

Finding Aid to the Eileen Tuff Diaries

Tuff, Eileen, 1888-1948

Eileen Tuff Diaries, 1920-1947

1 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 235

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

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BIOGRAPHY

Eileen Carl was born July 10, 1888 in a log house at Key West, a village near Dubuque, Iowa. Her father, Alonzo E. Carl, was born in the Mohawk Valley of New York, and married her mother, Bridget Canning, of Dubuque, in Bay City Michigan. The family lived in Shearls Mound, Iowa and Thompson Mill, Iowa before coming to North Dakota in June of 1899. There he worked on the railroad, living on a farm with friends near Denbigh before moving to Rugby, North Dakota. Eileen's formal education was interrupted by moves to several school districts around Dubuque and the family's move to North Dakota. At age 15 she began doing household work for elderly friends and neighbors, so her formal education ended. Yet she was a voracious reader all her life, wrote scores of poems and countless letters.

On July 18, 1906 Eileen Carl married William Hamilton Tuff. He had homesteaded on land nine miles northwest of Rugby in East Barton Township and to where they moved after their marriage. Mr. Tuff, born April 28, 1880 in Canada, was the son of William R and Catherine (Hamilton) Tuff. Mrs. Tuff lived on this farm for the rest of her life. Eileen Tuff had twelve children, six boys and six girls. Coincidentally William Tuff was also one of twelve children. The Tuffs made their living by farming and by raising livestock. She and her husband were actively involved with state and local politics and counted themselves as supporters of the Nonpartisan League. Mrs. Tuff attended political rallies and meetings, and hosted some Nonpartisan League meetings. William Tuff was a member of the North Dakota House of Representatives from 1935 to 1946 and a member of the North Dakota Senate from 1947 to 1950. Eileen Tuff died at Rugby on May 29, 1948. Mr. Tuff died in 1960. They are buried at Percilla Watts Cemetery in Rugby.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists of diaries written by Eileen Tuff, spanning from 1920 to 1947, Hamilton and Tuff family history, and journals about her travels. The diaries were begun on November 26, 1920. Mrs. Tuff writes a short narrative in the first diary telling about her life up to that time in 1920. After this introduction she begins her diaries. Entries into her diaries were made not daily but typically on several to most of the days of any given month. Mrs. Tuff identified her first ten diaries by numbering them. It appears that diary number eight is missing and this leaves a gap in the sequence of the diaries from June 21, 1933 to April 8, 1934. Other smaller gaps are noted in the period covered by Mrs. Tuff's diaries.

There is a second set of five diaries that were written during the period between 1922 and 1934. The time periods of these diaries overlap with the time periods covered by the set of diaries that Mrs. Tuff had numbered one through ten. This second set of diaries is very similar to the numbered set and it is believed they were transcribed from the other set, with some editing in the process.

Mrs. Tuff's diaries give us a detailed description of life on a farm in North Dakota during the first half of the twentieth century. Her diaries show how independent the family was, especially in terms of growing their own food. Mrs. Tuff mentions canning peas, beets, beans, sauerkraut, pickles, carrots, tomatoes, strawberries, beef and pork. All of these items were grown or made there on the farm. Mrs. Tuff made her own sausage, cream, bread, and cheese. They supplied their own meat by slaughtering the cows, pigs, chickens, turkeys, and sheep that they kept on the farm. They augmented this meat supply with wild game like pheasants, deer, ducks, geese, rabbit, and fish.

This farm fed Mr. and Mrs. Tuff and their twelve children so easily that they sold eggs, cream, roosters, turkeys, pigs and cows to make extra money. As independent as they were they did rely on the larger economy for items that they could not make or did not want to make for themselves. They bought coal, sugar, flour, shoes, eyeglasses, fabric, and at least some of their clothes in town. They bought plows and other farm implements in town. Later on they would buy tractors and all the fuel, tools and replacement parts that this equipment requires. And of course they depended on the town economy to purchase the wheat, corn, and potatoes that they grew as cash crops.

These diaries chronicle the technological innovations of the period. The Tuffs got their first car in 1916. They got a phone in 1923, connected only to the neighboring Rudolph farm for several years. The first lighting was by carbide lights, followed by a home-built 12-volt wind generator. The national historical developments of the period did not figure prominently in Mrs. Tuff's diary. Events like the stock market crash in 1929 and the Allied invasion of Europe in 1944 are not mentioned in the diary. The declaration of war in 1941 and the Japanese invasion of Guadalcanal are mentioned in passing without comment. She also mentions hearing a speech by Hitler on the radio. At least two young men who died in the war are mentioned in the diary.

There are frequent trips to town. The town that she refers to is Barton, North Dakota or perhaps Rugby, North Dakota. Mrs. Tuff mentions going to the movies, Gene Autry is a favorite. In summer "the boys play ball [baseball] at Barton" and there are more than a few trips to the river for picnics. Visits to friends and neighbors are also a favorite diversion.

