



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection 3102

Foerderer family
Papers

1881-ca. 1997 (bulk 1929-1983)
8 boxes, 6 volumes, 2.4 lin. feet

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Processed by: Cary Majewicz
Processing Completed: April 2008
Sponsor: Processing made possible by a generous
donation from Ethel Davis.
Restrictions: None

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Abstract

Percival E. Foerderer (1884-1969) was a Philadelphia businessman, civic leader, and philanthropist, who lived most of his life in the suburbs of Merion and Bryn Mawr. His medical education was interrupted when his father, Robert H. Foerderer, became ill and could no longer run the family's decades-old leather manufacturing business. In response, Percival quit school and, in the early 1900s, joined Robert H. Foerderer, Inc, manufacturers of "Vici Kid" leather. Later in life, Percival served as chairman of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson Medical College and Hospital, and on the boards of many other companies and organizations in Philadelphia. He married Ethel Brown (1885-1981), daughter of a Philadelphia textile manufacturer, who presided over the Women's Board of Jefferson and was active in several other civic and philanthropic activities. Percival and Ethel Foerderer had three daughters, Mignon, Florence, and Shirley.

This small family collection spans from the 1880s to the late 1990s. It contains a variety of material including correspondence, clippings, photographs, scrapbooks, albums, business and legal papers, family members' personal writings, and bound volumes.

Background note

The originator of the Foerderer family in America was Robert H. Foerderer (1860-1903). Born to Edward and Augusta Julia (Oehme) Foerderer, Robert became well known in Philadelphia for his self-titled leather manufacturing and tanning business, Robert H. Foerderer, Inc. He invented a tanning process using chrome as the main ingredient which made goat skin leather that was soft, supple, and could be used for a variety of goods, most popularly, shoes and gloves. For his product, Robert trademarked the named "Vici Kid," and in 1892, he built a large plant in the Frankford section of Philadelphia. In addition to his successful leather business, he participated in several local clubs, served as the president and director of the Keystone Telephone Company, and in 1900, was elected as a U. S. representative from Pennsylvania's At-large congressional district. He married Caroline Fischer (1861-1934) in 1881, and the couple had a daughter, Florence, and a son, Percival Edward. The family resided first on North Broad Street in Philadelphia. In the late 1890s, Robert moved his family to a multi-acre estate in the Torresdale section of Philadelphia. The estate had been named "Glengarry" by its previous owner, Charles Macalester, a local businessman and broker. The Foederers later re-named the estate "Glen Foerd" in honor of its past and current owners.

Percival Edward Foerderer (1884-1969) was born in Philadelphia on October 25, 1884, and was educated at the Cheltenham Military Academy and William Penn Charter School. He desired to become a doctor and entered a medical program at the University of Pennsylvania in 1903. That same year, Percival learned that his father had become quite ill. Knowing that he would more than likely succeed his father in the family's leather business, Percival quit school and asked to become part of the company. Even though he started at an entry-level position, by 1908 Percival had become president of Robert H. Foerderer, Inc. Two years later, Percival married Ethel Tillyer Brown (1885-1981), the daughter of John Adam(s) Smith Brown (1858-1937), a Philadelphia textile machinery manufacturer, and Harriet Hogeland Tillyer (1860-1920).

For the first few years of their marriage, Percival and Ethel lived in Philadelphia, on Walnut Street adjacent to Rittenhouse Square. There they had their first child, a daughter named Mignon Estabrook (1911-2002). In 1915, the small family moved to their first suburban home in Merion, Pennsylvania, which was built on a few acres of land the couple had previously brought. Several years later, Ethel gave birth to two more daughters: Florence deRapleye (1926-1999) and Shirley Avril (1927-1999). Around 1929, the family settled into their newly built estate named "La Ronda" in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Created by architect Addison Mizner in a Mediterranean style (a departure from the Colonial and Tudor style estate homes that were popular around this time), La Ronda was situated on over two hundred acres of what was previously Brookfield Farm, the estate of Pennsylvania lawyer and politician Wayne MacVeagh, who died in 1917. The family remained at La Ronda until Percival's death in 1969, around which time a portion of the estate was sold to nearby Villanova University.

In addition to his successful run as president of Robert H. Foerderer, Inc., Percival E. Foerderer's career was marked by numerous other civic, philanthropic, and business interests, and he managed his father's estate for at least five decades. During the late 1910s he served on the War Service Committee of the Leather Industry and on the Committee on Labor Problems, which investigated labor conditions in the leather industry. Percival retired from and dissolved Robert H. Foerderer, Inc. sometime around 1937 and pursued other interests. He attained the positions of director of the Land Title Bank and Trust Company and chairman of the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Mutual Life Insurance Company. Percival also served in the military during World War II and achieved, in 1942, the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Army Medical Specialist Corps.

Furthermore, Percival became well-known in Philadelphia for his lengthy service to Jefferson Medical College and Hospital of Thomas Jefferson University. From 1928 to 1961 he served as a trustee; in 1950 he was elected chairman of the board and remained in this position for eleven years. During his years with the hospital, Percival, as well as his wife Ethel who also served the hospital in various capacities, achieved numerous and impressive tasks, such as bringing about the hospital's \$40 million expansion program in the 1950s. This included the creation of a new structure at 11th and Walnut streets. The building was completed in 1954, and in 1962 it was named the "Foerderer Pavilion."

After Percival retired from the hospital's board in 1961, the couple established the Percival E. and Ethel Brown Foerderer Foundation, which was initially designed to give

funds “to purposes wholly charitable, educational, religious, literary, and scientific.” Over time, however, its funds went increasingly to subsidize university fellowships. In 1994, the foundation’s assets were transferred to Thomas Jefferson University into the new, similarly titled “Percival E. and Ethel Brown Foerderer Fund.” This fund, now generally known as the Foerderer Fund, continues to finance projects of university students and fellows, particularly those who wish to study abroad.

