

Collection #
P 0060

GEORGE AND NELLIE MEIER COLLECTION CA. 1900–1930S; COPY PRINTS 1980

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	One half-size document case of photographs
COLLECTION DATES:	Ca. 1900–1930s; copy prints 1980
PROVENANCE:	Gift from Patricia Gullick of Indianapolis, who received the album from her great uncle, Fermor Cannon, who was married to Ruth Austin McGinnis Peaslee, who was Nellie Meier's niece.

RESTRICTIONS: None

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REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.

ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 1980.0719, 1998.1148x

NOTES: See: Meier, Nellie Simmons. *Lions' Paws: The Story of Famous Hands*. New York: Barrows Mussey Publisher, 1937. General Collection: [BF921 .M36 1937](#); clipping files for Meier, Nellie and for Tuckaway

BIOGRAPHICAL / HISTORICAL SKETCH

Tuckaway, a residence “tucked away” among mature trees at 3128 North Pennsylvania Street in Indianapolis, was the site of a famed salon that attracted national and international celebrities from the 1910s through the 1930s. In 1910 it became the home of arts patrons George and Nellie Meier who supported writers, artists, actors, dancers, and musicians. They contributed to local arts organizations and sponsored visits of nationally known performers and artists to Indianapolis.

Tuckaway

Built in 1906 by acquaintances of the Meiers, the house is one of the earliest in Indianapolis of the bungalow style. In 1910 when the original owners decided to move to California, the Meiers immediately consulted their attorney and within a few hours had a purchase agreement.

The Meiers remodeled the house to accommodate their active social life as well as their collections of art and period furnishings. They altered the street facade of the house as little as possible to retain the quaint cottage appearance. A two-story salon was incorporated in front with a complete second floor to the rear that included several bedrooms, baths, and a great open porch. On a postcard in the collection postmarked in August 1912, Nellie wrote, “Carpenters commence Aug 12 to ‘raise the roof’!!” Borrowing an idea from their friend Coco Chanel’s Paris reception room, the Meiers had the walls and spaces between the large beams in the ceiling covered in canvas and finished with a special paint that mixed gold powder in a varnish base to give a warm, glowing effect.

In the 1920s a sun room (called the “green breakfast room” by current owner Kenneth Keene) with latticed walls and ceiling was added by architect Fermor Cannon, who later married Nellie’s niece, Ruth, who inherited the house from Nellie.

In 1972 the house was bought by designer Kenneth Keene. Although Ruth had not been anxious to sell Tuckaway, Keene’s enthusiasm and appreciation of the house and its history won her over. Ruth also consented to letting Keene have many dresses and accessories designed by George as well as Nellie’s extensive files and memorabilia to display

in the house. On 23 September 1982, the house was added to the National Register of Historic Places and is listed as the George Philip Meier House.

George and Nellie Meier

George Philip Meier was born in September 1864 in Michigan to German immigrant parents. He became a nationally known designer of women's apparel. In 1902 he began an affiliation with L.S. Ayres & Company and traveled to Europe annually in that capacity.

Nellie P. Simmons Meier was born in Cohoes, New York, on November 10 (in 1864 according to the 1900 census; in 1867 according to her 1914 passport application). She became a palm reader of considerable fame. She began studying palmistry as a science in 1895, and in the next forty years read (and in most cases took impressions of) more than 20,000 hands, including those of numerous well-known Americans and Europeans including Susan B. Anthony, Booker T. Washington, Walt Disney, Helen Hayes, George Gershwin, Amelia Earhart, Margaret Sanger, Jane Addams, Jacob Riis, Eleanor Roosevelt, Carole Lombard, Leslie Howard, Mary Pickford, Ethel Barrymore, Eva LeGallienne, Jascha Heifetz, José Iturbi, Ida Tarbell, Lowell Thomas, George Ade, Meredith Nicholson, May Wright Sewall, James Whitcomb Riley, and Lew Wallace. She also lectured extensively and wrote for magazines. She had a strong interest in elevating palm reading from the status of fortune-telling to that of a science.

George and Nellie married on 14 February 1899 in Marion County, Indiana. At the time of the 1900 census, they lived at 838 N. Delaware Street in Indianapolis, and George worked as a tailor. His older sister Emma Meier and a boarder lived with them.

The Meiers moved to 843 N. Meridian Street in Indianapolis around 1906 or 1907, and by 1909 they lived at 940 Middle Drive in the Woodruff Place neighborhood of Indianapolis.

The 1910 census shows the couple still living on Middle Drive; Emma was still living with them as was Nellie's 15-year-old niece Ruth McGinnis. George was still working as a tailor. At some point that year the Meiers acquired the Tuckaway home, where they remained until their deaths.

In 1920 the census listed George's occupation as a designer of women's clothes, and in 1930 as a gown designer.

