



## **Donald R. Whitman Collection (SP0079)**

**Collection Number:** SP0079

**Collection Title:** Donald R. Whitman Collection

**Dates:** 1874-2008

**Creator:** Whitman, Donald Ray, 1931-2008

**Abstract:** The Donald R. Whitman Collection contains the personal papers of Donald Ray Whitman, including correspondence, genealogical records, and photographs. The collection also documents Whitman's service in the United States Air Force and his work in the Marshall Islands during Operation Ivy in 1952, as well as his career with the National Weather Service in Kansas City, Missouri.

**Collection Size:** 2.5 cubic feet  
(42 folders, 50 photographs, 4 VHS tapes, 5 oversize items)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Springfield](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at [springfield@shsmo.org](mailto:springfield@shsmo.org). Collections may be viewed at any research center.

**Restrictions on Use:** Materials in this collection may be protected by copyrights and other rights. See [Rights & Reproductions](#) on the Society's website for more information about reproductions and permission to publish.

**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Donald R. Whitman Collection* (SP0079); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Springfield [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Springfield].

**Donor Information:** The papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Kathi Whitman on October 7, 2022 (Accession No. SPA0110).

**Related Materials:** Additional materials related to the Donald R. Whitman Collection can be found in the following collections:

[Kay Drey Nuclear Hazards Collection](#) (SA1029)

**Processed by:** Processed by Haley Frizzle-Green, November 7, 2022

**Biographical Note:**

Donald Ray Whitman was born October 6, 1931, in Buffalo, Missouri, to Clarence Raymond Whitman and Lillian *McGee* Whitman. Donald graduated from Buffalo High School in 1949 and served in the United States Air Force from 1951 to 1955. While serving in the Air Force, Donald was stationed in the Marshall Islands as part of a weather reconnaissance team for Operation Ivy, the world's first detonation of the hydrogen bomb. Donald and his team witnessed the detonation of both Ivy bombs, "Mike" and "King". Ivy Mike, the world's first hydrogen bomb, dropped on November 1, 1952. Ivy King, the largest pure-fission nuclear bomb ever tested by the United States, was detonated on November 16, 1952.

After returning to the United States, Donald married Polly Lou Bell of Pittsburg, Kansas, and the couple had one daughter, Kathi Whitman. Donald studied meteorology and earth science at Washington University in Seattle and University of Missouri, where he received his degree in 1968. After graduating, Donald worked for the National Weather Service in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1975, he was awarded the Silver Medal Award by the United States Department of Commerce for his work on the National Weather Service's training program in Meteorology and Management. Donald's work on the program led to an increase in technical competence and overall morale. He also developed special training courses for Native Alaskans and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Scientific Upward Mobility Program.

In the early 1990s, Donald began searching for his former weather reconnaissance colleagues who were stationed in the Marshall Islands during Operation Ivy. Several of the men began communicating through written correspondence, which then led to multiple reunions. On November 1, 2002, Donald and eight other Ivy weathermen reunited in Las Vegas, Nevada, to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Ivy.

Donald was a member of the Atomic Veteran's Association and, along with his wife Polly, was a founding member of the Greater Kansas City Cornish Society. Donald also spent 35 years as a judge for the Greater Kansas City Science and Engineering Fair. Polly Whitman died on November 17, 2002, and Donald was remarried to Marjorie Roberts. Donald died on April 17, 2008, due to brain and lung cancer. He is buried next to his first wife, Polly, in Highland Park Cemetery in Pittsburg, Kansas.

**Arrangement:**

The collection has been arranged into the following eight series with four subseries:

Personal Papers

Photographs

Genealogy

McGee Family

Sprague Family

Whitman Family

Military Service

Operation Ivy

National Weather Service

Publications  
VHS Tapes  
Oversize

## **Scope and Content Note:**

### **Personal Papers**

This series contains Donald Whitman's personal correspondence, academic records, articles written by Whitman, and materials from his celebration of life service. The correspondence includes letters written to family and friends, political leaders, and businesses and organizations in the Kansas City, Missouri, area. This series is arranged by subject and then chronologically.

### **Photographs**

This series includes photographs of Donald Whitman, as well as his family and friends. There are also two images of Missouri towns, including Buffalo City Hall and a 1926 street scene from Hollister. This series is arranged by subject and then chronologically.

### **Genealogy**

This series contains materials related to Donald Whitman's family genealogy. The McGee Family subseries contains family group sheets, correspondence, newspaper articles, photographs, and family reunion records. This subseries also includes materials related to Dallas County, specifically Prairie Grove Church and Kelly School. The Sprague Family and Whitman Family subseries consist of family group sheets, correspondence, photographs, and newspaper articles. The Genealogy series and subseries are arranged by subject and then chronologically.

