



Lyda Conley Papers (KSCOLL 9)

The Lyda Conley Collection comprises correspondence, documents, and ephemera from the papers of Eliza Burton Conley.

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Unknown

Title: Lyda Conley Papers

Dates: Approximately 1893-1963

Size: Two boxes, 85 folders, one linear foot

Location: Kansas Room, 2nd floor workroom, closed stacks

Administrative Information

Restrictions on access: Unrestricted access.

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Location of originals: Kansas City, Kansas Public Library, Kansas Room closed stacks

Citation note: (Identification of the image), Lyda Conley Papers, Kansas Room Special Collections, Kansas City, Kansas Public Libraries

Collection Description

This collection includes correspondence between Lyda Conley and her clients, miscellaneous correspondence, newspaper clippings, and memorabilia including Ms. Conley's voter registration application and law school commencement program.

Historical Note:

Eliza Burton "Lyda" Conley was born around 1868 to Eliza Burton Zane Conley, a member of the Wyandot tribe, and Andrew Conley, an English farmer in Kansas. Conley was one of four sisters. Conley attended the Kansas City School of Law and graduated as one of the only women in her class. She was admitted to the Missouri Bar in 1902 and the Kansas Bar in 1910. Conley also trained as a telegraphic operator, taught at Spalding Business College in Kansas City, and taught Sunday school at her church.

Lyda Conley is best known for her efforts to protect the Huron Indian Cemetery, the resting ground of her parents and Wyandot ancestors, and for being the first Native American woman to argue before the Supreme Court. The Huron Cemetery is located in the heart of downtown Kansas City, Kansas. As the city grew, the cemetery was repeatedly threatened by commercial development. Situated so close to the business district, the cemetery had become valuable commercial property and numerous attempts were made to sell the sacred ground.

In 1906, Congress approved legislation to sell the land and move the bodies to the nearby Quindaro Cemetery. Conley filed a permanent injunction against the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and Indian Commissioners in U.S. District Court to prevent the sale. Conley and her sister Helena built a shack, known as "Fort Conley," at the entrance to the cemetery. As her lawsuit went through the courts, Conley and her sister guarded their family and ancestors' graves day in and day out with a shotgun.

Lyda eventually took her case to prevent the sale of the cemetery to the Supreme Court. Although it was ultimately dismissed, Conley's case and passionate defense of the cemetery attracted national attention and support from local lawmakers. In 1912, Senator Charles Curtis introduced a bill in congress to preclude the sale of the cemetery. In the decades after Lyda Conley's death, several more attempts were made to sell the land, but the cemetery had become known and appreciated as a local historic landmark and no buyers materialized. In 1971 the cemetery was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and in 2017 it received Historic Landmark status and was officially renamed the Wyandotte National Burying Ground.

Conley died in 1946 after an attack on her way home from the library. She is buried, next to her family, in the Wyandotte National Burying Ground.

Arrangement Note

Items in this collection were rehoused and inventoried in October 2019. They are arranged in the order they were found in.

Scope and content note

The documents in this collection date from 1893 to 1963 with the bulk of the materials covering her work on behalf of her client at Leavenworth prison, Ben Long Ear, for whom she was petitioning for early release. A notebook containing information on burials in the Huron Cemetery dates to the 1960s.

Collection Inventory

BOX 1

Folder 1

Envelope that contained papers related to Ben Long Ear case

Folder 2

Voter registration certificate for A. H. Allen, Leavenworth, Kansas, February 8, 1893

Folder 3

Letter to Cynthia Hill from Mr. Fletcher, Solicitor's Department Treasury, Kansas City, Kansas, May 14, 1902

Folder 4

Lyda Conley law school graduation program, envelope, and business card, Kansas City School of Law, Kansas City, Missouri, June 11, 1902

Folder 5

Letter to Grace Niles from Lyda Conley, Kansas City, Kansas, April 15, 1908

Folder 6

Unsigned letter to Raymond P. Kelley, Kansas City, Missouri, July 15, 1909

Folder 7

Questionnaire for Women Lawyers, from the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations, New York, New York, January 31, 1918

Folder 8

Band concert program, U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas, September 12, 1920

Folder 9

Lyda Conley voter registration certificate, Kansas City, Kansas, October 9, 1920

Folder 10

Indian Home Life booklet, Department of the Interior, 1927

Folder 11

Real estate tax receipts, Wyandott City, Kansas, 1930-1931

Folder 12

Handwritten note card with quotation by Sokoloski and Lyda Conley business envelope

Folder 13

Notebook of burials in Huron Place Cemetery, 1843-1963, no date, author unknown

Folder 14

Historical notes on the 7th Street M. E. Church, South, no date, author unknown

Folder 15

Letter to Reverend B. B. Pennington, requesting a framed portrait for the 7th Street Church anniversary celebration, Kansas City, Kansas, May 3, 1928

Folder 16

Letter to Lyda Conley from the Clerk of the Supreme Court, Washington D. C., May 2, 1910

