



Nettie Mills  
Papers, 1918-1919

Collection 2

## Champaign County Historical Archives

**Compiled by:** Jennifer Wood, Fall 2007  
**Creator/Corporate Name:** Nettie Dorothy (nee Irle) Mills  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1918-1919, 2007  
**Physical Description:** 1 box (.5 linear ft.)  
**Language:** English

### Provenance

The Nettie Dorothy (nee Irle) Mills papers were donated to the Champaign County Historical Archives in April 2007.

### Access

These records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

### Biographical Note:

Letters written by Nettie Dorothy (nee Irle) Mills (1896-1970), a young American nurse, to her parents George G. and Mary F. (nee Arnold) Irle, of Somer Township, Champaign County, Illinois, during her service with the Army Nursing Corps (ANC)/American Expeditionary Force in World War I. The letters (1918-1919), covering the end of the war and the first months of demobilization, were written from northern Illinois, New York City, and various base hospitals in France, and describe Irle's experiences with the American (and occasionally German) soldiers in her care; her travel, living conditions, and concerns for family and friends; and also touch upon specific historical events such as the reaction to Germany's surrender and the international influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. The collection also includes a printed transcription of the letters; photocopies of Irle's Army service papers; a photograph of her in ANC uniform circa 1918; and a letter from George Irle to the editor of the *Urbana Daily Courier*, requesting that the *Courier* publish copies of two of his daughter's letters from France.

Nettie Dorothy Irle was born April 18, 1896, one of four children of George G. and Mary F. (nee Arnold) Irle. Her maternal and paternal grandparents were born in Germany, but her father had been born in Pennsylvania and her mother in Illinois. George Irle's parents settled in Champaign County as pioneer farmers in the 1860s, and he and Mary continued to farm in Somer Township. Nettie's siblings included sister Anna (nee Irle) Pierce and brothers George W. and William Irle. [Note: There is some suggestion that she may also have had one or more adoptive or foster brothers]. After graduating in 1917 from the Burnham City Hospital School of Nursing (Champaign, Ill.), Irle served with the ANC from August 1918 until May[?] 1919. Irle married Lowell H. Mills in 1920, and they had two sons, James L. and Jack I. Mills. In her later nursing career she worked in the Champaign County office of Dr. Finch. She died in Champaign County on June 21, 1970, and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.



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The letters written by Irle to her parents during her service with the ANC reflect a youthful, active, adventurous, and practical-minded young woman enjoying her new experiences but sometimes still missing her family and their life on a small Midwestern farm. She describes the concrete details of her daily life as a nurse, relates scenes from the places that she visits, and comments on customs and scenery that seem odd or exotic to her, such as the wooden shoes still being worn at that time by French country people. Her account does not emphasize the trauma and hardship of war, for herself, her patients, or the French citizenry, as the fighting is very nearly over by the time she arrives overseas. She does, however, observe and recount various instances of attitudes and behavior of recuperating soldiers that suggest their intense experiences. Her concern for her family and friends is apparent throughout, as she inquires about their activities, worries periodically about the prevalence of the influenza in Champaign County, and chides them for not writing to her more often.

**Scope and Content Note:**

The majority of this collection contains correspondence detailing Mills' experience as a WWI nurse both in training and on the battlefield. It also consists of Mills' army papers, and a photocopy of a photograph of Mills in uniform. A transcription of the letters is also provided as an aid to researchers, as Irle's handwriting, though exuberant, is not always very legible. See Folder 32 for additional notes.

**Arrangement:**

Correspondence is arranged chronologically by date of letter.

**Container Listing:**

**Box 1**

**Series 1: Ancillary Material**

Folder 1: Irle's Army Service Papers, August 7, 1918-May 14, 1919

    Photograph of Irle (photocopy), in Army Nursing Corps uniform, circa 1918

Folder 1A: *Stories of WWII and the Korean Conflict, Jack I Mills Sr. Includes Stories of Nursing in WWI, Reminiscences of Dorothy Irle Mills*. Compiled by Jack Irle Mills Jr., December 2007 (Accession 2008-0011).

**Series 2: Correspondence**

Folder 2: August 13, 1918

Folder 3: August 19, 1918

Folder 4: August 25, 1918

Folder 5: August 31, 1918

Folder 6: September 1, 1918

Folder 7: September 4, 1918

Folder 8: September 12, 1918

Folder 9: September 15, 1918

Folder 10: September 18, 1918

Folder 11: September 28, 1918

Folder 12: October 23, 1918



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- Folder 13: November 5, 1918
- Folder 14: November 16, 1918
- Folder 15: November 26, 1918
- Folder 16: December 1, 1918
- Folder 17: December 8, 1918
- Folder 18: December 16, 1918
- Folder 19: December 17, 1918
- Folder 20: December 30, 1918
- Folder 21: January 6, 1919
- Folder 22: January 10, 1919, George Irle to editor of the *Urbana Daily Courier*
- Folder 23: January 17, 1919
- Folder 24: January 25(?), 1919
- Folder 25: February 16, 1919
- Folder 26: February 23, 1919
- Folder 27: March 14, 1919
- Folder 28: April 10, 1919
- Folder 29: April 17, 1919
- Folder 30: April 26, 1919
- Folder 31: May 11, 1919
- Folder 32: Correspondence Transcription, August 13, 1918 – May 11, 1919