### **Military Service**

This series contains Donald Whitman's military records including correspondence, photographs, and an Atomic Veteran's Association newsletter from 1995. The Operation Ivy subseries consists of records related to Operation Ivy and Whitman's involvement in weather reconnaissance on the Marshall Islands. The materials include special orders, photographs, correspondence, and materials Whitman collected over time from fellow Ivy weathermen. Of particular note, is a copy of Burton Abeles' journal which contains a firsthand account of the Operation Ivy detonations in 1952.

The correspondence in the Operation Ivy subseries includes letters written to and from Whitman between 1992 to 1994. The letter writing campaign began as an effort to reconnect fellow Ivy weathermen with George Wilson, a colleague who was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). After Wilson passed away, the Ivy weathermen continued to stay in touch, first through written correspondence, and then through in-person reunions. The Military series is arranged by subject and then chronologically. The Operation Ivy subseries is arranged chronologically.

### **National Weather Service**

This series consists of records pertaining to Donald Whitman's employment with the National Weather Service in Kansas City, Missouri. The records include awards and employee files. The

employee files were compiled by Whitman and organized by date. Each set of employee files includes correspondence, academic materials, and performance evaluations. This series has been kept in its original order and is arranged by subject and then chronologically.

## **Publications**

This series contains various publications including a Buffalo High School yearbook from 1949, as well as *The Buffalo Holiday Messenger*; *Right & Wrong: Practical Ethics (A Fresh Look by a Retired Judge)*; and *Edwards AFB: Then and Now*. This series also includes a book titled *Theory of Spencerian Penmanship*, published in 1874, which includes the following inscription: "From Dan C. Farrar, Druggist and Bookseller, Bolivar, Mo." This series is arranged chronologically by publication date.

## **VHS Tapes**

This series includes four VHS tapes related to either Operation Ivy or the atomic bomb tests on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. Three out of the four tapes are documentaries; the fourth tape is a 1997 news broadcast from Kansas City, Missouri's KMBC Channel 9 News. This series is arranged chronologically by release date.

## **Oversize**

This series contains oversize items including award certificates and plaques. This series also includes a binder titled "Descendants of William and Sarah Martin McGee" and consists of McGee family history and photographs. Also included is a photo album which contains images of Whitman's colleague George Wilson, as well as original images from Whitman's time in the Air Force and on the Marshall Islands. This series is arranged by subject. The binder and photo album have been kept in their original order.

## **Container List:**

f. 1-8	Personal Papers
Box 001	f. 1 Correspondence, 1929-1931
	f. 2-4 Correspondence, 1957-1972
	f. 5 Correspondence, 2004
	f. 6 Education, 1946-1949
	f. 7 Obituary and celebration of life, 2008
	f. 8 Written works, no date
f. 9-10	Photographs
	f. 9 People, 1904-1997, no date
	f. 10 Places, 1926, 1949
f. 11-22	Genealogy
	f. 11-16 McGee Family
	f. 11 Family history, no date
	f. 12 Correspondence, 1986-2005
	f. 13 Dallas County, Missouri, 1927-2006
	f. 14 Newspaper articles, 1942-2005
	f. 15 Photographs, 1991-1996, no date
	f. 16 Reunions, 1987-2003
f. 17-19	Sprague Family

	f. 17	Family history, no date
	f. 18	Correspondence, 1998-2005
	f. 19	Photographs, 1948-1997, no date
f. 20-22		Whitman Family
	f. 20	Family history, 1986, no date
	f. 21	Correspondence, 1985-2005
	f. 22	Newspaper articles, 1982-2003
f. 23-33		Military Service
	f. 23	Atomic Veteran's Association, 1995
	f. 24	Correspondence, 1951-1953
	f. 25-32	Operation Ivy
	f. 25	Special Orders, 1951-1953
	f. 26	Photographs, 1952
	f. 27	Collected materials, 1952-1994
	f. 28	Copy of Burton J. Abeles' journal, 1952
	f. 29	Articles, 1952-2001, no date
	f. 30	Correspondence, 1992-1994
	f. 31	Correspondence, 1997-2004
	f. 32	Remembrance service, 1997
	f. 33	Photographs, 1951-1953
f. 34-37		National Weather Service
	f. 34	Awards, 1975
	f. 35	Employee files, 1955-1959
	f. 36	Employee files, 1962-1965
	f. 37	Employee files, 1965-1971
f. 38-42		Publications
Box 002	f. 38	<i>Theory of Spencerian Penmanship</i> , 1874
	f. 39	<i>The Buffalo Holiday Messenger</i> , 1909
	f. 40	Buffalo High School yearbook, 1949
	f. 41	<i>Right &amp; Wrong: Practical Ethics (A Fresh Look by a Retired Judge)</i> , 1993
	f. 42	<i>Edwards AFB: Then and Now</i> , 2001
v.t. 1-4		VHS Tapes
Box 003	v.t. 1	"Operation Ivy, 1952", Defense Nuclear Agency, 1980
	v.t. 2	"Radio Bikini", PBS, 1988
	v.t. 3	"Trinity and Beyond: The Atomic Bomb Movie", 1995
	v.t. 4	"Operation Ivy", KMBC Channel 9 News, 1997
Item 1-5		Oversize
Box 004	Item 1	Award, 1975
	Item 2	Award, 1986
	Item 3	Award, 2000
	Item 4	"The Descendants of William and Sarah Martin McGee", no date
	Item 5	Photo album, 1951-1952, no date

