



# Guide to the John Shelton Curtiss papers, 1796-1981

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## Summary

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**Collection Title:**

John Shelton Curtiss papers, 1796-1981

**Creator:**

Curtiss, John Shelton

**Abstract:**

John Shelton Curtiss was a professor emeritus of history at Duke University, specializing in Russian history and civilization. The collection includes professional and personal papers, as well as extensive documentation of Curtiss family history and genealogy.

**Extent:**

6.5 Linear Feet

**Physical Location:**

For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

**Language:**

English

**Language:**

Materials in English and Russian

**Collection ID:**

UA.29.02.0158

**Permalink:**

<http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/uacurtissjohn/>

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], John Curtiss papers, Duke University Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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## **Background**

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### **Scope and Content**

The collection is divided into three series: professional papers, personal papers, and family history and genealogy.

Curtiss' professional papers are exclusively from after his retirement as a faculty member at Duke University. They include drafts of scholarly articles written by him after his retirement, book reviews and publication information for his book *Russia's Crimean War*, a C.V., and recommendations for former students.

His personal papers are much more extensive, covering the breadth of his activities during his retirement. Included is his work with a number of local organizations, such as the Durham County Public Library, the Kiwanis Club, the Ruritan society, and the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department. Also included are personal correspondence, both with family and acquaintances, letters to congress, political activism, documents pertaining to land he partly owned in Texas, and an autobiography he wrote concerning his life in retirement.

The final series is materials pertaining to Curtiss family history and genealogy. These include family trees, baptismal and marriage certificates, correspondence dating back to the early 19th century between various distant relations, and a number of materials which appear to have belonged to his father, Harlow C. Curtiss. Photographs of many family members are present. Also included are photographs of a trip to Moscow John and Edna Curtiss took in 1955. The bulk of the material concerns the Curtiss' line, but some materials concerning the family history of Edna Sutter Curtiss are also included. Most material is manuscript, but at the end of the series are a number of bound volumes concerning family history in Connecticut and New England, as well as a copy of the complete works of Turgenev written in Russian.

### **Biographical/Historical**

John Shelton Curtiss was a professor emeritus of history at Duke University. He was born on July 15th, 1899 to Harlow Clarke Curtiss, a prominent Buffalo New York attorney, and Ethel Mann Curtiss, his wife. John Curtiss attended Princeton University, graduating in 1921, and was a member of the undefeated Princeton Crew team.

Curtiss attended Columbia University for graduate school beginning in 1925. He taught at Brooklyn College from 1933-1936, as well as at Columbia from 1934-1936. He taught himself Russian as a graduate student, and began

specializing in Russian history. Over his long career he made several trips to the Soviet Union for research and study.

Upon receiving his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1939, he was hired by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to be an archivist at Roosevelt's library in Hyde Park. After the involvement of the United States in World War II in 1941, he was called to Washington to work with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to study classified slavic materials and intelligence. Upon the conclusion of the war in 1945, he joined the faculty at Duke and spent the rest of his career there.

In 1954 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in Russian History, and in 1966 was designated a James B. Duke Professor of history.

In his personal life, he married Edna Sutter on September 21, 1925 in Buffalo, New York. They had two children, Anne Curtiss Fong, and John Sutter Curtiss. After his retirement from Duke University, Curtiss became involved with a number of local Durham organizations, including the Durham County Public Library, the Kiwanis Club, and the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department. He was also heavily involved in collecting and preserving his family's history and genealogical materials.

Upon the death of his wife in Durham, North Carolina on May 22nd, 1981, Curtiss moved to Honolulu, Hawaii to live with his daughter and her family until his death on December 27th, 1983.

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## **Administrative Information**

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### **Publication Statement**

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### **Processing Information**

Processed by: Matthew Schaefer, November, 2013

Accessions described in this finding aid: UA81-77, UA81-97

## **Use Restrictions**

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

## **Access Restrictions**

Collection is open for research.

Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection.

All or portions of this collection may be housed off-site in Duke University's Library Service Center. The library may require up to 48-hours to retrieve these materials for research use.

Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library to use this collection.

## **Acquisition Information**

The John Curtiss papers were received by the Duke University Archives as a gift in June and September, 1981.

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## **Names and Subjects**

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- New York (State) -- Genealogy
- Connecticut -- Genealogy
- Historians -- Correspondence
- Genealogies
- Curtiss, John Shelton
- Curtiss, Harlowe Clarke
- Curtiss, Edna Sutter
- Duke University--Faculty
- Durham County (N.C.). Library
- Sutter family
- Curtiss family

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## Collection Inventory

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