

S. J. McKee Archives



T.R. Wilkins collection

<http://archives.brandonu.ca/en/permalink/descriptions4298>

Part Of: RG 1 Brandon College fonds

Description Level: Sub-series

Series Number: MG 1 1.4

Accession Number: 3-2016

GMD: textual records

Date Range: 1911?-1940

Physical Description: 7 cm

History /

Biographical:

Thomas Russell Wilkins was born in Toronto in 1891. He received his B.A. from McMaster University in 1912, and became the Science Master at Woodstock College the following year. In 1916, he and his wife Olive moved to Chicago, where Wilkins was an instructor of Physics at the University of Chicago. The next year he served as a master signal electrician in the U.S. Signal Corps. During World War I, Wilkins completed pioneer research for the United States Navy, which led to the development of pulse sonar devices in the 1920s. He had also been researching the possibilities of a wireless telephone.

Wilkins and his wife moved to Brandon in 1918, where he took up the position of Professor of Physics. During his time at Brandon College, Wilkins introduced the latest technology to classrooms, designed the original Science Building, and along with the Brandon Citizen's Committee, secured building funds for the Citizen's Science Building.

Receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1921, Wilkins resigned from Brandon College in 1925 to pursue postgraduate study at Cambridge University. In 1926, he began research at the University of Rochester, where he also took up the position of Professor of Physics. From 1930 to 1938, he acted as the Director of the Institute of Optics.

Widely known for his work in the fields of cosmic rays and atomic disintegration, in April 1939, Wilkins announced the perfection of a camera that was able to record the "footprints" of invisible atoms after they collide. In October 1939, he received a medal from the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain recognizing his work regarding the use of photographic emulsions in the study of radium. The following year, Wilkins perfected a camera that could determine the energy levels inside the nuclei of stable chemical elements. He received a grant from Sigma Xi, the National Society for the Promotion of Scientific Research, in November of 1940.

Wilkins married twice. The first marriage, to Olive Angles Cross took place on June 17, 1913. Olive Wilkins died suddenly on May 13, 1937, at the age of 45. Wilkins married Susan Gwendolyn Whidden, the daughter of former Brandon College president Dr. H.P. Whidden, in 1938.

Thomas Russell Wilkins died suddenly of a heart attack on December 10, 1940, on his way back to his laboratory after a faculty meeting. He was 49 years old.

Custodial History:

Records were accessioned by the McKee Archives in 1998. Prior custodial history is unknown.

Scope and Content:

T. Russell Wilkins' records contain correspondence between himself and Mrs. Wilkins and Dr. Whidden concerning their employment with Brandon College. There are letters between the two men regarding the building of the Science Building in 1920. There is also a copy of the Canadian Baptist. Besides programmes and a picture, there is also correspondence between various people. Dr. Wilkins kept the papers he had written for various classes at McMaster University in the years 1911 and 1912. There is a "toast to the ladies" that he delivered at a banquet of some sort, that gives an interesting view on how Wilkins, and possibly other men of his time, viewed women. There are numerous newspapers clippings, and several pages taken from journals such as Popular Mechanics, Popular Electricity and others. Dr. Wilkins was at the top of his field of study. He was an extremely bright man who managed to create some very useful tools of science. His papers are interesting and informative to read.

Notes:	History/Bio information taken from Campus News May 1990
Name Access:	Olive Wilkins Thomas Wilkins H.P. Whidden
Subject Access:	science building science scientific development
Storage Location:	2016 accessions