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## Register of the Belle Persons Clewe Papers, 1921-1960

### Collection number: MSS 014

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research  
Los Angeles, California

#### Contact Information:

- Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research
- 6120 S. Vermont Avenue
- Los Angeles, California 90044
- Phone: (323) 759-6063
- Fax: (323) 759-2252
- Email: [archives@socallib.org](mailto:archives@socallib.org)
- URL: <http://www.socallib.org>

Processed by:

Cathy Chambers

Date completed:

Dec. 1991

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Belle Persons Clewe Papers,

**Date (inclusive):** 1921-1960

**Collection number:** MSS 014

**Creator:** Clewe, Belle Persons

**Extent:** 3 document cases

**Repository:** Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.

Los Angeles, California

**Language:** English

### Access

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### Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Belle Persons Clewe Papers, #, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles.

### Biography

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Belle Persons Clewe (dates not known) was a teacher in the Los Angeles school district from the early part of the century until approximately the late 1930s or early 1940s. As a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), she was active in local peace and disarmament efforts.

Clewe's education was on the East Coast; she went to Wellesley, earned her B.S. degree from Columbia University and was granted a teaching diploma from Teacher's College at Columbia. After teaching kindergarten for a year and a half at Horace Mann, the laboratory school at Teacher's College, she turned to physical education for young children, work which resulted in 1905 in a book entitled *Plays and Games for Indoors and Out*. Shortly after the book's publication, Clewe moved to California where she continued to write articles for journals in the field of education.

In Los Angeles, Clewe taught English at various high schools. She married John F. Clewe, also a teacher, in 1915. From 1919 until 1922 she took a leave of absence from her career and worked as Assistant Campaign Manager for the Citizens for Better Schools Campaign--a committee organized to support candidates for the Board of Education election of 1921. The Better Schools candidates ran successfully that year against candidates backed by the conservative Better America Federation but lost during the Board elections of 1923.

While teaching at Huntington Park Union High School in 1923, Clewe faced charges of un-Americanism which, while not substantiated, led to her reassignment. She began teaching at Fairfax High School in 1924 under the onus of radicalism but did not curtail her teaching of disarmament issues. In 1928, her class presented speeches on the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact and, as an act to back up their words, took letters to their parents urging letters in support of the Pact be mailed to senators.

Public interest surrounded the Geneva Conference talks on universal disarmament scheduled to convene February 1932. At Fairfax, both the American Legion Hollywood Post essay contest and the Goodwill Day speech contest, sponsored by WILPF and involving Clewe's speech students, had disarmament as their topic. Interested students in Clewe's class also took petitions to circulate in their neighborhoods and other students in the school were encouraged to do so as well. Some members of the American Legion, dismayed at positions taken by students in favor of disarmament, and members of various other 'patriotic societies, met at the Hollywood Post to condemn the teaching of what they considered to be rhetoric undermining the strength of the nation. They issued a statement to the press calling for the dismissal of R.G. Van Cleve, the principal at Fairfax, and for disciplinary measures to be taken against Clewe.

Clewe and Van Cleve presented their case before the Board of Education prior to the 1931 summer recess and charges were unofficially dropped, or at least proved inconclusive. However, in July, Clewe received notice that she was to be transferred at the start of the school year to another school, a position that would have been a demotion. At her protest, the transfer date was postponed until February. The issue of Clewe's transfer provided the motivation for a Parents' Committee meeting with the Hollywood Post and for continued meetings during the autumn of 1931, including one on December 2, 1931 for which a transcript was taken. The Board of Education publicly exonerated Clewe from all charges brought against her on January 21, 1932.

Clewe was transferred to a corresponding position at John Marshall High School in February of 1932, and although she was teaching in a tent, expressed satisfaction with the change. It is not known whether or not she encountered additional opposition to her teaching philosophy. After retirement, Clewe became active in Everybody's Committee to Outlaw War and occasionally attended services and events at the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles.

### **Scope and Content**

The bulk of the material in this collection derives from the 1931 incident at Fairfax High School in which Clewe was criticized for involving her students in disarmament issues. The first series, FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL, is comprised of this material and is followed by REFERENCE MATERIALS, CORRESPONDENCE, ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES, and JOHN F. CLEWE.

FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL includes material Clewe gathered to offer in her defense during various meetings and hearings held from May of 1931 through January of 1932. Included are school memos, classroom material and articles from the student newspaper, the *Colonial Gazette*, regarding the disarmament projects she initiated in her classes. Also included are instructions for the American Legion Hollywood Post Patriotic Essay Contest held in May of 1931. Certain that the Better America Federation was the organization instigating the complaint, Clewe retained a copy of an article from their Special Bulletin in which WILPF is named as the 'League for Peace-time Sedition' and the 'truth' of the Fairfax story is told.

