

AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

Collection Summary

Title:	Nell Dorr Papers
Date:	1934–1988, bulk 1940s–1960s
Creator(s):	Dorr, Nell (1893–1988)
Extent:	4 linear feet
Code:	NDP
Repository:	Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives
Abstract:	The Nell Dorr Papers contain correspondence, photographs, clippings, poems written by Nell Dorr, handwritten and typed drafts of her books, and ephemera.

Information for Researchers

Access Restrictions

The collection is open to qualified researchers.

Use Restrictions

The Nell Dorr Papers are the physical property of 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

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

Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

Barbara Tenery Collection of Nell Dorr Papers [on loan]
Frederick and Margareta Mitchell Collection of Nell Dorr Papers

Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

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

Contact the museum archivist at archivist@cartermuseum.org or 817.989.5077 for additional information.

Administrative Information

Acquisition and Custody Information

Gift of the Nell Dorr Estate, 1990

Processed By

Georgia A. Carey

Biographical Note

Nell Dorr (1893¹–1988) 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.

¹August 27, 1893; August 28, 1893; and August 25, 1895, all are given as Dorr's birth date on documents in the collection. August 27, 1893, and November 15, 1988, are Dorr's life dates given in the Social Security Death Index.

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 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 Nell Dorr Papers contain correspondence, photographs, clippings, poems written by Nell Dorr, handwritten and typed drafts of her books, and ephemera. Series include Correspondence, Writings by Nell Dorr, Ephemera, Photographs, and Published Material. Correspondence is the largest series.

A more detailed series description appears at the start of each series in this finding aid.

Of particular interest to researchers looking for biographical information are two brief autobiographies. One was published under the title “A Letter from Nell Dorr” in the *Town Crier*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, December 4, 1954. The facts given contradict dates in a chronology of Dorr's life prepared by Margaretta Mitchell. Dorr's typed stories of her life are filed under the heading “Autobiography” in box 7, along with two copies of her article published in *Town Crier*. Mitchell's chronology is filed in under her name in “Business Correspondence.”

Several volumes, including Dorr's notebook containing handwritten notes about the papers and chemicals she used to print her photographs, are listed at the end of this finding aid.

Inventory

Series I. Correspondence

Scope and Content Note: The majority of this collection consists of correspondence. This series is divided into subseries: Correspondence, Personal: Nell Dorr; Correspondence, Personal: John Van

Nostrand Dorr; Correspondence, Business: Nell Dorr; Correspondence, Business: John Van Nostrand Dorr; and Correspondence, Business: *Mother and Child*.

Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by the author's surname, then chronologically. Undated correspondence follows dated correspondence.

Photographs of family and friends enclosed with letters have been removed from the correspondence and housed in box 8.

Two packages of correspondence have not been processed because the papers are badly mildewed. To prevent the mildew from spreading to other documents in the collection, the plastic-wrapped packages are in a separate document box marked "Nell Dorr Collection, Correspondence Damaged by Mildew-Unprocessed." These letters have been isolated until they can be cleaned, after which they will be integrated into the collection. Access to these documents cannot be granted until they have been cleaned and processed.

Subseries I. Correspondence, Personal: Nell Dorr

Box 1, Folder 1: Anderson, Erica (1)

Box 1, Folder 2: Anderson, Erica (2)

Box 1, Folder 3: Ashe Family Members (Daughter Virginia "Win")

Box 1, Folder 4: Bache, Alice / Baril, Claudette / Byron, Mary

Box 1, Folder 5: Cloos, Consuelo

Box 1, Folder 6: Craeybeckx, Herman

Box 1, Folder 7: Dorr, Goldthwaite

Box 1, Folder 8: Dorr, Jack and Ann

Box 1, Folder 9: Dorr, John V. N. (1)

Box 1, Folder 10: Dorr, John V. N. (2)

Box 1, Folder 11: Dorr, John V. N. (3)

Box 1, Folder 12: Dorr, John V. N. (4)

Box 1, Folder 13: Dorr, John V. N. (5)

Box 1, Folder 14: Dorr, John V. N. (6)

Box 1, Folder 15: Dorr, John V. N. (7)

Box 1, Folder 16: Dorr, John V. N. (8)

Box 1, Folder 17: Dorr, John V. N. (9)

Box 1, Folder 18: Edison, Sydney / Ethel [no surname given]

Box 1, Folder 19: Everhard, Tine

Box 1, Folder 20: Faxton, Bill / Ford, Lauren / Fragan, Nannie

Box 1, Folder 21: Gander, Tom

Box 1, Folder 22: Gish, Lillian

Box 1, Folder 23: Graff, Grace and Curt

Box 1, Folder 24: Griffin, John Howard (1)

Box 1, Folder 25: Griffin, John Howard (2)