Folder 17

Letter to Lyda Conley, with newspaper clipping, from anonymous woman, Washington D.C., 1907

Folder 18

Empty envelope that contained documents from folder 667 A

Folder 19

Letter to Lyda Conley from Ben Long Ear, requesting her counsel in his case, Leavenworth, Kansas, April 6, 1921

Folder 20

Letter to Lyda Conley from Ben Long Ear, requesting a visit to discuss his case, Leavenworth, Kansas, April 20, 1921

Folder 21

Letter to Ben Long Ear from Alfred Blackbird, discussing an upcoming visit to the Crow Agency, St. Xavier, Montana, May 21, 1921

Folder 22

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, with color illustration of Indian man on cliff overlooking river, Leavenworth, Kansas, 1921

Folder 23

Letter from A.J. Phelan to Lyda Conley, cover letter for letters of recommendation for Ben Long Ear, Leavenworth, Kansas, November 8, 1921

Folder 24

Letter from B.K. Wheeler, Wheeler and Baldwin Attorneys at Law, to Lyda Conley, discussing recommendation for Ben Long Ear, Butte, Montana, July 21, 1921

Folder 25

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, discussing papers regarding his case, and a request to visit him, Leavenworth, Kansas, August 20, 1921

Folder 26

Letter from B.K. Wheeler, to Lyda Conley, regarding report to Dept. of Justice on Ben Long Ear case, Butte, Montana, September 10, 1921

Folder 27

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, regarding a possible trip to Washington and his limited ability to continue to pay for her services, Leavenworth, Kansas, November 19, 1921

Folder 28

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley regarding partial payment of fees for her legal services, Leavenworth, Kansas, October 18, 1921

Folder 29

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, illustrated with image of Indian woman and child with horse, dog, and teepee, requesting a visit before her upcoming trip to Washington D.C., Leavenworth, Kansas, October 30, 1921

Folder 30

Duplicate copy of Ben Long Ear application for Executive Clemency, September 18, 1922

Folder 31

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley regarding reopening his case, Leavenworth, Kansas, September 22, 1921

Letter from Mrs. Gus Thompson to Ben Long Ear, offering help with his case, Hardin, Montana, September 18, 1922

Folder 32

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley regarding Long Ear case, Leavenworth, Kansas, October 21, 1922

Folder 33

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley regarding clemency papers, Leavenworth, Kansas, November 30, 1922

Folder 34

Letter from Robert H. Turner to Lyda Conley regarding petition for pardon and parole of Ben Long Ear, Washington, D. C., December 11, 1922

Folder 35

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley regarding his anticipation of the next Parole Board meeting and asking what she is doing on his behalf, Leavenworth, Kansas, January 22, 1923

Folder 36

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, requesting she visit him in Leavenworth, February 2, 1923

Folder 37

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, submitting reimbursement for her travel expenses and requesting another meeting at Leavenworth, March 1, 1923

Folder 38

Letter from Harmon Allen to Lyda Conley, forwarding correct address of Edward Phelan, Attorney at Law, Leavenworth, Kansas, April 30, 1923

Folder 39

Letter from Edward Phelan to Lyda Conley, regarding Ben Long Ear's wishes for them to work together towards his parole, Helena, Montana, April 17, 1923

Folder 40

Letter from Edward Phelan to Lyda Conley inquiring as to what steps she has taken in regards to Mr. Long Ear's parole, Helena, Montana, May 14, 1923

Folder 41

Empty envelope, addressed to Lyda Conley, postmarked Leavenworth, Kansas, July 31, 1923

Folder 42

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley regarding details of his case and her work towards his parole, Leavenworth, Kansas, July 31, 1923

Folder 43

Letter from Lyda Conley to Mrs. Gus Thompson, requesting a letter of recommendation for Ben Long Ear's parole, Kansas City, Kansas, November 29, 1923

Folder 44

Letter from Lyda Conley to Robert Yellowtail, requesting that he speak to his influential friends about letters of recommendation for Ben Long Ear's parole, Kansas City, Kansas, November 29, 1923

Folder 45

Letter from Lyda Conley to Russell White Bear, requesting a visit to Ben Long Ear in Leavenworth and a letter of support for his parole, Kansas City, Kansas, November 29, 1923

BOX 2

Folder 46

Letter from Lyda Conley to Mrs. Gus Thompson, requesting letters of support for Ben Long Ear's parole, Kansas City, Kansas, March 25, 1925

Folder 47

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, requesting she send an outline of a letter of recommendation to Mrs. Gus Thompson, Leavenworth, Kansas, March 24, 1924

Folder 48

Letter from Harmon Allen, Chaplain, to Lyda Conley suggesting she write to friends of Ben Long Ear to send letters of support for his parole, Leavenworth, Kansas, March 14, 1924

