

Finding Aid to the Flora Gill Jacobs Papers, 1864-2006

Summary Information

Title: Flora Gill Jacobs papers

Creator: Flora Gill Jacobs (primary); Jacobs family (secondary)

ID: 115.87

Date: 1864-2006 (inclusive); 1975-2006 (bulk)

Extent: 5 linear feet

Language: The majority of this collection is in English, with some reference materials in German, French, Spanish, Japanese, and Italian. Materials in languages other than English will be denoted in the Contents List section of this finding aid.

Abstract: The Flora Gill Jacobs papers are a compilation of manuscripts, personal and research correspondence, publicity, postcards, photographs, and historical information on the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1975 and 2006.

Repository:

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Use: This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donor has not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, she has given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

Custodial History: The Flora Gill Jacobs papers were donated to The Strong in January 2015 as a gift from Amanda Jacobs, daughter of Flora Gill Jacobs. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 115.87. The papers were received from Amanda Jacobs in 4 bins, accompanied by nearly 300 reference books, trade catalogs, children's books, and periodicals from Flora Gill Jacobs' personal collection.

Preferred citation for publication: Flora Gill Jacobs papers, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong

Processed by: Julia Novakovic, November 2015

Revision description: Additional archival materials found in book collection added in November 2016.

Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Greene, Vivien
- Jacobs, Flora Gill

Corporate Names

- Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum (Washington, D.C.)

Subjects

- Collectors and collecting
- Doll furniture
- Doll furniture--Collectors and collecting.
- Dollhouses
- Dollhouses--Collectors and collecting.
- Dollhouses--History.
- Museum archives
- Museum directors
- Museum publications
- Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum (Washington, D.C.)
- Women museum directors

Biographical Note

Flora Gill Jacobs (1918–2006) was an American journalist, author, dollhouse expert, and founder of the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum.

Jacobs (née Gill) grew up in Washington, D.C., where she remained a lifelong area resident. While attending George Washington University, Jacobs wrote film reviews for the *Washington Times-Herald*. She left college to work full-time for the newspaper and later joined the *Washington Post* as a reporter and editor. In 1940, she married Ephraim Jacobs, and the couple had one daughter, Amanda.

While freelancing, Jacobs became interested in documenting the history of dollhouses and miniature furnishings—though she herself had never owned a dollhouse. (She remedied that void by acquiring her signature “South Jersey House” for \$35 from an antiques dealer in New Jersey in 1945.) In 1953, she published her first book, *A History of Dolls' Houses: Four Centuries of the Domestic World in Miniature*. Several additional authoritative volumes on dollhouses (and children's mystery books) followed over the next two decades.

As her dollhouse and miniatures collections expanded, Jacobs's friends and local social groups frequently requested tours to view the collections in her home. Eventually, Jacobs' dollhouses outgrew her actual house. Jacobs rented a small building in Northwest D.C. for her collections and established the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum there in 1975. For nearly four decades, Jacobs's museum was “dedicated to the proposition that dolls' houses of the past comprise a study of architecture and decorative arts in miniature, and that toys of the past reflect social history.” The museum collections included rare dollhouses, miniature buildings, hand-crafted and machine-made miniature dollhouse furnishings, and American toys.

In 2004, citing rising costs and advanced age, Jacobs closed the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum. The contents of her museum holdings were sold at auction that year. Flora Gill Jacobs passed away in 2006 at the age of 87 in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Flora Gill Jacobs papers contain materials relating to Flora Gill Jacobs as an author, collector, and director of the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum. Material types include manuscripts, personal and research correspondence, research notes, reference materials, postcards, photographs, museum souvenirs, publicity clippings, scrapbook pages, and more. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1975 and 2006. Additional scope and content information can be found under the "Contents List" section of this finding aid.

The Flora Gill Jacobs papers have been arranged into two series, both of which have been further divided into subseries. The materials are housed in five archival document boxes and one oversized folder.

Related Materials

The Flora Gill Jacobs collection in the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play contains more than 300 reference books, trade catalogs, and early magazines in the library stacks.

The Strong acquired several items from the 2004 auction of the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, including a Bauhaus-style dollhouse by Moritz Gottschalk, c. 1920-1930 (Object ID 104.816).