Box 1, Folder 26: Griffin, John Howard (3)

Box 1, Folder 27: Griffin, John Howard (4)

Box 1, Folder 28: Griffin, John Howard (5)

Box 1, Folder 29: Griffin, John Howard (6)

Box 1, Folder 30: Griffin, John Howard (7)

Box 1, Folder 31: Griffin, John Howard (8)

Box 1, Folder 31: Griffin, John Howard (9)

Box 2, Folder 1: Hardee, Covington

Box 2, Folder 2: Hardee, Joan

Box 2, Folder 3: Howard, Claire

Box 2, Folder 4: Howe, Elizabeth Koons (1)

Box 2, Folder 5: Howe, Elizabeth Koons (2)

Box 2, Folder 6: Howe, Elizabeth Koons (3)

Box 2, Folder 7: Kellogg, Steven and Helen / Loeh, Michael

Box 2, Folder 8: Maritain, Jacques

Box 2, Folder 9: Mayer, Grace (1)

Box 2, Folder 10: Mayer, Grace (2)

Box 2, Folder 11: Mayer, Grace (3)

Box 2, Folder 12: Mayer, Grace (4)

Box 2, Folder 13: Mayer, Grace (5)

Box 2, Folder 14: Mayer, Grace (6)

Box 2, Folder 15: Mentzel, Rose (1)

Box 2, Folder 16: Mentzel, Rose (2)

Box 2, Folder 17: Mentzel, Rose (3)

Box 2, Folder 18: Mentzel, Rose (4)

Box 2, Folder 19: Mentzel, Rose (5)

Box 2, Folder 20: Mentzel, Rose (6)

Box 2, Folder 21: Mentzel, Rose (7)

Box 2, Folder 22: Mentzel, Rose (8)

Box 2, Folder 23: Mentzel, Rose (9)

Box 2, Folder 24: Mentzel, Rose (10)

Box 3, Folder 1: Miller, Rhena Schweitzer

Box 3, Folder 2: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (1)

Box 3, Folder 3: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (2)

Box 3, Folder 4: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (3)

Box 3, Folder 5: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (4)

Box 3, Folder 6: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (5)

Box 3, Folder 7: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (6)

Box 3, Folder 8: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (7)

Box 3, Folder 9: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (8)

Box 3, Folder 10: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (9)

Box 3, Folder 11: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (10)

Box 3, Folder 12: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (11)

Box 3, Folder 13: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (12)

Box 3, Folder 14: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (13)

Box 3, Folder 15: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (14)

Box 3, Folder 16: Mitchell, Margaretta and Frederick (15)

Box 3, Folder 17: Pfeifer, Marcuse

Box 3, Folder 18: Spence, Kit and Derek

Box 3, Folder 19: Standard, Paul / Stieglitz, Alfred

Box 3, Folder 20: Steichen, Edward

Box 3, Folder 21: Tenery Family Members (1) [Daughter Barbara "Barby"]

Box 3, Folder 22: Tenery Family Members (2)

Box 3, Folder 23: Tenery Family Members (3)

Box 3, Folder 24: Thompson, Ruby Reid

Box 3, Folder 25: Titania / Tom

Box 3, Folder 26: Tudor, Tasha (1)

Box 3, Folder 27: Tudor, Tasha (2)

Box 3, Folder 28: Tudor, Tasha (3)

Box 3, Folder 29: Tudor, Tasha (4)

Box 3, Folder 30: Tudor, Tasha (5)

Box 4, Folder 1: Williams, Shedrick (1)

Box 4, Folder 2: Williams, Shedrick (2)

Box 4, Folder 3: Williams, Shedrick (3)

Box 4, Folder 4: Williams, Shedrick (4)

Subseries II. Correspondence, Personal: John Van Nostrand Dorr

Box 4, Folder 5: Correspondence, A–C

Box 4, Folder 6: Correspondence, D (1)

Box 4, Folder 7: Correspondence, D (2)

Box 4, Folder 8: Correspondence, D (3)

Box 4, Folder 9: Correspondence, D (4)

Box 4, Folder 10: Correspondence, D (5)

Box 4, Folder 11: Correspondence, D (6)

Box 4, Folder 12: Correspondence, D (7)

Box 4, Folder 13: Correspondence, D (8)

Box 4, Folder 14: Correspondence, D (9)

Box 4, Folder 15: Correspondence, E–G

Box 4, Folder 16: Correspondence, H–J

Box 4, Folder 17: Correspondence, K–Z

Subseries III. Correspondence, Business: Nell Dorr

Box 5, Folder 1: Atherton, Zona

Box 5, Folder 2: Cahn, William Communications Consultant

Box 5, Folder 3: Citytrust

Box 5, Folder 4: *Coronet* Magazine

Box 5, Folder 5: Craeybeckx, A. H. S.

