

# AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

## Collection Summary

- Title:** Barbara Tenery Collection of Nell Dorr Papers
- Date:** 1919–1986, bulk 1960s
- Creator(s):** Dorr, Nell (1893–1988)
- Extent:** 3 linear feet
- Code:** BTC
- Repository:** Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives
- Abstract:** The Barbara Tenery Collection of Nell Dorr Papers contains correspondence, photographs, clippings, and poems written by Nell Dorr. Most of the material relates to her book projects.

## Information for Researchers

### Access Restrictions

The collection is open to qualified researchers by special request only.

### Use Restrictions

The Barbara Tenery Collection of Nell Dorr Papers is on loan to the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. The Amon Carter Museum of American Art owns copyright to Dorr's materials; however, the museum does not own rights to materials produced by others. The Amon Carter Museum of American Art assumes no responsibility for infringement of literary property rights or copyrights or for liability to any person for defamation or invasion of privacy.

### Preferred Citation

Barbara Tenery Collection of Nell Dorr Papers, [item identification], Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives.

### Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

Nell Dorr Papers [A2008.045]  
Frederick and Margareta Mitchell Collection of Nell Dorr Papers

### Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

# AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

More than 5,000 prints and 6,000 negatives by Dorr in the Photography Collection.

**Contact the museum archivist at [archivist@cartermuseum.org](mailto:archivist@cartermuseum.org) or 817.989.5077 for additional information.**

## **Administrative Information**

### **Acquisition and Custody Information**

This collection is on extended loan from Barbara Tenery.

### **Processed By**

Jonathan Frembling

## **Biographical Note**

Nell Dorr (1893–1988) was born Virginia Nell Becker in Cleveland, Ohio, the daughter of Minnie and John Jacob Becker, a photographer. In 1900, the family moved to Massillon, Ohio, where Becker had a studio. Dorr learned the techniques of developing processes working as his assistant. In 1910 she married Thomas Koons, her childhood sweetheart; they had three daughters, Virginia (Win), Elizabeth (Betty or Bets), and Barbara (Barby).

Before World War I, the family moved to Miami, Florida. Dorr's father helped her to open a studio. Photography became a way for her to escape the frenzy of real estate speculation in which her husband was involved. The Koonses lost everything except their home and the photography studio in the crash of 1926, and she began supporting the family by taking photographs of important visitors to Miami for *Gondolier* magazine. In 1931, she divorced Tom Koons.

In 1932, Dorr moved to New York City where she began exhibiting and continued publishing her work. That year, she had a one-person exhibition of photomurals at the Merle Sterner Gallery in New York. *Mangroves*, a softbound portfolio of her photographs, was published in limited edition in 1933. The Grand Central Art Gallery was the site of another one-person show, "Photographic Etudes," in 1934. She also exhibited photographs from her Famous Men Series at the Delphic Gallery that year. One of the men she photographed was scientist John Van Nostrand Dorr, whom she married in 1935.

Dorr's first book *In a Blue Moon*, a collection of photographs taken in the Florida Keys during the 1920s, was published in 1939. In 1940 she began working on a 16-mm sound film about the Kurt Graff Ballet, *The Singing Earth*; she completed in 1947. In 1949 she made another 16-mm sound film, *Through the Dorr Way*, which documented the work of the Dorr-Oliver Company.

The Dorr Foundation helped publish the first edition of *Mother and Child* in 1954. The foundation promoted the book as a testament of solid values of the American family and donated nearly 1,000

# AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

copies to the U.S. Information Agency. In 1955 Dorr's work was included in *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. *The Golden Key*, a 16-mm sound film about the marriage of Tasha Tudor's antique dolls, was made in 1958. Dorr's photographs taken in a Mexican village were published in 1962 in *The Bare Feet*.

Dorr's photographs were exhibited around the country: one-person exhibition, *Mother and Child*, Washington Art Association, Washington, Connecticut, October 3–17, 1964; *Mother and Child*, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, December 1964–January 1965; exhibition, Battle Creek Civic Art Center, April 1973; group exhibition, *Women of Photography: An Historical Survey*, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1975; one-person exhibition, Shado Gallery, Portland, Oregon, 1976; one-person exhibition of photographs from the 1930s, Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio, February 1981.

In addition to exhibiting her work, Dorr continued to photograph and to publish books. *Of Night and Day* was published in 1968. A second edition of *Mother and Child* was published in 1972 by Scrimshaw Press. Her last book *Life Dance*, published in 1975, was a collaboration with her friend Covington Hardee.

John Dorr died in 1962 at the age of 90. Dorr resided for the remainder of her life at Villa Serena in Washington, Connecticut.

## Scope and Content Note

The material has been organized into three series, Correspondence, Clippings and Ephemera. The series have been arranged in chronological order where possible, unless otherwise noted.

**Correspondence** includes personal and professional correspondence to and from Dorr.

**Clippings** includes newspaper and magazine clippings on Dorr's work. Also included are two large scrapbooks which contain both clippings and original correspondence.

**Ephemera** includes a small collection of artifacts and an interview transcript.

The papers were extensively re-organized as their original condition was disheveled. The papers were stored in loose stacks, with little order. While sorted, original order was maintained as much as possible. The scrapbook materials were left unaltered.

## Inventory

### Series I. Correspondence

**Scope and Content Note:** This series contains the personal and business correspondence to and from Dorr. The correspondence is personal, such as a series of letters and typed and hand-written poetry tucked into a small three ring notebook, and letters from "Kit," and professional, such as to David Smart, of *Esquire* magazine — primarily concerning business matters.

# AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

Box 1, Folder 1: Correspondence — 1944–1959

Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondence — 1960–1965

Box 1, Folder 3: Correspondence — 1968–1979

Box 1, Folder 4: Correspondence — 1980–1981

Box 1, Folder 5: Correspondence — 1982–1986, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 6: Correspondence and Pages from Black “University Loose Leaf Notebook”, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 7: Correspondence — Smart, David — *Esquire*, 1940–1948, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 8: Correspondence — *Bare Feet* Donation [1], 1966

Box 1, Folder 9: Correspondence — *Bare Feet* Donation [2], 1966

Box 1, Folder 10: Correspondence — *Bare Feet* Donation [3], 1966, n.d.

## Series II. Clippings

**Scope and Content Note:** A small collection of gallery announcements for Dorr’s exhibitions and examples of professional notice of her work.

Box 1, Folder 11: Clippings — Dorr, Nell — Gallery Announcements, 1934–1985, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 12: Clippings — Assorted Periodicals, 1955–1984, n.d.

Box 2, Folder 1: Scrapbook [1]

Box 3, Folder 1: Scrapbook [2]

## Series III. Ephemera

**Scope and Content Note:** A short transcript of an interview for the NBC Radio Network show “Weekday,” and a handmade card and photograph entitled “King Alfred”.

Box 1, Folder 13: Interview — Schone, Virginia, 1955

Box 1, Folder 14: Artifacts — Assorted, 1982, n.d.