaries	1920-1925
	1-8	---	1931, 1932
	1-9	---	1933, 1934
	2-1	---	1935, 1936
	2-2	Correspondence from Omar Kilborn	1901
	2-3	---	1903
	2-4	---	1906
	2-5	---	1907
	2-6	---	1908
	2-7	---	1909
	2-8	---	1911
	2-9	---	1913
	2-10	---	1914
	2-11	---	1915
	2-12	---	1916
	2-13	---	1918
	2-14	---	1919
	2-15	--- expressing sympathy	1920
	3-1	--- ---	1920
	3-2	--- with the Woman's Missionary Society	1926-1939
	3-3	--- from students	1904
	3-4	Various correspondence	1911-1938
	3-5	Formulary (Pharmaceutical)	[ca. 1912]
	3-6	Notes	[191-?]-1932
	3-7	---	[192-?]
	3-8	--- (loose)	1911-1926
	3-9	Certificates	1896-1913
	3-10	Passport	
	3-11	Ledger	1926-1942
	4-1	Missionary birthday book	[19-?]

**SERIES 3: RECORDS OF THE DESCENDANTS OF OMAR AND RETTA GIFFORD KILBORN. – 1893-1967.**

<b>Acc.</b>	<b>Box-File</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
2011.105C	4-2	Correspondence	1933-1952

**SERIES 3/Subseries 1: Cora Kilborn. – 1893-1967. – 1 cm of textual records. – 258 photographs.**

Subseries consists of the records of Cora Kilborn and includes some correspondence, primarily from family members, and an album documenting her time as a medical missionary in China and the Hospital for Women and Children in Chengdu, Sichuan.

<b>Acc.</b>	<b>Box-File</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
1977.175C	TR-7	Correspondence	1912-1939
1977.175P	1	Photograph album	1893-1967

**SERIES 4: PHOTOGRAPHS. --[190-?]-[194-?]. --1 photograph. --1 map.**

Series consists of a map of Chengdu, [190-?], and a photograph of Retta Kilborn, [194-?].

See Archives Catalogue for item-level descriptions of photographs.