Phillips Family Papers, circa 1880-1973: Finding Aid

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Phillips Family Papers, circa 1880-1973: Finding Aid
Biography/History

Born in Saline, Kansas, Edward (Ed) Harford Phillips (1868-1944) moved west in 1882 to pursue cattle ranching. He primarily worked as a horse handler on multiple ranches, including James B. Kempton’s XIT ranch near Terry, Montana, one of the largest cattle ranches in eastern Montana. A skilled horseman and steer roper, Phillips joined the cast of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show in New York in 1900 as a stunt horse rider. In 1902, Phillips married Mary (Marie) N. Kempton (1881–1946) with whom he had two children: Jean Sarah Phillips (1908–1985), who also performed in Wild West shows, and Joseph Edward Phillips (1913–1972).

Marie Kempton Phillips, an accomplished horsewoman and relay rider, joined her husband as a performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. The couple celebrated their honeymoon in London while touring with the show during its four-month run at the Olympia Building beginning in December 1902. Over the next couple of years, the Phillips traveled back and forth from Montana to New York working various jobs at cattle ranches, farms, and race tracks, and performing in rodeo and horse-racing contests, and a Wild West show in Coney Island. From 1906 to 1912, the Phillips family lived at Cross L. ranch in Medora, North Dakota before moving back to Terry, Montana.

In 1919, the family moved to Los Angeles, California, and Ed Phillips joined Tom Mix's stock acting company. He left after a year to work with cowboy stars such as Buck Jones, Harry Carey, Fred Thompson, William S. Hart, and Hoot Gibson, and others. From 1922 to 1930, the Phillips family lived and worked a farm in Merced before returning to Los Angeles where Ed again worked as a film actor and consultant for westerns. During his Hollywood career, Phillips was in movies made by Leo D. Maloney (1888-1929) and had minor roles in the movies "Gun Play" (1935) and "In Old Chicago" (1938), among others. His movie career ended with Columbia Studios (1939-1942). Phillips was an honorary member of the Chuck Wagon Trailers.

Photographs and some information about Ed Phillips and the Kempton ranch can be found in Mark H. Brown and W. R. Felton's book, Before barbed wire; L. A. Huffman, photographer on horseback (New York, Holt [1956]). The Kempton ranch and family, including Ed and Marie Phillips, were also documented by photographer Evelyn Cameron whose farm sat adjacent to the Kempton's property.

Description

This collection consists of photographs, manuscripts, diaries, and ephemera relating to Edward Phillips, his wife Marie Kempton Phillips, and their daughter Jean Phillips that document the family, in particular Edward Phillips' career as a cattle rancher, Wild West show performer, and Hollywood actor. Notably, there are over 550 negatives (available in digital form) taken by Marie Kempton Phillips with a hand-held camera dating from circa 1904 to 1938, many of which depict life on a Montana ranch, novelty steer riding and rodeo scenes, horse races and other performances, branding, cattle, wagon trains, horse-breaking, and more.

Also of special interest are Marie’s diary for 1904 documenting the period when her and her husband traveled back and forth from Montana to New York working various jobs at cattle ranches and performing in contests and a Wild West show in Coney Island; photographs of Kempton family members (some with stamps from Miles City, Montana, the studio of frontier photographer L. A. Huffman); a letter from Ed and Marie Phillips and a short diary written while on board the U.S.M.S.
"St. Louis," describing the voyage to England with the cast of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show; a draft of an unpublished autobiography by Ed Phillips and his daughter Jean; and Jean Phillips' 1939 diary that documents her father's time working for Columbia Studios.

Also included in the collection are research materials about the Phillips family, the Kempton family and ranch, and related topics.

**Access and Use**

**Access**

Marie Kempton Phillips and Jean Phillips' negatives are closed to researchers.

**Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information**

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Associate University Librarian for Rare Books and Special Collections.

**Acquisition and Appraisal**

**Provenance and Acquisition**


**Appraisal**

Published materials were removed from the collection during 2015 processing.

**Related Materials**

**Related Archival Material**

Evelyn Cameron Photographs (C1404)

Montana Historical Society Research Center: James B. Kempton papers, 1892-1952

**Processing and Other Information**

**Preferred Citation**

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Phillips Family Papers, Box and Folder Number; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

**Processing Information**
This collection was processed by Faith Charlton in May 2015. Finding aid written by Faith Charlton in May 2015.

