

# ELIZABETH TAYLOR WATKINS PAPERS

AR 810



Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

Updated October, 2012

# **Elizabeth Taylor Watkins Papers**

## **(1900 – 1983)**

### **AR 810**

#### **Summary**

Main Entry: Elizabeth Taylor Watkins Papers

Date Span: 1900 – 1981

Abstract: Elizabeth Watkins served as a Baptist missionary to Japan from 1929 to 1970. The collection consists primarily of letters from Watkins to her mother, written between the years 1916 and 1933. Also included are her autobiography, a diary, newsletters, and an autograph book. A significant amount of correspondence is in Japanese.

Size: 2 linear ft.

Collection #: AR 810

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Elizabeth Taylor Watkins was born April 21, 1900, in Camden, SC, the eldest of three children of Edward Fleming Watkins and Elizabeth Bomar Watkins. She had two brothers, John Earle (born 1901) and Edward Fleming (born 1903). The family moved to Spartanburg, SC, in 1904, and her father died in 1909. She maintained a very close relationship with her mother her entire life. Elizabeth was baptized in 1910 at Southside Baptist Church in Spartanburg.

Watkins graduated from Spartanburg High School in 1916 and Judson College in Marion, Alabama in 1920. At Judson, she actively participated in the YWCA and the Baptist Young People's Union. She also devoted time in the spring of her senior year to speaking in rural Alabama churches in behalf of the "Seventy-five Million Campaign." She attended the Woman's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, Kentucky, where she studied from 1920 to 1922, preparing to fulfill her dream of becoming a foreign missionary. When she completed her studies in Louisville, Elizabeth applied to the Foreign Mission Board, but her application was declined because of her age. She was twenty-two at the time, and the Board's minimum age for appointment was twenty-five.

Unable to secure an appointment for overseas, Watkins turned to home missions work. From 1922 to 1924, she resided and worked at the Baptist Settlement House in Norfolk, Virginia, engaging in social work and teaching in the evening school. In 1924, she taught at Watauga Academy in Butler, Tennessee, one of the Home Mission Board's Mountain Mission Schools. In 1925, she accepted a job as Young People's Leader for the Oklahoma Woman's Missionary Union, a position she held for a year. Watkins continued to feel a strong calling

to foreign missions and developed a particular desire to go to Japan. She applied to the Foreign Mission Board each year from 1923 to 1928, but appointments were extremely limited during those years due to financial constraints.

Letters from T. B. Ray, Secretary of the Board, urged Watkins to continue preparing herself by seeking further training and experience in teaching. In 1926, she entered the Teachers College of Columbia University, receiving the Master of Arts in English June 1, 1927, and a diploma as “Teacher of English” February 28, 1928. She spent time teaching Bible and religious education at Converse College in Spartanburg, SC. In the summer of 1928, she served as a volunteer elementary summer school teacher in Newfoundland under the auspices of the International Grenfell Association.

Finally, in 1929, she resolved to go to Japan on her own. She paid for her own passage and was hired directly by the Board’s Japan Mission to teach at Seinan Gakuin, a boys’ middle/high school (grades 7 through 11) established by FMB missionary Kelsey Dozier in 1915 at Fukuoka. During the 1930s, Watkins also taught at two government schools: Moji Commercial High School (1933 – 1937) and Fukuoka College of Commerce (1938 – 1941). In addition to her teaching, she actively participated in the work of the Fukuoka mission. In 1930, she became director of the Garden of Love, a kindergarten in a village near Seinan Gakuin called Jigyohama. About eighty families lived in the village, all outcastes because of their social class, poverty, and disease. She continued in this work until 1941 and also engaged in social work among coal mining families in a nearby community from 1935 to 1941.

Watkins’s mother joined her in Japan in 1933, remaining with her until late 1940, when the political situation forced her to return to the United States. Watkins herself remained in Japan for a few more months and then left only because it became clear that her relationship with her Japanese friends put them in jeopardy. She departed Japan for Hawaii April 11, 1941.

Watkins spent the war years continuing her education and her service activities while working to support herself. She and her mother lived in Spartanburg from 1941 to 1945. Watkins studied stenography at Spartanburg Business College in 1941– 1942 and attended summer school at Converse College in 1943. She also received 500 hours training as a Nurse’s Aide at Spartanburg General Hospital in 1944 and volunteered for the Red Cross. Meanwhile, she supported herself by working in a shirt factory and selling Compton’s Encyclopedias.