After George died in 1931, Nellie continued with her palm readings, travel, and lectures. In 1937, President Franklin Roosevelt personally asked Nellie to donate a large number of hand prints and their analyses to the Library of Congress. The collection of Nellie Simmons Meier's papers held in the Library of Congress includes autographed original palm prints, autographed photographs, and character sketches of 135 notable individuals that were assembled for her book, *Lions' Paws, the Story of Famous Hands*. Nellie's death in 1944 was mourned by thousands in Indianapolis. (Some sources list Nellie's death date as 1939, but this appears to be an error.)

Sources:

Cravey, Georgia A. "Tuckaway." In *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, edited by Bodenhamer, David J. and Robert G. Barrows. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994: 1343. General Collection: F534 .I55 E4 1994

Historic Meridian Park Neighborhood. "Tuckaway" (<http://www.historicmeridianpark.org/tuckaway.htm>). Accessed 27 October 2009.

Indiana Marriage Collection, 1800–1941 (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=5059>). Accessed 10 October 2008.

Indianapolis City Directory. Taylor, Mich.: R.L. Polk & Co. 1906-1909. General Collection: F534.I55 A18

Kalleen, James L. III. "A Reader of Hands" Nellie Meier of Tuckaway." In *Indianapolis at Home*, December 1979, pp. 42–43, 102, 104. Clipping File: Biography – M

Keene, Kenneth. Personal communication, 9 December 2009.

Library of Congress. "Nellie Simmons Meier: A Register of Her Papers in the Library of Congress" (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/text/meier.html>). Accessed 9 October 2008.

Meier, Nellie Simmons. *Lions' Paws: The Story of Famous Hands*. New York: Barrows Mussey Publisher, 1937. General Collection: [BF921.M36 1937](#)

National Register of Historic Places (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/research/nris.htm>). Accessed 16 October 2008.

U.S. Census, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx>). Accessed 10 October 2008.

U.S. Passport Applications, 1795–1925 (<http://content.ancestrylibrary.com/iexec/?htx=List&dbid=1174>). Accessed 15 October 2008.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of two series of photographs of the Indianapolis homes of George and Nellie Meier, ca. 1900–1930s. Some of the photographs have writing on the back, mostly Nellie's, describing the decor.

Series 1, Tuckaway: This series contains exterior and interior views of Tuckaway, the home at 3128 North Pennsylvania Street, ca. 1910s–1930s.

Series 2, Earlier Homes: This series includes an exterior view and some interior views of the home at 838 N. Delaware Street, ca. 1900–1907, and interior views of the home at 940 Middle Drive in the Woodruff Place neighborhood, taken in 1909. Also included are photographs of interiors identified by room, but not by house. These could be of either the Delaware Street or Middle Drive home, or of the home at 843 N. Meridian Street, ca. 1906–1908.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Tuckaway

CONTENTS

Exterior Views: front, back, and side; some snow scenes, blooming tulips, probably Nellie on back porch, George on front walk. Postcard written by Nellie, 1912.

Drawing Room before ca. 1925: several views including Nellie sitting with her cat.

Drawing Room after ca. 1925: several views showing newly installed corbels and Chanel-inspired canvas coverings for ceiling and walls.

Dining Room before ca. 1925: several views.

CONTAINER

Photographs, 1, Folder 1 Box

Photographs, 1, Folder 2 Box

Photographs, 1, Folder 3 Box

Photographs, Box

	1, Folder 4	
Dining Room after ca. 1925: a few views showing newly installed corbels and the walls without the hanging rail shown in the earlier views.	Photographs, 1, Folder 5	Box
Sun Room (Green Breakfast Room): two views, ca. 1920s–1930s.	Photographs, 1, Folder 6	Box
Library: several views showing the walls filled with photographs of famous friends.	Photographs, 1, Folder 7	Box
Hall and Stairway: two views.	Photographs, 1, Folder 8	Box
Master Bedroom (second floor): one view.	Photographs, 1, Folder 9	Box
Contact Sheets: several exterior and interior views. One photo of the actor Leslie Howard having his palm read by Nellie.	Photographs, 1, Folder 10	Box

Series 2: Earlier Homes

CONTENTS

Exterior of 838 N. Delaware Street from the north side, Pratt Street (now E. 9th Street), ca. 1900–1907.

Interior of 838 N. Delaware Street: the library, ca. 1900–1907.

Interior of 940 Middle Drive, Woodruff Place: two views of salon and one of the dining room. Postcards written by Nellie, December 1909.

Bedrooms (house unidentified): two views of George and Nellie's bedroom; one view of Emma Meier's (George's sister) bedroom.

Dining Room (house unidentified): two views.

Parlor (house unidentified): two views.

Upstairs front room and alcove (house unidentified): two views.

Upstairs middle room (house unidentified): two views.

“Little room off hall” (house unidentified): one view.

CONTAINER

Photographs,
1, Folder 11

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 12

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 13

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 14

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 15

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 16

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 17

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 18

Box

Photographs,
1, Folder 19

Box

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P 0060).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.