Folder 49

Letter from Lyda Conley to H. H. Votaw, Board of Paroles, recommending that Ben Long Ear be paroled, Kansas City, Kansas, March 28, 1924

Folder 50

Letter from Lyda Conley to Mrs. Gus Thompson, providing suggestions on how to write a letter of support for parole for Ben Long Ear, Kansas City, Kansas, March 26, 1924

Folder 51

Letter from Rev. A. Vrebosch to H. H. Votaw, expressing support for the parole of Ben Long Ear, St. Xavier, Montana, April 3, 1924

Folder 52

Letter from Rev. A. Vrebosch to Lyda Conley, expressing support for the parole of Ben Long Ear, St. Xavier, Montana, April 3, 1924

Folder 53

Letter from Lyda Conley to Luther C. White, Prison Parole Board, expressing support for the parole of Ben Long Ear and Antoine Stasso, Kansas City, Kansas, April 6, 1925

Folder 54

Letter from Lyda Conley to Ben Long Ear, inquiring as to whether or not he has heard from the parole board, Kansas City, Kansas, April 16, 1924

Folder 55

Letter from Lyda Conley to Mrs. Edith Black Hair, requesting that she obtain affidavits that statements made during Ben Long Ear's trial were untrue, Kansas City, Kansas, April 20, 1925

Folder 56

Letter from Lyda Conley to Ben Long Ear, forwarding letters from Senator T. J. Walsh of Montana and inquiring about his health issues that she had received word of, Kansas City, Kansas, March 5, 1925

Folder 57

Letter from Lyda Conley to Senator Charles Curtis, forwarding a letter from Chief Plenty Coos regarding consideration of petitions made by the Crow tribe and the parole of Ben Long Ear, Kansas City, Kansas, May 7, 1925

Folder 58

Letter from Lyda Conley to Mrs. Edith Blackhart, requesting that she deliver to Chief Plenty Coos, through her brother Pretty Paint, a letter for him to sign and send to H. H. Votaw, in support of Ben Long Ear, Kansas City, Kansas, June 12, 1924

Folder 59

Letter from Lyda Conley outlining expenses incurred for printing abstract by the Kansas Law Publishing Company, Kansas City, Kansas, no date

Folder 60

Letter from Head Chief of the Crow Indians to Dr. H. H. Votaw, expressing support for the parole of Ben Long Ear, Pryor, Montana, July 4, 1924

Folder 61

Letter from Lyda Conley to Robert Yellow Tail, requesting that he get a statement from Bear Goes to Other Ground, that a police officer gave false testimony in the trial of Ben Long Ear, Kansas City, Kansas, July 23, 1925

Folder 62

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, regarding non delivery of a letter Miss Conley sent to his sister and correcting the address, Leavenworth, Kansas, August 9, 1924

Folder 63

Letter from Lyda Conley to Ben Long Ear inquiring about various correspondence regarding his case, Kansas City, Kansas, July 31, 1924

Folder 64

Letter from Lyda Conley to Antoine Stasso, expressing disappointment with the news that his parole had been denied, Kansas City, Kansas, September 5, 1924

Folder 65

Letter from Lyda Conley to Edward Phelan, requesting help with securing new evidence in the case of Ben Long Ear, Kansas City, Kansas, September 8, 1924

Folder 66

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley informing her that he received a letter from Edward Phelan expressing his desire to help with Mr. Long Ear's case, Leavenworth, Kansas, September 16, 1924

Folder 67

Letter from Lyda Conley to H. H. Votaw, requesting a meeting in Leavenworth regarding the parole of Ben Long Ear and Antoine Stasso, Kansas City, Kansas, September 22, 1924

Folder 68

Letter from Lyda Conley to Senator Thomas J. Walsh, regarding postponement of action on the parole of Ben Long Ear and requesting continued efforts on his behalf, Kansas City, Kansas, October 16, 1924

Folder 69

Letter from G. W. Gudger to Lyda Conley, confirming receipt of her letter to Senator Walsh, Helena, Montana, October 24, 1924

Folder 70

Letter from Ben Long Ear to Lyda Conley, forwarding a letter from Chief Plenty Coos, Leavenworth, Kansas, May 5, 1925

Folder 71

Letter from Lyda Conley to Robert Yellowtail regarding his trip to Washington D. C. and work on behalf of Ben Long Ear, Kansas City, Kansas, August 10, 1925

Folder 72

Letter from Robert Yellowtail to Ben Long Ear regarding a petition for action by the Crow tribal council and preparation for the upcoming Congressional Committee visit, June 29, 1925

Folder 73

Letter from Robert C. Strong to Robert Yellowtail requesting more facts about Ben Long Ear's case so that he may sign the application for his parole, Billings, Montana, August 1, 1925

Application for executive clemency for Ben Long Ear

Folder 74

Letter from the Crow Chief to President Calvin Coolidge, regarding application for executive clemency for Ben Long Ear, Crow Agency, Montana, July 30, 1925

Application for executive clemency for Ben Long Ear