

Victoria University Archives

Finding Aid - Harold Morrey Smith fonds (2061)

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Harold Morrey Smith fonds

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Summary information

Repository:	Victoria University Archives
Title:	Harold Morrey Smith fonds
Reference code:	2061
Category [alternative]:	Students / Alumni Personal Papers
Date:	1916-1920 (date of creation)
Physical description:	19 cm of textual records 1 photo album
Dates of creation, revision and deletion:	Added by MO: June 6, 2016Updated by JT: Sept 21 2018; Dec 19 2018Updated by JT: July 9 2019Updated by JT: January 5 2021Updated by JT: Oct 31 2024
Note [generalNote]:	See also a photo of H.M. Smith in uniform under accession 1989.141, by searching our Photograph Database.
Note [generalNote]:	For other personal records donated by students, see Collection 2190 - Victoria University (Toronto, Ont.). Student Collection

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

Harold Morrey Smith was born in Toronto in 1897. His father was employed by the Bank of Toronto. His mother, with whom Harold had a close relationship, was apparently involved in the activities and social life of Trinity Methodist Church. His only sibling, a younger brother named Waldo, was later to become a minister of The United Church of Canada and a professor of church history. Harold attended the University of Toronto Schools before matriculating at Victoria College in the University of Toronto in 1914. During his first two years at Vic, he distinguished himself as a gifted student who not only won academic scholarships and prizes but also participated in activities such as the "Bob" and was elected "Senior Stick" (in absentia) by his classmates.

In the summer of 1916 Harold enlisted in the Canadian military and spent the next three years in training as a member of the Signal Corps. The first weeks from late June to early August of 1916 were spent at Rockcliffe Park in Ottawa. This was followed by more than two years at several locations in England, where he made friends within the military (including a close-knit group of Vic students) as well as among the townspeople he visited and members of the local Methodist churches he attended. He developed a particularly close friendship with a young woman in Eastbourne. During this period he found himself promoted to the rank of sergeant. In November of 1918 his unit moved to France, where he remained until the end of the war without seeing action in battle.

After returning to Canada in the summer of 1919, Harold re-entered Victoria College and graduated with a B.A. and a Gold Medal in Modern History in 1920. His professional career was devoted to practicing law in Toronto, which he did for almost fifty years until his death in 1972.

Scope and content

Fonds contains letters sent by Harold Morrey Smith to his family from military training camps in Ottawa, England and France during the period 29 June 1916 to 22 May 1919. There are some additional items such as a procedure manual for Signal Training (1918), dispersal certificate (1919 May 24), a small encased picture of Jesus Christ, and a student essay written for a Modern History course.

The letters provide an exceptionally clear and vivid picture of both the external and internal worlds of Harold Morrey Smith during the period of his military service. The world outside him is described in great detail: living conditions and social life in the military training camps; training methods and signalling techniques; excursions to towns and cities, and the social life he found outside the camps; religious services attended as well as movies, plays and musicals taken in.

The internal world of Harold Morrey Smith is pictured in as much detail. It is a world shaped both by the moral and religious outlook of Canadian Methodism, and by a broad education in the liberal arts. The mind of a future lawyer is suggested in descriptive passages that are precise and analytical in approach. Other passages, in which the writer's emotions are more visible, express moral and aesthetic opinions. In some instances it appears that the writer seeks to reassure his parents that their distant son is not falling prey to the common vices of military life. Nevertheless, the letters do explore in a frank and insightful way some of his feelings about his routinized existence and the moral complexity of the war he is training to fight. Other subjects discussed in the letters are his attitudes toward his promotion to higher rank, his desire to see "action", his unwillingness to commit himself to a romantic relationship during this period, as well his thoughts about religion, art, writing, and other more abstract topics. Throughout, his closeness to his family and his fondness for the Victoria College community as remembered in Toronto and experienced abroad are evident.

The letters are written in an unusually lucid and vigorous style, which makes their reading generally quite effortless in spite of all the descriptive detail. It is evident that Smith had definite ideas about composition and style, and that he invested a good deal of time in keeping up his correspondence and diaries (the existence of other letters and the diaries are not presently known). Researchers interested in the subjects addressed in the letters to his family are the ultimate beneficiaries of this substantial investment.

Notes

Title notes

- **Source of title proper:** Title based on the contents of the fonds.

Physical condition

The paper of some letters is becoming brittle and fragile, especially around the edges. Use caution when reviewing.

Immediate source of acquisition

This material was donated to the Victoria University Archives by Mr. Smith's daughters, Margaret Veall and Carolyn Stafford, in the autumn of 1989 and winter of 1990.

1987.082V (student essay)

1989.128V

1993.065 (album)

Alternative form available

Some letters are available digitally. See file level for details and contact the Archivist for access.

Finding aids

Photograph album is described in the photograph database - search for accession number 1993.065.

Some photos have been digitized: <http://archival-photos.vicu.utoronto.ca/>

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published
- **Conservation:** December 2018 - Many letters have been sleeved in plastic to protect them. Some letters are sleeved by individual pages, others have all the pages in one sleeve.

Access points

- Photographs and art (documentary form)
- Textual records (documentary form)

Series descriptions

Reference code	Title	Dates	Physical description
2061-1989.128V-1-1	File - Letters to his family	1916 June - September	
2061-1989.128V-1-2	File - Letters to his family	1916 October - December	
2061-1989.128V-1-3	File - Letters to his family	1917 January - February	
2061-1989.128V-1-4	File - Letters to his family	1917 March - April	
2061-1989.128V-1-5	File - Letters to his family	1917 May - July	
2061-1989.128V-1-6	File - Letters to his family	1917 August - September	

2061-1989.128V-1-7	File - Letters to his family	1917 October - December
2061-1989.128V-1-8	File - Letters to his family	1918 January - March
2061-1989.128V-2-1	File - Letters to his family	1918 April - October
2061-1989.128V-2-2	File - Letters to his family	1918 July - October
2061-1989.128V-2-3	File - Letters to his family	1918 November - 1919 February
2061-1989.128V-2-4	File - Letters to his family	1919 March - May
2061-1989.128V-2-5	File - [various items] <i>Scope and content:</i> Procedure Manual for Signal Training - 1918 Christmas Greeting Card - 1918 Dispersal Certificate - 1919 May 24 Picture of Jesus Christ (encased) - n.d.	1918-1919
2061-1987.082V TR-1	File - Why Sir Robert Peel Adopted Free Trade <i>Scope and content:</i> Student essay written for Modern History course.	1920