System of Arrangement

Series I: Author and collector, 1864-2006

Subseries A: Manuscripts

Subseries B: Correspondence

Subseries C: Research notes and reference materials

Subseries D: Publicity

Series II: Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, 1974-2006

Subseries A: Historical information

Subseries B: Publicity

Subseries C: Photographs

Contents List

Series I: Author and collector, 1864-2006

Scope and Content Note: This series includes draft manuscripts, personal and research correspondence, research notes, original and photocopied reference materials, postcards, news clippings, and other related documents. The bulk of these materials are dated between 1947 and 1990.

Subseries A: Manuscripts

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains typescript pages, with some handwritten annotations, by Flora Gill Jacobs. The draft pages on dollhouses may be early plans for her 1953 book, *A History of Dolls' Houses*. A published children's fiction story, "The Snowman's Lunch," is also part of this subseries.

Box 1

- Folder 1 "Chapter Five - The Stately (Doll) Homes of England," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s?]
- Folder 2 "Chapter 13 - Paper Dolls and How They Live," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s?]
- Folder 3 "Chapter Twenty-Three - The Stettheimer Doll House," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s?]
- Folder 4 "Insect Theatricals - Four Centuries of Performing Fleas," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s?]
- Folder 5 "Britain in Miniature," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, 1978
- Folder 6 "The Zoo in Miniature," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, 1978
- Folder 7 "Households of the Past--In Miniature," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, n.d.
- Folder 8 "A Tadpole's Mail," Flora Gill Jacobs, text draft, n.d.
- Folder 9 "The Snowman's Lunch," Flora Gill Jacobs, *Story Parade*, February 1951

Subseries B: Correspondence

Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses correspondence, both personal and related to research on dolls' houses. Of note is a 19th century scrapbook given to Flora Gill Jacobs as a gift from her friend and noted dollhouse authority Vivien Greene.

Box 1

- Folder 10 Research correspondence, 1947
- Folder 11 General correspondence, 1949-1992 and n.d.
- Folder 12 Francis H. Conrad letter with inventory/pricing of Flora Gill Jacobs' dollhouse collection, 1958 [has later annotations, n.d.]
- Folder 13 Gertrude Sappington/ "Gay Nineties Mansion," 1966-1967
- Folder 14 NBC News, 1975, with audio recording of "Gene Shalit Critic's Corner," December 19, 1974
- Folder 15 Vivian Green letter, 1981, with accompanying "Tabby's Tea Party" scrapbook, 1877

Subseries C: Research notes and reference materials

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds research notes, library call slips, original and photocopied reference materials, and postcards.

Box 1

- Folder 16 Request slips, Victoria and Albert Museum Library, British Library [?], 1948
- Folder 17 Dollhouse research notes, n.d. [c. 1940s]
- Folder 18 Various notes and reference, 1864-2004 and n.d. [some in German]

Box 2

- Folder 1 Reference postcards [miniatures, dolls, dollhouses; also travel souvenirs], c. 1950s-1990s [mostly undated; some in German, Italian, Japanese]

Box 4

- Object 6 “The Queen’s Dolls’ House 1924” miniature scrapbook with clippings, 1924
- Object 7 “Toy Arks, Animals & Zoos,” book mock-up/scrapbook, n.d. [c. 1978?]

Subseries D: Publicity

Scope and Content Note: Within this subseries are news clippings about Flora Gill Jacobs’s dollhouse collection, reviews of her children’s books and reference books, and a self-written biographical summary. Also included in this subseries are obituaries and tributes collected by the Jacobs family after her death in 2006.

Box 2

- Folder 2 “Biographical Summary: Flora Gill Jacobs,” 2004 and n.d.
- Folder 3 News/magazine clippings, ads about Flora Gill Jacobs [pre-Washington Dolls’ House & Toy Museum], 1954-1969 and n.d.
- Folder 4 Publicity clippings from McIntosh & Otis, 1965
- Folder 5 Flora Gill Jacobs obituary clippings, 2006
- Folder 6 Flora Gill Jacobs eulogy text, various presenters, 2006
- Folder 7 Flora Gill Jacobs, *DCA Bulletin*, Laurie McGill, Summer 2006

Series II: Washington Dolls’ House & Toy Museum, 1974-2006

Scope and Content Note: This series holds papers and other media related to the Washington Dolls’ House & Toy Museum, established by Flora Gill Jacobs in 1975. Materials in this series include museum brochures, bookmarks, postcards, miniature books, photographic slides, press releases, news clippings, scrapbook pages, and photographs. The bulk of these materials are from the late 1970s through the 1980s.