From April to July, 1945, Watkins taught elementary school in a Japanese internment camp at Gila River, Arizona. Her mother, who was with her at the time, became ill and died in a Phoenix hospital that fall. From 1946 until her departure for Japan in 1947, Watkins served as a high school teacher and church worker in the mountains of Alabama. At the same time, she completed a correspondence course with the International Child Evangelism Institute. The summer of 1947, she attended summer school at Wheaton College in Illinois.

In May 1947, the Foreign Mission Board agreed to issue Watkins a contract (not a regular appointment) to teach at Seinan Jo Gakuin, a girls’ school in Fukuoka, and to pay her passage to Japan. In 1948, the Foreign Mission Board finally gave her a formal appointment, allowing her years of unofficial service to outweigh her age in making the decision. From

1948 to 1952, she directed the Good Will Center (Rinkosha) in Tobata, under the auspices of the Japan WMU.

Watkins was able to devote herself to her first love – pioneering new church work. In 1952, she started Baptist work in three towns on the island of Shikoku, commuting between Matsuyama, Imabari, and Yahatahama. She engaged in door to door visitation and direct evangelism. When churches were organized, she directed the Sunday School, led Bible studies and the WMU, and worked with the physically handicapped, the deaf, and juvenile delinquents residing in local institutions. During a furlough in 1953 – 1954, she earned a Master of Religious Education degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Elizabeth Taylor Watkins retired in 1970 at the age of seventy. Before leaving Japan, the Emperor awarded her the “Fifth Class Order of the Precious Crown” for service in education. She retired to Salt Lake City, Utah, but did not cease working. For eleven years, she volunteered in numerous local service organizations, including the Red Cross and the local VA hospital. She died in Salt Lake City October 15, 1983, at the age of eighty-three.

### **Scope and Content**

The Elizabeth Taylor Watkins papers comprise two linear feet of records dating from 1900 to 1981. The bulk of the collection consists of letters from Watkins to her mother written between the years 1916 and 1933. Those letters chronicle her experiences as a student at Judson College, the WMU Training School, and at Columbia University, as well as her work at the Baptist Settlement House in Norfolk, VA, as Oklahoma WMU Young People’s Leader, and as a teacher at Watauga Academy in Butler, TN. Letters to her mother also chronicle her first four years in Japan, as well as a period of approximately four months in 1941.

From 1933 to 1940, her mother was with her in Japan, so few letters from Watkins exist. Most of the correspondence from 1933 to 1972 consists of letters from family members, along with a few from the director of the Baptist Mission in Japan. Other significant materials in the collection include Watkins’s typescript autobiography, and copies of a few newsletters written by her in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, the collection includes the autograph book (1888) and diary (1890 – 1992) of Watkins’s mother, Elizabeth Bomar Watkins.

### **Materials Removed**

Thirty-five photographs of Elizabeth were separated from this collection and placed in the Photograph Collection Individuals File. Three photographs of the 1954 Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, were placed in the Photograph Collection Subjects File.

### **Arrangement**

Arranged alphabetically by series and alphabetically or chronologically within each series

### **Provenance**

Donated by F. Calvin Parker, 1997

**Preferred Citation**

Elizabeth Taylor Watkins Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives,  
Nashville, Tennessee

**Access Restrictions**

None

**Subject Terms**

Southern Baptist Convention. Foreign Mission Board  
Missions – Japan  
Women in missionary work  
Baptists – Missions  
Social settlements – Virginia

**Related Materials**

Additional information on Elizabeth Taylor Watkins appears in the Foreign Mission Board Missionary Correspondence Files (AR 551-2, Box 77). This material includes two folders of financial records (1948 – 1983), two folders of correspondence with the Area Director for Japan (1948 – 1983), one folder of correspondence with the Board Secretary (1970 – 1980), and a few of her newsletters from the 1950s and 1960s. There is only partial overlap between the newsletters in this file and the newsletters in the main body of the Watkins Papers.

**Bibliography**

Parker, F. Calvin. The Southern Baptist Mission in Japan, 1889 – 1989. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991.

