

Guide to the Alvin Russell Davis Correspondence, 1917-1919

Administrative Information

Title and Dates:

Alvin Russell Davis Correspondence, 1917-1919

Repository:

New Hampshire Historical Society
30 Park Street
Concord, NH 03301
603-228-6688
nhhistory.org

Collection Number:

2023.057

Author of Finding Aid:

Korrena Cowing

Creator:

Davis, Alvin Russell, 1897-1960

Language:

The materials in this collection are in English. Three postcards are in French and two postcards are in German.

Extent:

1 box ; 0.42 linear feet

Abstract:

This collection consists of the correspondence of Alvin Russell Davis between 1917 and 1919, documenting his service with the 103rd Infantry Regiment during World War I. Davis primarily writes to his mother, Addie Erwin, and his girlfriend, Bertha E. Stearns.

Access and Use

Acquisition Information and Provenance:

The Alvin Russell Davis Correspondence was the gift of Vanessa Murphy on August 5, 2023. An additional set of letters were donated by Vanessa Murphy in 2025.

Processing Information:

This collection was processed by Korrena Cowing in April 2024 and additional material added by Korrena Cowing in November 2025. The finding aid was written by Korrena Cowing in April 2024 and updated by Korrena Cowing in November 2025. This finding aid follows the standards set-forth by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

Access Restrictions:

Available for research. This collection has been digitized and is available on the New Hampshire Historical Society's online catalog.

Location:

The collection is housed at the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord, New Hampshire.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements:

The materials in this collection are paper based and have no special technical requirements for use.

Copyright/Conditions Governing Use:

For permission to reproduce or publish materials from this collection, please contact the New Hampshire Historical Society. Users are responsible for following all copyright and intellectual property laws.

Preferred Citation:

Item title, Alvin Russell Davis Correspondence, 2023.057. New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, NH. Date accessed.

Collection Overview

Biographical Information:

Alvin Russell Davis was born on December 31, 1897 to Henry E. Davis (1864-1908) and Addie (Russell) Davis (1871-1946) of Keene, NH. After his father's death in 1908, he and his mother remained in Keene, moving in with her parents. On December 20, 1916, his mother married David Erwin (1853-1934), a chairmaker from Keene.

Alvin enlisted in the army on July 25, 1917 and served with Company H of the 1st New Hampshire Infantry Regiment, which became part of the 103rd Infantry Regiment during World War I. He was discharged on April 28, 1919. After the war, Alvin returned to Keene and worked as a theatre manager. He married Bertha Edith Stearns, daughter of Harlan and Edith (Emory) Stearns, on July 12, 1921 in Rindge, NH, whom he wrote numerous letters to during his time in

the war. Bertha was born on May 24, 1898 in Rindge. Together they had one child: Russell Henry Davis (1922-1978). Bertha worked as a school teacher throughout her life.

Alvin Russell Davis died in Keene on December 17, 1960; Bertha died on January 1, 1995.

Collection Scope and Content Note:

The Alvin Russell Davis Correspondence, 1917-1919, consists of his correspondence with friends and family while serving in the army during World War I. Davis primarily writes to his mother, Addie Erwin, and his girlfriend, Bertha E. Stearns, with a few letters to Mrs. O. V. Norcross [Eva May Norcross] and his father, David Erwin. There is a single letter to Davis from his mother in this collection as well as a couple letters from his mother to Bertha, providing updates on her son, and a few letters from others who have met Davis overseas. The letters detail his service with Company H of the 1st New Hampshire Regiment from their time in New Hampshire to Camp Bartlett in Westfield, MA, where they became part of the 103rd Infantry Regiment. His letters continue through their deployment overseas, where he stops briefly in England before heading to the frontlines in France.

Most of his letters throughout this collection reminisce on life back in New Hampshire, his friends and family, and the theater. He also gives updates on friends and family from other letters he has received, providing a look at home life during this time, as he writes about the family farm and of Bertha Stearns' teaching.

Davis' early letters also discuss preparing to leave for France, with some notes on their training, camp life, and medical treatment such as getting vaccinated. In October 1917, he writes first from England and then from France, describing the countries, the sounds of battle, and how he misses the United States. Included is a full description of his travel from the United States to England. The bulk of the letters in this collection date from 1918, where he details camp life, the damage to the villages they are in, battles with the Germans, what it is like in the trenches, and stays in the hospital due to injury and illness. Davis suffered multiple injuries at the frontline, including being hit by shrapnel and being gassed. He notes after his last hospital stay that this has left his heart and lungs in "bad shape."

Though often praising the Red Cross on their work and the help they have given the soldiers, he spends multiple letters telling Bertha that he does not want her to become a Red Cross nurse because he does not want her near the war. The letters continue with Davis celebrating the end of the war and waiting to hear when they will be returning to the United States. In April 1919 he writes from Camp Devens, MA, where he and his company are stationed. The last letter in this collection, dated May 7, 1919, notes there is no more need for writing letters as they are leaving on Friday.

Some of the letters in this collection have been censored. A couple of the letters from home briefly mention the increasing influenza pandemic (Spanish flu).

Arrangement:

The materials in this collection are arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Box 1

Folder 1	Correspondence, 1917 June-July
Folder 2	Correspondence, 1917 August 1-15
Folder 3	Correspondence, 1917 August 19-30
Folder 4	Correspondence, 1917 September 2-17
Folder 5	Correspondence, 1917 September 18-23
Folder 6	Correspondence, 1917 October
Folder 7	Correspondence, 1917 November
Folder 8	Correspondence, 1917 December
Folder 9	Correspondence, 1918 January
Folder 10	Correspondence, 1918 April
Folder 11	Correspondence, 1918 May
Folder 12	Correspondence, 1918 June-July
Folder 13	Correspondence, 1918 August-October
Folder 14	Correspondence, 1918 November 2-10
Folder 15	Correspondence, 1918 November 15-28
Folder 16	Correspondence, 1918 December, undated
Folder 17	Correspondence, 1919 January
Folder 18	Correspondence, 1919 February
Folder 19	Correspondence, 1919 April-May

Subject Terms

People:

Davis, Alvin Russell, 1897-1960
Stearns, Bertha Edith, 1898-1995
Erwin, Addie, 1871-1946
Erwin, David, 1853-1934
Norcross, Eva May, 1874-1961

Organizations:

American National Red Cross
Keene Normal School
New Hampshire. National Guard. Regiment, 1st
United States. Army. American Expeditionary Forces
United States. Army. Division, 26th
United States. Army. Infantry Regiment, 103rd
Young Men's Christian Association

Subjects:

Correspondence
Farms
Influenza epidemic, 1918-1919
Military life
Thanksgiving Day
Theater

World War, 1914-1918

World War, 1914-1918--Hospitals

Locations:

Camp Devens, MA

England

France

Keene, NH

Rindge, NH

Sullivan, NH

Westfield, MA

Occupations:

Soldiers

Teachers