**Index:**

Index Term	Folder	Medium	Image
Abeles, Burton J., 1930-2009	28, 30, 33		Yes
Atomic bomb--Testing	25-32	v.t. 1-4	Yes

Index Term	Folder	Medium	Image
Atomic Veteran's Association	23		
Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands)		v.t. 2-3	
Bolivar (Mo.)	38		
Buffalo (Mo.)	6, 9-10, 13, 39-40		Yes
Buffalo High School (Buffalo, Mo.)	6, 40		Yes
Camp Stoneman (Pittsburg, Calif.)	33	Item 5	Yes
Charity (Mo.)	11		
Dallas County (Mo.)	6, 10, 13, 39-40	Item 4	Yes
Edwards Air Force Base (Calif.)	42		Yes
Eniwetok Atoll (Marshall Islands)	24-33	Item 5	Yes
Faucett, Lillian McGee Whitman, 1911-2010	1, 15, 20-22, 24	Item 4	Yes
Greater Kansas City Science & Engineering Fair		Item 3	
Hickam Air Force Base (Hawaii)	33	Item 5	Yes
Hollister (Mo.)	10		Yes
Hydrogen bomb--Testing	25-32	v.t. 1-4	Yes
Jackson County (Mo.)	2-5, 34-37	v.t. 4, Item 3	
Kansas City (Mo.)	2-5, 34-37	v.t. 4, Item 3	
Kelly School (Buffalo, Mo.)	13	Item 4	Yes
KMBC-TV (Television station: Kansas City, Mo.)		v.t. 4	
Korean War, 1950-1953	24-33	Item 5	Yes
Kwajalein Atoll (Marshall Islands)	24-27, 33	Item 5	Yes
Lackland Air Force Base (Tex.)	24		
McGee family	11-16	Item 4	Yes
McGee, Sarah L. Martin, 1815-1893	11, 15	Item 4	Yes
McGee, Solomon M., 1836-1899	11, 15	Item 4	Yes
McGee, William J., 1802-1872	11, 15	Item 4	Yes
Meteorology	25-32, 34-37	Item 5	Yes
Operation Ivy, Marshall Islands, 1952	25-32	v.t. 1, 4	Yes
Plymouth (Mass.)--History	17		
Polk County (Mo.)	19, 38		Yes
Pomme de Terre River (Mo.)	13		Yes
Prairie Grove (Mo.)	13	Item 4	Yes
Prairie Grove Church (Prairie Grove, Mo.)	13	Item 4	Yes
Smith, Laurence Reynolds, 1914-2012	41		
Sprague family	9, 17-19		Yes
Sprague, Daniel Gilbert, 1875-1949	19		Yes
Sprague, Solomon Courtright, 1845-1909	17		
Taney County (Mo.)	10		Yes
Tin Town (Mo.)	19		Yes

Index Term	Folder	Medium	Image
United States. Air Force	24-33	Item 5	Yes
United States. Defense Nuclear Agency		v.t. 1	
United States. National Weather Service	9, 34-37	Item 1-2	Yes
USNS David C. Shanks (Ship)		Item 5	Yes
Van Horn, Effie Lee Wolfe, 1873-1943	11, 38	Item 4	
Van Horn, John J., 1872-1950	11	Item 4	
Weather forecasting	25-32, 34-37	Item 5	Yes
Whitman (Mass.)	20		Yes
Whitman family	9, 17, 20-22		Yes
Whitman Mission National Historic Site (Wash.)	22		Yes
Whitman, Christian C., 1872-1942	9, 17, 20-22		Yes
Whitman, Clarence Raymond, 1906-1943	20-22		
Whitman, Donald Ray, 1931-2008	1-9, 11-37, 39-41	v.t. 37, Item 1-5	Yes
Whitman, Fannie Sprague, 1881-1977	9, 17, 20-22		Yes
Whitman, Moses, 1836-1898	20-22		
Whitman, Polly Lou Bell, 1932-2002	20-22	Item 5	Yes
Wilson, George R., 1932-1992	30, 32	Item 5	Yes