
Guide to the Phillis Abry Kaplan Papers, 1940-1946 (bulk 1943)

Accession number: 95-8

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

San Francisco, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Phillis Abry Kaplan Papers,

Date (inclusive): 1940-1946 (bulk 1943)

Accession number: 95-8

Creator: Kaplan, Phillis Abry

Extent: 1 linear foot.

Repository: The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

San Francisco, California.

Language: English

Access

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Phillis Abry Kaplan Papers, 95-8 , The Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California.

Biography

Phillis Abry was born on July 16, 1920. When she was seventeen, she was expelled from her private high school in the midwest after a love letter she had written to another young woman was found by the woman's guardian. Unable to continue living in her father's home, she moved to New York city to live with her mother. In March 1943, moved by a patriotic desire to help the war effort and by a desire to "be with all those women" in the army, she left her job as a lab technician at the RCA research labs in Princeton, New Jersey, to enlist in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). After training in Des Moines, Iowa, she went to Newark, New Jersey, to complete a radio repairman's course at the United Radio Television Institute. There she met her lover Mildred, who arranged for the two to be sent to the same army base: the

South Plains Army Air Field in Lubbock, Texas, in July 1943. In August, the WAACs were sworn into the US Army and Phillis officially became a member of the Women's Army Corps (WAC). She worked as a recruiter for the WAC in the winter of 1944, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Indeed, she was pictured (inspecting a radio together with Mildred) in a WAC recruiting poster. From August 1945, through March 1946, she was stationed in Paris; when she returned home, she received an honorable discharge. She lived with Mildred for some years, until she went to college in Reno, Nevada. There she met her husband; in 1950 she graduated and they were married. In 1987, she was interviewed by Allan Berube for his World War II Project. She died in 1995.

Scope and Content

The Phillis Abry Kaplan records consists of the contents of two scrapbooks, arranged chronologically from 1940-1946.

The first scrapbook contains documents from the enlistment process; WAC handbooks and newsletters, and three issues of the magazine "Overseas Woman"; photographs and newspaper clippings from the training at Des Moines; photographs and certificate of completion from the Radio Institute in Newark; itinerary to Texas and snapshots from life in the South Plains Army Airfield; photos from the winter 1944 recruiting team (including pictures used in the documentary "Coming out under Fire"); and snapshots from Phillis' visit to her mother and sister.

The second scrapbook includes photographs of Phillis' trip to Paris; postcards and theater programs; souvenirs such as metro tickets and ration cards; a list of the Company members, and a copy of Phillis' honorable discharge.

The photographs are black and white positive images; they depict the everyday life of the WAC, from marching and driving a truck to holiday parties and skits in the barracks.

The three audio cassette tapes contain Allen Berube's interview with Phillis Abry Kaplan, in which she speaks in detail about her life and experiences in the WAC, and narrates her scrapbook.

Title: World War II project

Title: Related Collections

Title: Coming Out Under Fire