Box 5, Folder 6: Dorr, Goldthwaite H. III / Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Box 5, Folder 7: Educational Audio Visual, Inc.

Box 5, Folder 8: Ginn and Company

Box 5, Folder 9: *The Golden Key*

Box 5, Folder 10: Hanns Reich Verlag / McGraw–Hill

Box 5, Folder 11: Hill and Wang / Ferris, Bangs, Davis, Trafford, and Syz

Box 5, Folder 12: International Center of Photography

Box 5, Folder 13: *Life Dance* (1) / Hardee, Covington

Box 5, Folder 14: *Life Dance* (2) / Hardee, Covington

Box 5, Folder 15: *Life Dance* (3) / Hardee, Covington

Box 5, Folder 16: Lovejoy, Cuneo, and Curtis (1)

Box 5, Folder 17: Lovejoy, Cuneo, and Curtis (2)

Box 5, Folder 18: Lovejoy, Cuneo, and Curtis (3)

Box 5, Folder 19: Massillon Museum

Box 5, Folder 20: Mitchell, Margaretta (1) / *Recollections*

Box 5, Folder 21: Mitchell, Margaretta (2) / *Recollections*

Box 5, Folder 22: Museum Graphics

Box 5, Folder 23: New York Graphic Society, Ltd. (1) / Cumming, Burton

Box 5, Folder 24: New York Graphic Society, Ltd. (2) / Cumming, Burton

Box 5, Folder 25: New York Graphic Society, Ltd. (3) / Cumming, Burton

Box 5, Folder 26: New York Graphic Society, Ltd. (4) / Cumming, Burton

Box 5, Folder 27: New York Graphic Society, Ltd. (5) / Cumming, Burton

Box 5, Folder 28: New York Graphic Society, Ltd. (6) / Cumming, Burton

Box 5, Folder 29: *Of Night and Day*

Box 5, Folder 30: Photographic Research / Kay Y. James

Box 5, Folder 31: *Popular Photography*

Box 5, Folder 32: *Psychotherapy and Science Review*

Box 5, Folder 33: Rutgers University Press

Box 5, Folder 34: Scrimshaw Press / Frederick Mitchell

Box 5, Folder 35: *The Singing Earth* (1) / 1937–1938

Box 5, Folder 36: *The Singing Earth* (2) / 1940–1942

Box 5, Folder 37: *The Singing Earth* (3) / 1947–1948

Box 5, Folder 38: *The Singing Earth* (4) / 1954–1957

Box 5, Folder 39: Spoken Arts

Box 5, Folder 40: Time–Life Books

Box 5, Folder 41: Tudor, Tasha (McCready)

Box 5, Folder 42: The United Nations

Box 5, Folder 43: Villa Serena — Washington, Connecticut

Box 5, Folder 44: von Schreiber, Barbara

Subseries IV. Correspondence, Business: John Van Nostrand Dorr

Box 5, Folder 45: Disney, Walt

Box 5, Folder 46: Steichen, Edward

Subseries V. Correspondence, Business: *Mother and Child*

Scope and Content Note: This correspondence is separate from the other business correspondence because Dorr had maintained it separately. Original order has been retained. The first folder box is titled "To Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth" and contains correspondence regarding a copy of *Mother and Child* that Dorr sent to Buckingham Palace.

Box 6, Folder 1: To Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth

Box 6, Folder 2: Correspondence — A–B

Box 6, Folder 3: Correspondence — C

Box 6, Folder 4: Correspondence — D–F

Box 6, Folder 5: Correspondence — G–I

Box 6, Folder 6: Correspondence — J–L

Box 6, Folder 7: Correspondence — M–O

Box 6, Folder 8: Correspondence — P–R

Box 6, Folder 9: Correspondence — S

Box 6, Folder 10: Correspondence — T–Z

Box 6, Folder 11: Publicity Material (1)

Box 6, Folder 12: Publicity Material (2)

Series II. Writings by Nell Dorr

Box 7, Folder 1: Autobiography

Box 7, Folder 2: Rough Drafts for Publications

Box 7, Folder 3: Poems (1)

Box 7, Folder 4: Poems (2)

Box 7, Folder 5: Poems (3)

Series III. Ephemera

Scope and Content Note: Ephemera contains a wide array of materials, including reviews, a tax return, clippings, and cards among other things. A copy of Edward Steichen's review of *In a Blue Moon* (*U.S. Camera*, December 1939), in which he praises the publication for "its exquisite grace and beauty," is in the file folder "Book Reviews."

Clippings include items pertaining to Dorr's friends, such as Lillian Gish, Tasha Tudor, and John Howard Griffin.