Subseries A: Historical information

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains Washington Dolls’ House & Toy Museum productions, including museum brochures, souvenirs (such as miniature books, photographic slides, and postcards), invitations, and other museum information. The catalog for the auction of the contents of the Washington Dolls’ House & Toy Museum in 2004 is also part of this subseries. The objects in Box 4 are framed souvenirs which hung in the museum shop of the Washington Dolls’ House & Toy Museum.

Box 2

- Folder 8 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum brochures, n.d. [c. 1980s?]
Folder 9 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum - Museum Shop brochure, n.d.
Folder 10 "The Zoo in Miniature" brochures, Smithsonian National Zoological Park and Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, Flora Gill Jacobs, 1978
Folder 11 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum birthday party brochures, n.d. [c. 1980s?]
Folder 12 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum bookmarks, n.d.
Folder 13 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum postcards, c. 1970s-1980s
Folder 14 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum - Queen Anne mansion holiday cards, National Trust for Historic Preservation, n.d. [c. 1989?]
Folder 15 "The Antiquarian's Cat Calendar," Flora Gill Jacobs, Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, 1980
Folder 16 Invitations to Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum events, 1975, 1985
Folder 17 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum - other information, c. late 1970s-1980s
Folder 18 Hand-drawn sign, "Antique dolls' houses and toys...", n.d.
Folder 19 Auction catalog, "Flora Gill Jacobs' Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum," Noel Barrett Antiques, June 19, 2004, with lot 199 tag, 2004

Box 4

- Object 1 "Six Books in Miniature by Flora Gill Jacobs / shopping bag," framed gift shop samples/sign, n.d.
Object 2 "Six Books in Miniature by Flora Gill Jacobs," framed gift shop samples/sign, n.d.
Object 3 "The Museum's Postcards in Miniature with their Own Album," framed gift shop samples/sign, n.d.
Object 4 Pack of miniature postcards, n.d.
Object 5 "Our Mini Poster," framed gift shop sample/sign, n.d.
Envelope 1 Travel slides from Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, includes: 4 sets of The South Jersey House / Noah's Ark / German kitchen / Bliss houses, 1977; 3 sets of A Mansion from Mexico / Two Jumeaus / Reed's U.S. Capitol / Tiffany-Platt House, 1977
Folder 1 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum map layout for brochure, n.d.

Oversized

- Folder 1 "The Zoo in Miniature" exhibition poster, Smithsonian National Zoological Park and Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, Flora Gill Jacobs, 1978

Subseries B: Publicity

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds newspaper and magazine clippings related to coverage of the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum. Box 5 contains the entirety of two publicity clippings scrapbooks assembled by Flora Gill Jacobs over the duration of the museum's lifespan. Also included in this subseries are press releases from the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum and a 30-second museum promo on VHS.

Box 3

- Folder 1 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum press releases, 1974-2002 and n.d.
- Folder 2 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum - First Anniversary draft and final press releases, 1976
- Folder 3 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum press release and photographs, 1982
- Folder 4 News/magazine clippings about Flora Gill Jacobs and Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, 1974-1995 [some in Spanish]
- Folder 5 News/magazine clippings about Flora Gill Jacobs and Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, 1996-2006 and n.d.
- Folder 6 Le Club de la Miniature Française, information and article on Washington Dolls' House and Toy Museum, 1988-1989 [in French]
- Folder 7 VHS tape, "Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, PSA :30, 1/98, WTTG/Fox Television," 1998

Box 5

- Folder 1 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum publicity scrapbook pages, 1975-1979 [Scrapbook 1, entirety]
- Folder 2 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum publicity scrapbook pages, 1980-1985 [Scrapbook 2, partial]
- Folder 3 Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum publicity scrapbook pages, 1986-c. 2000 [Scrapbook 2, partial]

Subseries C: Photographs

Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses various photographs of items within the Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum collection, as well as people at museum events or posed near dollhouses.

Box 3

- Folder 8 Publicity photographs from Washington Dolls' House & Toy Museum, c. 1982
- Folder 9 Photographs [people, dollhouses, baseball game], c. 1970s-1990 and n.d.