The major statement Clewe prepared was for the joint committee meeting on December 2, 1931 of the Parents' Committee organized in Clewe's behalf and members of the American Legion. Members of the 'patriotic societies' were invited in order that they might state the case against Clewe and allow her the opportunity to publically clarify her actions or refute their charges. In this statement, Clewe discusses WILPF and the American Civil Liberties Union (both of which were perceived to have a commitment to communism), the meaning of and general support for universal disarmament, and denies her supposed hostile treatment of boys enrolled in the R.O.T.C. program at Fairfax. Although it is not specifically known what meetings were held before the December 2nd meeting, it seems that they were not as public nor as well documented and were likely meetings held between Clewe, R.G. van Cleve (the principal at Fairfax), and members of the Board of Education. It may have been that Clewe's shorter statement, in which she itemizes the inaccuracies of the stories appearing in the press, was prepared and adapted for those earlier meetings. The notes she took and the drafts she wrote in the course of preparing her statements are retained in this series as are the exhibits she duplicated for inclusion in her statements.

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Clewe clipped and annotated the newspaper articles appearing at the outset of the incident in order that she might make note of their inaccuracies and misstatements. Later, she clipped articles regarding her exoneration, the vote for which was taken by the board at their meeting January 21, 1932 and reported in the press the following day.

Among the correspondence from friends in which they express their regret or anger at the injustice of the situation is a letter dated June 11, 1931 from Florence Curtis Hansen of the American Federation of Teachers (Chicago office) pledging union support for Clewe; attached is John Clewe's response in Belle's behalf. Also included is the copy of a letter from Ethelwin Mills--President of the California State Council of WILPF--for publication in the Los Angeles *Herald* as a public statement regarding the history and aims of WILPF. Clewe's letter of March 1934 to Howard K. Beale is, of all the material in the series, that which most elucidates the episode at Fairfax.

The transfer to John Marshall High School was to some extent welcomed by Clewe--she sent letters, copies of which are in the Transfer folder, to Board members Eckman and Sheldon expressing both her thanks for their help in procuring her exoneration and her satisfaction with her new assignment. Also included are four photographs taken of Clewe and her students in the tent they used as their homeroom at John Marshall.

The remainder of the material is much less directly concerned with details of Clewe's life. The series REFERENCE MATERIALS includes articles, quotations and statistics Clewe collected, organized and used for various presentations both before and after she incorporated some of it into her Fairfax statements. The folder entitled Free Speech, includes a clipping about the activities of Yetta Stromberg and the 'Red Flag' decision of the State Court of Appeals.

The series CORRESPONDENCE includes in a general file personal letters from friends. Letters to Clewe from Upton Sinclair and letters from fellow supporters of Sinclair's 1934 campaign to End Poverty in California (EPIC) are included in subsequent files.

In the ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES series is located material detailing the Board of Education campaigns of 1921 and 1923, the campaigns in which the Clewes were most heavily involved, and the campaigns of 1933 and 1935. The exact date of Clewe's retirement is not known, but evidence of her continuing interest in education and of the rights of teachers is seen in mailings from the American Federation of Teachers Union (AFT), Los Angeles branch and the Teachers Defense Committee. The draft for the undated essay, A Perilous Adventure in Democracy, appears to have been co-authored by Belle and perhaps John and is included in this series for its discussion of the American Federation of Teachers.

Material concerning peace and disarmament organizations covers a span of years--from 1919 until well into the 1960s--and, as the incident at Fairfax suggests, comprised the major focus of Clewe's activism. The articles and pamphlets she collected regarding the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact in 1928 and the Geneva Conference conceivably were used to spark discussion or as research material in her classes as students prepared their Armistice and Goodwill Day speeches. Pamphlets about the history of WILPF and clippings about Jane Addams, WILPF's International President, were used to disprove the linkage proposed by members of the 'patriotic societies' between WILPF and communism. Included in the WILPF pamphlet folder are programs from the convention held in Los Angeles at the Hotel Roosevelt in Hollywood in June of 1931. The Clewes also took part in the California leg of the WILPF Peace Caravan, a motor parade taken across the U.S. to Washington DC where signed disarmament petitions were presented to President Hoover. After World War II, both Clewes held office in Everybody's Committee to Outlaw War. A folder on that committee in the Library's Organizational File (Box 8) supplements material in the Clewe Collection as does the Library's collection on the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles.

The final series JOHN F. CLEWE consists of material collected by Belle's husband John, and is included here due to the overlap between their interests and the likelihood that they acted to some degree in tandem.

FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL

Box 1, Folder 1 **Projects--Armistice Day, Goodwill Day, American Legion Patriotic Essay Contest. 1928, 1931, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 2 ***Colonial Gazette*, Fairfax student newspaper. 1928, 1931**

Box 1, Folder 3 **Special Bulletin, Better America Federation. 1931**

Box 1, Folder 4-10 **Statements**

Box 1, Folder 4-9 **Clewe's statements**

Box 1, Folder 4 **Final copies. n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 5 **Supplemental statement. 1923, 1924, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 6-7 **Drafts. n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 8 **Notes. n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 9 **Exhibits. 1905-1931, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 10 **Related statements--students' and principal's. 1931, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 11-12 **Hearings**

Box 1, Folder 11 **Parents' Committee and American Legion. 1931**

Box 1, Folder 12 **Board of Education--minutes and correspondence. 1931, 1932**

Box 1, Folder 13-15 **Clippings**

Box 1, Folder 13 **Misstatements and inaccuracies regarding original complaint. 1931, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 14 **Exoneration. 1932, January**

Box 1, Folder 15 **American Legion. 1931, 1932, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 16-23 **Correspondence**

Box 1, Folder 16 **General. 1930-1932**

Box 1, Folder 17-18 **Parents' Committee**

Box 1, Folder 17 **Letter. 1932, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 18 **Notes for letter. n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 19 **Endorsements. 1925, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 20-22 **Howard K. Beale**

Box 1, Folder 20 **Incoming. 1933, 1934**

Box 1, Folder 21 **Outgoing. 1934, March**

Box 1, Folder 22 **Notes. 1933, 1934, n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 23 **Transfer--John Marshall High School. 1932**

Box 1, Folder 24-25 **Notes**

Box 1, Folder 24 **General. n.d.**

Box 1, Folder 25 **Interviews and meetings. n.d.**

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Box 2, Folder 1	<b>General. 1930, 1931, n.d.</b>
Box 2, Folder 2	<b>Quotations. 1917, 1927, 1929, 1931, n.d.</b>
Box 2, Folder 3	<b>Cost of War. 1930, 1931, n.d.</b>
Box 2, Folder 4	<b>Free Speech. 1925, 1929, 1931</b>

**CORRESPONDENCE**

Box 2, Folder 5	<b>General. 1919-1959, n.d.</b>
Box 2, Folder 6	<b>Upton Sinclair--incoming. 1924</b>
Box 2, Folder 7	<b>EPIC campaign. 1934</b>

ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Box 2, Folder 8      **Teaching. 1935, 1937, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 9-16   **Board of Education elections**

Folder 9              **Citizens' Better Schools Campaign. 1919-1921, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 10     **Talk... Ebell Club. 1921**

Box 2, Folder 11-14   **Teacher-Citizen Better Schools Campaign**

Box 2, Folder 11      **Correspondence. 1923**

Box 2, Folder 12      **Campaign literature. 1923**

Box 2, Folder 13-14   **Clippings. 1922-1923, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 15      **Later campaigns. 1933, 1935**

Box 2, Folder 16      **Campaign records. n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 17      **American Federation of Teachers Union. n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 18      **A Perilous Adventure in Democracy. ` n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 19      **Teachers Defense Committee. 1959-1960, n.d.**

Box 2-3                **Peace/Disarmament**

Box 2, Folder 20-21   **General**

Box 2, Folder 20      **Pamphlets, flyers, mailings. 1919-1937, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 21      **Pamphlets, flyers, mailings. 1954-1967, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 22      **Clippings. 1919-1936, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 23      **Kellogg-Briand Pact. 1928-1929, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 24-25   **Geneva Conference**

Box 2, Folder 24      **Pamphlets, petitions. 1931, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 25      **Clippings. 1931, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 26-38   **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom**

Box 2, Folder 26      **Pamphlets, petitions. 1919-1931, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 27      **Pamphlets, flyers, mailings. 1955, 1957.**

Box 2, Folder 28      **Jane Addams. 1931, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 29      **Pax International. 1925-1931, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 30      **Peace Caravan. 1931, n.d.**

Box 2, Folder 31      **Everybody's Committee to Outlaw War. 1955, n.d.**

Box 3, Folder 1      **First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles--programs, addresses. 1952-1965, n.d.**

**JOHN F. CLEWE**

Box 3, Folder 2	<b>Correspondence. 1930, 1934, 1959</b>
Box 3, Folder 3-5	<b>Organizations and activities</b>
Box 3, Folder 3	<b>High School Teachers Association. 1920, n.d.</b>
Box 3, Folder 4	<b>Friends of Diamond Kimm Committee. 1956</b>
Box 3, Folder 5	<b>Committee to Secure Justice in the Rosenberg Case; for Martin Sobell. 1952, 1955, 1964, n.d.</b>