

## **HARRY P. HARDING PAPERS, 1917-1962**

1.5 cu. ft. (1 document box, 4 flat boxes)

### **ABSTRACT**

Henry Patrick Harding, known for most of his life as Harry P. or H.P. Harding, was born in Aurora, North Carolina, on August 14, 1874, to Confederate Army Major Henry H. and Susan Elizabeth Sugg Harding. The Harding family moved to Greenville, North Carolina, in 1885, where Harry attended Greenville Male Academy. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1899, and went on to receive his Master of Arts from Columbia University in 1931.

Following his father, who had been a farmer, teacher, and school superintendent in Greenville, Harry chose teaching as his career. Beginning as a principal at New Bern High School after receiving his Bachelors degree, Harding came to Charlotte in 1904. He had married Lucia Ella Ives of New Bern in 1903. In 1913, he was made Superintendent of the Charlotte schools, where he helped make great strides within the system. Harding High School was named in his honor, although he was initially resistant to the idea, believing buildings should not be named for living superintendents. Harding officially retired from his position in 1949, however he maintained an office and visited schools as superintendent emeritus. He died on July 13, 1959, and is buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

This collection contains documents, scrapbooks, and an artifact.

### **ACCESS**

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### **PREFERRED CITATION**

Cite as: Harry P. Harding Papers, 1917-1962, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.

### **ACQUISITION**

Presented by Mrs. John Kortheuer, August 1989.

Processed by Hannah Cox, August 2015.

### **HISTORICAL NOTE**

Born in Aurora, North Carolina, on August 14, 1874 to Confederate Army Major Henry H. and Susan Elizabeth Sugg Harding, Henry Patrick Harding was known for most of his life as Harry or H.P. He was one of eight children, although two died in infancy. Major Harding was a farmer and a delegate to the state House of Representatives during Harry's early years. In 1885, the family moved to Greenville, where Major Harding became a teacher, and eventually spent four years as superintendent of the schools. Harry was educated at Greenville Male Academy and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, where he graduated in 1899. In 1931, he received his Master of Arts degree from Columbia University, and an honorary doctorate from Davidson College in 1951.

After graduating from UNC, Harding became principal of New Bern High School. He left to organize the Oxford schools in 1901, but returned to New Bern as superintendent in 1902, and remained for two years. Then in 1904, Alexander Graham, superintendent of the Charlotte school system, recruited Harding to become principal of one of the graded schools. In 1912, Harding was appointed assistant superintendent, a position he held until succeeding Graham as superintendent the following year. Harding stayed in this position for 26 years, retiring in 1949. Following his retirement, he continued to maintain an office and visited schools as superintendent emeritus.

Harding made great changes to the Charlotte school system during his tenure. He cared deeply about the students under his charge, and was more interested in building the character and personality of a child, than teaching hard facts. Some of the strides Harding involved himself in included streamlining teaching in the high school by having teachers specialize in one subject; overseeing the first junior high school in North Carolina in 1923; adding elective courses to the curriculum to encourage and interest students in completing their educations; and persuading voters to approve special taxes and bonds in order to build better schools, supplement teachers' salaries, and improve children's' health. One of Harding's most difficult challenges came in 1933-1934, when the state legislature annulled the charters that allowed cities to levy special taxes for the schools, which created huge deficits in the budget, loss of teachers, and reduction in instruction time. Harding was eventually able to get voters back on board in 1935, after approaching local businessmen to obtain their support.

Named in honor of Superintendent Harding, Harding High opened in September 1935 on Irwin Avenue. Harding was initially resistant to the idea of having the school named for him, as he believed it was improper to do so for a living superintendent. The PTA prevailed, however, and the school was officially named Harry P. Harding High School. The building remained a high school until 1961, when the Irwin Avenue building was designated a junior high school. The high school was moved to Alleghany Street, and was named Harding University High School the same year. The Irwin Avenue building later became an elementary school, and finally a Head Start Center. By the late 1980s, the building was demolished, with the exception of the auditorium and gymnasium, and another structure was built to accommodate the Irwin Avenue Open Elementary School.

In addition to his work as superintendent, Harding also served as a trustee of UNC, and was president of the North Carolina Association of City School Superintendents, of the

South Piedmont Teachers Association, and of the North Carolina Education Association. He spent two summers teaching at UNC, served on the North Carolina High School Textbook Commission, and was a member of the Ninety-Six Club, which consisted of two superintendents from each state. Locally, he was a member of the Rotary Club, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, and the Executives Club.

In his private life, Harding was a husband and father. He married Lucia Ella Ives (1876-1963) of New Bern in 1903. They had two children, Lucia Elizabeth, (1908-1987), and a son, Harry P. Harding, who died in 1911 of ileocolitis, today known as Crohn's disease, at just over a year old. The remaining five of Harding's seven siblings held estimable positions as well. William Frederick Harding lived in Charlotte and was a Superior Court Judge, Fordyce C. Harding was a lawyer serving in the North Carolina Senate from 1915-1920, Jarvis B. Harding built roads in Mexico as a civil engineer, and their sisters, Sudie Harding Latham and Mary Elizabeth Harding, were teachers.

Harry P. Harding died on July 13, 1959 of hypertensive cardiovascular disease. He was buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte.

## REFERENCES

Frech, Laura Page. *Harding, Henry Patrick*. NCPedia, 1988.  
<http://ncpedia.org/biography/harding-henry-patrick>

Harding High School, Class of 1957. *Harding High History*.  
<http://www.harding1957.com/History-of-Harding-High-School.htm>

## RELATED MATERIALS

Harding, Harry P. *The Charlotte City Schools*. Charlotte: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 1966. (CALL NUMBER: NCR 371.9756)

*Harry P. Harding*. (CALL NUMBER: NCR VERTICAL FILES)

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Harry P. Harding Papers consist of documents, scrapbooks, and an artifact. The collection ranges in date from 1917-1962. Series included are Charlotte Schools, Correspondence, Clubs and Organizations, Newsletters, Retirement, Scrapbooks, Speeches and Writings, and Artifacts.

**Charlotte Schools, 1920s-1957**, consists of a lists of school board members and teachers, one school budget, and two years of Superintendent of Schools Annual Reports.

**Correspondence, 1917-1948**, comprises correspondence primarily written to Harding during his tenure as superintendent. Included are thank-you letters and well-wishes from colleagues and notes from students and parents.

**Clubs and Organizations, 1930**, contains Harding's membership in the Ninety-Six Club, an organization represented by two school superintendents from each state.

**Newsletters, 1949, 1952**, comprises a Rotary Club newsletter with an article on Harding, and a Childhood Education newsletter with an article in remembrance of Cornelia Avery Carter, a teacher in the Charlotte school system.

**Retirement, 1949**, consists of a letter of appreciation from the school board for Harding's service, and a record of many of Harding's years with the school.

**Scrapbooks, 1909, 1928-1962**, includes a "Life Book" created for Harding's daughter Lucia by her cousin Sydney, and five personal scrapbooks of the Harding family.

**Speeches and Writings, 1925-1950s**, consists of six typewritten documents of material written by Harding for a variety of audiences. Some are noted if given as speeches.

**Artifacts, undated**, contains Harding's briefcase with his initials and surname.

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