**Container List****Box 1**

Autobiographical

1.1 Autobiographical

Correspondence

1.2 Childhood, 1908

1.3 1916

1.4 1917

1.5 1918

1.6 1919

1.7 1920, January – June

1.8 1920, July – December

1.9 1921

1.10 1922

1.11 1923

1.12 1924

1.13 1925

1.14 1926

- 1.15 1927
- 1.16 1928
- 1.17 1929
- 1.18 1930
- 1.19 1931
- 1.20 1932

#### Correspondence

- 1.21 1933–1936, 1938, 1940
- 1.22 1941
- 1.23 1942
- 1.24 1943
- 1.25 1944
- 1.26 1945
- 1.27 1946
- 1.28 1948 – 1949
- 1.29 1950 – 1952, 1954 – 1959
- 1.30 1960 – 1969
- 1.31 1970 – 1971, 1973, 1980
- 1.32 no date
- 1.33 Between other family members, 1912 – 1913, 1916, 1931
- 1.34 in Japanese
- 1.35 letter fragments, no date
- 1.36 letter fragments, pre-war Japan

#### Education

- 1.37 Spartanburg City Schools, 1908 – 1916
- 1.38 Judson College, Marion, Alabama, 1916 – 1920, 1944 – 1946
- 1.39 WMU Training School, 1921 – 1922, 1926 – 1928
- 1.40 Teachers College, Columbia University, 1926 – 1928
- 1.41 Continuing education, 1941, 1944

#### Employment

- 1.42 Oklahoma WMU, 1925 – 1957
- 1.43 Teaching – Certificates, applications, etc., 1927, 1943, 1946
- 1.44 International Grenfell Association, Newfoundland, 1928

#### Employment

- 1.45 Gila River Project, ca. 1945
- 1.46 Tobata Baptist Goodwill Center (Rinkosha), 1949

#### Family Information

- 1.47 1918, 1935
- 1.48 Elizabeth Bomar Watkins – Autograph book, 1888
- 1.49 Elizabeth Bomar Watkins – Diary, 1890 – 1992

**Box 2**

## Financial

2.1 1934, 1959 – 1972

## Medical

2.2 1937, 1950 – 1972

## Miscellaneous

- 2.3 1919, 1923, 1925, 1935, 1941, 1943, 1965  
 2.4 Business cards  
 2.5 Clippings, 1919 – 1922, 1944, 1958, 1967, 1970 – 1972  
 2.6 Japanese keepsakes, 1958  
 2.7 Postcard collection  
 2.8 Teaching aid on the life of Paul

## Newsletters/Reports

2.9 1955, 1959 – 1960, 1969 – 1970

## Notes/Notebooks

- 2.10 Addresses  
 2.11 “The Great Century in Africa and Asia,” K. S. Latourette, chapter 6  
 2.12 Japanese language and customs  
 2.13 Japanese  
 2.14 Miscellaneous

## Notes/Notebooks

- 2.15 Revelation  
 2.16 Spiritual, 1925  
 2.17 Spiritual, 1939  
 2.18 Stenography

## Photographs

2.19 29 items, 1944

## Publications

- 2.20 The Advance (Foreign Missions Conference, Ridgecrest), 1958  
 2.21 Annals of Good St. Anne de Beaupre, vol. 41, no. 10, Feb., 1928  
 2.22 Crusade of the Americas, News Bulletin, Aug., 1968, May – June, 1969  
 2.23 The Friend, Honolulu, 1928 – Historical Num. – Kamehameha Schools, 1887 – 1928  
 2.24 Japan, Her Land and Life, Board of Tourist Industry, Tokyo, 1936  
 2.25 Lantern Lights of Baptist Work in Southwestern Japan, Fukuokua, 1935  
 2.26 The Messenger, Greenville (SC) Baptist Association, Oct., 1959  
 2.27 Radio sermons by Mordecai F. Ham  
 2.28 Tracts  
 2.29 Transactions of the Meiji Japan Society, vol. 40, Fall, 1933  
 2.30 Words of Jesus (devotional book)

### Scrapbook

3.1 Kept by her aunt, Louise Drake, 1948 – 1950

### Tapes

3.2 Audiocassette – Japanese preachers, 1970

### Travel

33 1960, 1970

### Vital Records

3.4 Birth certificate (1900), passports, social security cards

### Volunteer Work

3.5 Red Cross, 1942 – 1943, 1945

3.6 Utah, 1972 – 1981