The folder of correspondence from Martha Trinker to various correspondents is an anomaly; the letters do not mention Nell Dorr, and their relationship to the rest of the collection has not been established.

Box 7, Folder 6: Exhibition Announcements and Labels

Box 7, Folder 7: Book Reviews

Box 7, Folder 8: Business Cards

Box 7, Folder 9: Cards for Holiday and Social Occasions

Box 7, Folder 10: *Percolator*, with John V. N. Dorr on Cover, Posthumous

Box 7, Folder 11: Newspaper Clippings, Wedding of Barbara N. Koons

Box 7, Folder 12: Newspaper Clippings, Wedding of Betty Louise Koons

Box 7, Folder 13: Memorabilia — Howe, Betty Koons

Box 7, Folder 14: I.R.S. Tax Return — 1980

Box 7, Folder 15: Christmas Cards from the Dorr Co.

Box 7, Folder 16: Dorr, John V. N. Nature Laboratory / Horace Mann School / Appeal on Behalf of JVND Nature Laboratory

Box 7, Folder 17: Dorr, John V. N. Nature Laboratory / Horace Mann School / Information — 1972

Box 7, Folder 18: Dorr, John V. N. Nature Laboratory / Horace Mann School / Land Surveys

Box 7, Folder 19: Dorr, John V. N. Nature Laboratory / Horace Mann School / Publications (1)

Box 7, Folder 20: Dorr, John V. N. Nature Laboratory / Horace Mann School / Publications (2)

Box 7, Folder 21: *Dorrco Doings*, 1950, 1952, & 1953 (2 copies); Christmas Issues

Box 7, Folder 22: Mortgage Papers, Re: Chalfin v. Koons

Box 7, Folder 23: Signed Photographic Print

Box 7, Folder 24: Martha Trinker Papers

Box 7, Folder 25: Magazine Articles — John Howard Griffin

Box 7, Folder 26: Newspaper Articles — Lillian Gish

Box 7, Folder 27: Newspaper Articles — Tasha Tudor

Box 7, Folder 28: Albert Schweitzer Friendship House — Erica Anderson, founder

Box 7, Folder 29: *Aperture*, 8:1, 1960

Map Case, Folder 1: Oversized ephemera

Series IV. Photographs

Scope and Content Note: These photographs primarily were removed from the correspondence files and are arranged alphabetically by the last name of the sender. When a photograph was known to have accompanied a letter, the name of the sender and the date of the letter are noted on the protective sleeve. Although loose photographs could not be attributed with certainty to a particular letter, the photographs have been attributed to a sender and filed accordingly.

Box 8, Folder 1: Anderson, Erica

Box 8, Folder 2: Dorr, Nell

Box 8, Folder 3: Dorr, Nell, and Edward Steichen

Box 8, Folder 4: Griffin, John Howard (1)

Box 8, Folder 5: Griffin, John Howard (2)

Box 8, Folder 6: Mitchell, Margareta

Box 8, Folder 7: *Popular Photography*

Box 8, Folder 8: Tudor, Tasha

Box 8, Folder 9: Unidentified

Box 8, Folder 10: Williams, Shedrick (1)

Box 8, Folder 11: Williams, Shedrick (2)

Map Case, Folder 2: Oversized photographs

Series V. Published Material

Scope and Content Note: This series contains material both on Dorr's publications and publications about her.

Box 9, Folder 1: *Mangroves*, 1933

Box 9, Folder 2: *Mangroves*, 1933

Box 9, Folder 3: *Mangroves*, 1933

Box 9, Folder 4: Images from *Mother and Child*

Box 9, Folder 5: Images from *Of Night and Day*

Box 9, Folder 6: Exhibition Announcements and Brochures

Box 9, Folder 7: Advertisement Brochures for Books

Box 9, Folder 8: Cards from Nell and John Dorr

Box 9, Folder 9: Magazine Articles about Nell Dorr

Box 9, Folder 10: Magazine Articles — Illustrations by Nell Dorr

Box 9, Folder 11: Magazines — Illustrations by Nell Dorr

Box 9, Folder 12: Newspaper Clippings, Nell Dorr

The following volumes are stored in a flat box labeled "To Be Housed in Phase Boxes:"

Black and white notebook containing handwritten technical notes on photography [papers, chemicals, etc.] by Nell Dorr.

Leather-bound volume of handwritten poems by Nell Dorr.

Memorial Service for John; velvet-bound volume handwritten by Nell Dorr.

Mother and Child; two copies, one of which is inscribed "To my beloved husband, who mothered *Mother and Child* — with a grateful heart, Nell Dorr. November-1954."

In A Blue Moon.

Louis Untermeyer, *You*; a gift from Erica Anderson.

Martha Trinker, *Two Wars — Two Worlds — One Heart, Excerpts from a Woman's Diary, 1914–1944*.