

S. J. McKee Archives



Nadia Lewis collection

<http://archives.brandonu.ca/en/permalink/descriptions14325>

Part Of: RG 5 Western Manitoba Manuscript Collection

Description Level: Collection

Accession Number: 3-2017

GMD: multiple media

Date Range: late 1880's - 2009

Physical Description: 2.5 cm textual records
206 photographs (loose)
2 scrapbooks
2 artefacts

Physical Condition: The textual records and artefacts are in good condition. Many of the photographs are bent and the paper based photo albums have some tearing.

History /

Biographical:

Nadia Irene Lewis (nee Chernec) was born in Shoal Lake, MB on December 31, 1926. Shortly after her birth, Nadia was placed in the care of a nurse in Brandon, MB while her parents were attempting to set up a home in the United States. Her mother was a teacher and her father was in training to become a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), but because they were unmarried and had a child out of wedlock, they both lost their jobs and felt they needed to start a new life in a different place. As they were driving up the Brandon Hill, they were tragically involved in a three car collision, which killed them both.

The nurse caring for the newborn baby girl and a social worker from the Children's Aid Society assigned to the case decided to place Nadia in an orphanage in Brandon. During her stay at the orphanage, the caretakers named her "Katy" after a popular song of the day and discovered that she really enjoyed music. Nicholas and Maria Chernec adopted "Katy" from the orphanage when she was 3 1/2 years old, and in her brief autobiography, Nadia wrote that she suspected that Nicholas Chernec was her biological uncle (her father's brother). In June 1929, baby "Katy" was christened "Nadia Irene Chernec."

According to Nadia's autobiography, Nicholas Chernec urged his wife Maria to adopt the baby for three years as she remained in the orphanage. Maria had suffered a fall from a ladder during their marriage and as a result, was unable to have children. Maria "was often quite ill" and did not want to raise another person's child, but eventually she agreed.

Both Nicholas and Maria were of Ukrainian descent, and therefore Nadia was raised with a knowledge of Ukrainian traditions and within the Ukrainian community of Brandon, something that she embraced. Nadia grew up in Brandon's North End and graduated from the Normal School in 1945. She immediately began a teaching career that would last for 32 years, though she also worked in an office for three of those years. She married Alexander Mitchell Lewis on July 23, 1971 in Vancouver, BC. Alexander was a contractor and boat builder.

After Maria Chernec's death in September 1984, Nadia began correspondence with Oseredok, the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre in Winnipeg, MB. She ultimately donated many traditional Ukrainian items to the Centre, including a painting much beloved by her father (who died in 1955) and garments handmade by her mother, thus preserving some of her family's cultural heritage.

As noted previously, Nadia loved music as a child and eventually learned to play the violin. She performed with several orchestras throughout her life, including the New Westminster Symphony and the Kitsilano Orchestra. In November 1998, she was diagnosed with trigeminal neuralgia, a neurological disorder that affects the nerves in the head. This disorder, which can cause unexpected and debilitating pain in the affected area, led to Nadia giving up driving, and ultimately, her violin playing. Through prescription drug experimentation under the supervision of her physician and neurologist, Nadia was eventually able to control the effects of the disease. Nadia Irene Lewis died on September 14, 2013 in Richmond, BC at the age of 86.

Custodial History:

The collection was transferred to Ms. Lewis' lawyer after her death in 2013. The records were then given to Drew Mitchell, a distant cousin who had been named in her will. Mitchell donated the records to the McKee Archives in 2017.

Scope and Content:

The collection was created by Nadia Chernec Lewis throughout the course of her adult life and chronicles her activities from her birth in Manitoba, and moves to British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, New Zealand and finally back to British Columbia where she died.

Collection consists of an autobiography, her parents' biographies (written by Nadia), vital records related to her family, correspondence with classmates from the Normal School and Oseredok and many photographs of Nadia, her friends and family. Some of the photograph depict Brandon and Brandon's North End. Also included in the collection is a set of wooden rosary beads and a doll dressed in traditional Ukrainian garments, handmade by Maria Chernec.

Notes: History/Bio information taken from the records. Description by Megan Demarest (December 2018).

Language Note: English and Ukrainian

Finding Aid: A file list for the collection is available, as well as a photo inventory.

Storage Location: 2018 accessions

Arrangement:

Photographs 3-2017.5 through 3-2017.88 were in a card box labeled "Lewis Pictures (1956-'58, 1960's, 1970's)," which has been discarded.

Photographs 3-2017.89 through 3-2017.104 were in a candy box labeled "Pictures and Background Material in relation to Nicholas and Maria Chernec of Brandon, Manitoba . . . the Ukrainian Community in the 1930's-1940's mostly . . .," which has been discarded. An envelope in the box labeled "Ukrainian Shirt, History of . . ." contained a handwritten description of the shirt and its history along with photographs 3-2017.89 through 3-2017.94. The note is in Folder #6, Oseredok-Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre. Photographs 3-2017.95 through 3-2017.104 are Polaroids taken to document items that Ms. Lewis donated to Oseredok in 2000.

Photographs 3-2017.105 through 3-2017.152 were removed from a green self-adhesive photo album, which has been discarded.

Photographs 3-2017.153 through 3-2017.198 were removed from a self-adhesive photo album with a waterside lanscape image on the front, which has been discarded.