**Encoding**

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit 2015-06-24T13:15-0400

**Descriptive Rules Used**

Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard.*

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**Subject Headings**

- Phillips, Edward Harford, 1868-1944.
- Phillips, Marie Kempton, 1881-1946.
- Kempton family.
- Phillips family.
- Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show -- History -- Sources.
- Motion picture actors and actresses--United States--20th century--Biography.
- Ranching -- Montana -- 19th century.
- Ranching -- Montana -- 20th century.
- Wild west shows -- United States -- 1890-1900.
- Wild west shows -- United States -- 1900-1910.
- Black-and-white negatives.
- Diaries.
- Western Americana
Phillips, Marie Kempton, 1891-1938

Biography/History: Marie Kempton Phillips, who attended Loveland (Colorado) public schools and Western Normal College in Shenandoah, Iowa, was the daughter of businessman and cattle rancher James Berney Kempton (1843-1910) of Michigan, and Maria Emma Gerry (1851-1910). Maria Gerry's maternal grandfather was Chief Joseph Red Kettle of the Standing Rock Sioux nation; her paternal great-grandfather was Vice President Elbridge Thomas Gerry (1744-1814). Marie Kempton's siblings included: Berney Edmond Kempton (1870–1942), Henry Norman Kempton (1871–1934), Sarah Adelia Kempton (1873–1956), Sanford Smith Seokend Kempton (1875-1954), Asa Sterling Kempton (1877–1960), James Garfield Kempton (1879–1939), and Joseph Elbridge Gerry Kempton (1892–1955). Several Kempton children participated in Wild West shows, including touring in the early 1890s with Dr. Carver's show.

Description: Primarily includes over 550 negatives as well as some photographic prints that document the Phillips and Kempton families; cattle ranching and farming; Ed Phillip's career as a Hollywood actor; and the Phillips family's involvement in Wild West Shows and similar events. Other materials relating to Marie include a diary (1904), school books and autograph books, as well as some correspondence and ephemera.

Phillips, Marie Kempton, Photographs, circa 1900-1938

Description: Over 550 nitrate and acetate negatives, available in digital form, mostly taken by Marie Kempton Phillips with a hand-held camera. Some of the more recent photographs may have been taken by her daughter, Jean. Photographs show life on a Montana cattle ranch, including novelty steer riding, rodeo scenes, branding, horse-breaking; and also document Wild West shows--one of the photographs relates to the Colonel Jim White Wild West Show--horse and rodeo contests, parades, and carnivals in which the Phillips family was involved. The Phillips and Kempton families and others--likely neighbors and friends--are also documented. There also appear to be a few photographs of Cuba. Some of Marie's negatives may also be found in the Miscellaneous Photographs file group.

Access:
Negatives are restricted. Click the "View Images" button above to view digital surrogates.

Phillips, Marie Kempton, Photographic Prints, circa 1900-1938

Description: Most likely taken by Marie Kempton Phillips, these include photographs of the Phillips family; a few of Ed Phillips in costume and on
set; two of Ed and other cattle ranchers, including Frank Murphy; and a few photographs of others, some of which are identified, including one of Mrs. Lena Strong, known as "Bounding Fawn."
Some of Marie's photographic prints may also be found in the Miscellaneous Photographs file group.

Phillips, Marie Kempton, Empty Film Envelopes, circa 1910-1938

Phillips, Marie Kempton, Diary, 1904
Description: Documents the period when Ed and Marie Phillips traveled back and forth from Montana to New York working various jobs at cattle ranches, farms, and race tracks, and performing in rodeo and horse-racing contests, and a Wild West show in Coney Island.

Phillips, Marie Kempton, School and Song Books, circa 1893-1920
Description: Items were also used and belonged to Marie's daughter, Jean.

Phillips, Marie Kempton, Autograph Books, 1891-1900
Description: Consists of brief notes from friends and family, including Western Normal College classmates.

Phillips, Marie Kempton, Correspondence and Ephemera, circa 1902-1920
Description: Includes a letter from Marie and Ed written while on board the U.S.M.S. "St. Louis," describing the voyage to England with the cast of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show (December 10, 1902).

Phillips, Edward H., 1902-1944

Phillips, Edward H., Diary, Notebook, and Ephemera, circa 1902-1944
Description: Includes a transcription of six pages from a diary written in December 1902 en route to England, likely transcribed by Marie Kempton Phillips; a notebook documenting Ed Phillips' work with Columbia Studios (1939-1942); Pennsylvania Railroad Company documents for shipments of horses (1904); and a few other pieces of ephemera.