Mrs. Tuff makes frequent references to scrapbooks that she kept. She spent more than a little time writing about them in her diary. The scrapbooks are located at the public library in Rugby, N.D. The diaries give readers a sense of the daily and yearly cycles that structured her life. The daily activities of cooking, cleaning and taking care of her family took up a great deal of her time. The yearly cycles of plowing, planting and harvesting as well as holidays and school calendars regulated her world. The diaries are very personal. Mrs. Tuff describes the emotions that she experiences during fights with her husband, a sickness or injury to one of her children and separation from her husband when began to serve in the state legislature. These diaries will be a valuable source for anyone who wishes to know how rural farm families lived during the first half of the twentieth century. This collection has been organized into two **Diary Series** and a **Subject Files Series**.

The [First Diary Series](#) contains twenty-four diaries written by Eileen Tuff. After an autobiographical narrative that describes her life up to that time, the diaries document Mrs. Tuff's thoughts and activities from November 26, 1920 through October 20, 1945. The diaries give a detailed description of life on a North Dakota farm during the first half of the 20th century. The focus of the diaries is the day-to-day life of Mrs. Tuff's family and farm. While these diaries are an excellent source for understanding the culture and society of this place and time there is little to be found concerning the larger historical developments of the period. There appears to be one diary missing which would have covered the dates June 21, 1933 through April 8, 1934. Other smaller chronological gaps are noted.

The [Second Diary Series](#) contains five diaries written by Eileen Tuff. These diaries, in content, are like those described above. The time periods covered by these diaries overlaps with the time periods covered by the diaries in the first diary series. It is believed they were transcribed from the "original" diaries, with some editing in the process. The reason for these diaries is not clear.

The [Subject Files Series](#) contains three additional notebooks recorded by Eileen Tuff. The "Tuff Family Tree" notebook begins with Hamilton family, recording succeeding generations into the 1940s. Mrs. Tuff began the notebook in 1932, based upon family information given to her at that time. She then updated the booklet with births, marriages and deaths. The family line begins with William Hamilton, born 1827

at Edinburg, Scotland, and his wife Ellen Airth, born 1836. They were married at Glasgow, Canada. Eileen's husband William Hamilton Tuff was a grandson of William and Ellen.

There are two notebooks in which Mrs. Tuff recorded her memories of trips she had taken. One recounts various trips taken after her marriage, beginning in 1908 with a visit to her sister and family at Denbigh, N.D. The account then jumps to 1934 and continues to 1940. The notebook then jumps to her winter 1947 trip which is expanded upon in the next notebook. The final notebook also includes family history information on the Carl family. It begins with her parents, Alonzo and Bridget (Canning) Carl who settled at Rugby, N.D. Alonzo died there in 1901, leaving a wife and seven children.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Finding aid, and Biographical material
	First Diary Series
1/2	Birth to November 20, 1920
1/3	November 26, 1920 to October 18, 1926
1/4	October 3, 1926 to April 30, 1929
1/5	May 1, 1929 to December 17, 1930
1/6	December 18, 1930 to November 7, 1931
1/7	November 8, 1931 to August 5, 1932
1/8	August 6, 1932 to June 21, 1933
1/9	April 8, 1934 to October 9, 1934
1/10	November 22, 1934 to April 30, 1935
1/11	May 1, 1935 to November 28, 1935
1/12	December 1, 1935 to August 13, 1936
1/13	August 15, 1936 to March 31, 1937
2/1	April 1, 1937 to May 20, 1937
2/2	September 1, 1937 to August 10, 1938
2/3	August 10, 1938 to February 28, 1939
2/4	March 1, 1939 to January 1, 1940
2/5	January 1, 1940 to October 31, 1940
2/6	November 1, 1940 to October 13, 1941
2/7	October 13, 1941 to September 1, 1942
2/8	September 1, 1942 to June 29, 1943
2/9	July 1, 1943 to May 10, 1944
2/10	April 10, 1944 to December 11, 1944
2/11	December 1, 1944 to April 31, 1945
2/12	May 1, 1945 to October 20, 1945
3/1	August 9, 1945 to November 13, 1945

- 3/2 October 21, 1945 to March 31, 1946
- 3/3 April 1, 1946 to September 28, 1946
- 3/4 September 29 to February 16, 1947
- 3/5 February 21, 1947 to May 24, 1947
- 3/6 May 24, 1947 to October 31, 1947

Second Diary Series

- 3/7 April 1, 1922 to December 31, 1926
- 3/8 January 1, 1927 to January 22, 1929
- 3/9 March 9, 1930 to September 21, 1930
- 3/10 August 6, 1932 to November 28, 1932
- 3/11 July 27, 1934 to November 21, 1934

Subject Files Series

- 3/12 "Hamilton [and Tuff] Family Tree"
- 3/13 "Trips taken since marriage"
- 3/14 "My trip, April 1947" and Carl family history