Phillips, Edward H., Autobiographical Writings, circa 1936
Description: Includes a handwritten and typewritten autobiography drafted by Ed and his daughter Jean.

Phillips, Jean, 1915-1973

Phillips, Jean, Negatives, circa 1930s
Access: Negatives are restricted. Click the "View Images" button above to view digital surrogates.
Description: Includes 44 nitrate and acetate negatives that are primarily of Jean, her parents, and other family members.
Some negatives may also be found in the Miscellaneous Photographs file group.

Phillips, Jean, Diary, 1939 April-July
Description: Some of what Jean documents in her diary includes information about her father’s time working for Columbia Studios.

Phillips, Jean, Correspondence and Ephemera, 1915-1973
Description: Includes a couple of letters from Ed Phillip’s friend and colleague, Harry E. Webb (1887-1984). Webb was a writer, actor, and one of the original members of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. Another letter includes a fair amount of information about the Phillips family.

Miscellaneous Photographs, circa 1880-1940
Description: Primarily includes photographic prints, cabinet cards, studio prints, and some photo postcards of the Phillips and Kempton families, movie sets and actors, ranch and farming scenes, competitions and Wild West shows, as well as photographs of friends and acquaintances, most likely. Some were likely taken by Marie Kempton Phillips; some photos of Kempton family members were taken by the photographer L. A. Huffman.

Phillips Family, circa 1900-1935
Description: Includes a photo of Ed and Marie on their honeymoon in London while touring with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show; a couple of class photographs with Marie Kempton Phillips, including one of the Wind and String Instrument Department of Western Normal College.

James B. Kempton Family, circa 1880-1910
Description: Includes group and individual portraits, including a couple from photographer L. A. Huffman’s studio.

Film Sets with Edward H. Phillips, circa 1920-1930
Description: Includes studio and press photos; photos of Jack King and Henry Myers; and possibly photographs of Buffalo Bill Cody as well as photographs of Mary Pickford and crew at a film site.

Film Sets and Actors, circa 1920-1940
Description: Includes studio and press photos; photos of Jack King and Henry Myers; and possibly photographs of Buffalo Bill Cody as well as photographs of Mary Pickford and crew at a film site.

Ranch and Farming Scenes, circa 1900-1910
Description: A few photographs depict bullfighting with matadors; there are also a couple of photos of Ed, Marie, and Kempton family members on horseback; there are a couple of photographs by Bob Wallace of Ed Phillips and others roping a steer.

Individual and Group Portraits, circa 1890-1930
Description: Most are likely of family, friends, and neighbors. A few are identified.

Negatives, circa 1930s

Description: Includes 31 nitrate and acetate photographs, most likely taken by either Marie or Jean Phillips, that primarily document the Phillips family.

Access:
Negatives are restricted. Click the "View Images" button above to view digital surrogates.

Framed Photograph of Tex McLeod, circa 1930

Ephemera, circa 1900-1951

Description: Includes clippings and ephemera, many of which were likely part of a scrapbook kept by Ed Phillips.

Clippings, circa 1900-1951

Description: Includes some press clippings relating to Ed Phillips as well as clippings on Hollywood and Wild West shows.

The Terry Tribune, 1907, 1910

Description: 2 issues, including one with James B. Kempton's obituary (August 26, 1910); the other issue is a fabric copy.

Miscellaneous, circa 1902-1940

Description: Includes Ed and Marie Phillips' marriage certificate; greeting cards and post cards; a few unidentified manuscripts, including one entitled "The Last of the Riders" about Pony Express riders, Ed Phillips, and fellow cattle rancher Frank Murphy; and some event programs and souvenir items, including a brochure of Earl Carroll's "White Cargo" starring Patricia Saunders.

Research Materials, circa 1970s

Description: Includes research materials on Ed and Marie Phillips; the Kempton family and their ranch as well as other cattle ranches; photographers Evelyn Cameron and L. A. Huffman who documented the Kemptons and Ed Phillips; and illustrator Charles Russell. Includes notes, photocopies of original materials found in the collection, articles and other secondary sources, and contact prints of some of Marie Kempton Phillips' negatives.

Notes and Photocopies, circa 1970s

Contact Prints, circa 1970s