Percival Foerderer died in 1969 and his wife Ethel carried on his legacy and maintained her own as well. Ethel Tillyer Brown Foerderer worked primarily as the family caregiver, although she held many outside interests. She served on the Women’s Board of TJH for twenty-two years, from 1930 to 1952, five of which (1947-1952) were spent as its president. She spent much of her time fundraising and building relationships with internal bodies and external organizations. In addition to TJH, Ethel served on the Wards Committee of Bryn Mawr Hospital and on the Women’s Board of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. She passed away at her Haverford, Pennsylvania, home in 1981, survived by her three daughters and several grandchildren.

Mignon Estabrook Foerderer (1911-2002), the oldest Foerderer daughter, attended Shipley School in Bryn Mawr and graduated from the Agnes Irwin School in Rosemont. At the age of fifteen, she composed several works that were sung at the Triangle Club in New York City. She was “presented to society” as a debutante in 1929 and later joined the Junior League of Philadelphia. She married John Moore Kelso Davis in 1939. Florence Foerderer (1926-1999) never married and became a successful dog breeder. She owned Pemsfoerd Kennels in Paoli, Pa. Shirley Foerderer (1927-1999) married several times, lastly to Francis Wisner Murrury III. Both Mignon and Shirley oversaw the 1983 rededication of the Foerderer Pavilion at Thomas Jefferson Hospital.

Scope & content

This small family collection, spanning from the 1880s to the late 1990s, contains an assortment of items such as clippings, photographs, correspondence, legal and business papers, scrapbooks, and bound volumes. Most prominently featured throughout the collection are Percival’s achievements in the leather business and his work with Jefferson Medical College and Hospital. In addition, through clippings, photographs, scrapbooks, and other ephemera, the lives of Mignon and Florence Foerderer are also emphasized. Ethel Foerderer’s family history and personal activities are represented primarily through writings on Percival; however, there are documents pertaining to funds she bequeathed to various organizations. Shirley Foerderer’s life is documented mainly in photographs and a few pieces of correspondence relating to Thomas Jefferson University. A genealogy report on the descendants on Robert H. Foerderer can be found on pages 12-13 of this finding aid.

Box 1 contains one of the earliest items found in the collection: two wedding invitations, one for the 1881 marriage between Robert H. Foerderer and Caroline Fischer; the other for the 1883 marriage between Hattie Tillyer and John A.S. Brown. Included with the latter invitation is an unidentified tintype that could be of Harriet and John’s daughter, Ethel. This box also contains two disbound scrapbooks. The first one, spanning two

folders, is chiefly made up of clippings pertaining to Percival's and Mignon's appearances in local newspapers. The clippings on Percival underscore his advances in leather tanning and include interviews on everything from shoes to labor problems. Mignon's clippings highlight her many early accomplishments, including the New York City premier of several musical compositions she wrote as a teenager, and an interview she gave in 1931 on the youth of her generation and their attitudes towards parents, moral values, and current events.

The second scrapbook in Box 1 is comprised of Ethel Foerderer's notes on the history of Italian painting. She created both handwritten and typed notes on Italian painters and painting techniques dating primarily from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Accompanying her notes are images of Italian artworks, similar to those seen in art history encyclopedias or textbooks. A second folder contains a photograph of Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Italy, and envelopes containing loose images like those among Ethel's notes.

Another interesting scrapbook that straddles Boxes 2 and 3 is Mignon Foerderer's scrapbook of invitations received between 1929 and early 1931. Mignon debuted as a debutante in 192, and subsequently received many invitations to various social and family functions such as luncheons, dinners, dances, weddings, and parties. This scrapbook has been disbound into three folders.

Box 2 contains folders in papers concerning the Foerderers' La Ronda estate in Bryn Mawr. The folder labeled "La Ronda estate maintenance" includes work schedules for groundskeepers, inventories of the house's furnishings, and receipts for and correspondence concerning new purchases. Another folder contains several interesting clippings on the estate, such as a 1930 profile on the architectural style of the main house and stories on the legal battles which surrounded the estate during the 1970s and 1980s. This box also contains personal ephemera that once belonged to Florence Foerderer. Folder six contains her journal from when she attended Camp Kineowatha near Wilton, Maine. Folder 9 contains photographs, certificates from the American Kennel Club, and samples of her writing, including a story of a Canada goose named Roger she apparently nursed back to health.

Box 3 contains mostly papers that date from after Percival's death, except for the first two folders. In Folder 1 is correspondence, pamphlets, and plans for his mausoleum, which was erected at Woodlawn Cemetery in Bryn Mawr. Stone samples of granite and marble were removed from this folder and placed in Box 5. Folder 2 contains legal contracts and agreements between Ethel, Mignon, Florence, and Shirley and Villanova University for a piece of land from the La Ronda estate. The sale was administered by everyone but Percival because he was very ill at the time.

Other material in Box 3 includes a folder of reports from the Foerderer Foundation and agreements between the Foerderers and Thomas Jefferson University for the transfer of the Foerderer Foundation assets. There are also two written works on the Foerderer family, the Foerderer Foundation, and Thomas Jefferson University: "History of the Board of Trustees Thomas Jefferson University," by Frederick B. Wagner, and "The Foerderer Foundation: Its Impact." The latter work was created in 1994 to honor the

transfer of the assets of the Foerderer Foundation (then 25 years old) to a new fund, the Percival E. and Ethel Brown Foerderer Fund, controlled by Thomas Jefferson University. Another work highlighting the history of Percival E. Foerderer, his family, and his impact on Philadelphia entitled “Percival E. Foerderer: A ‘Mr. Jefferson’,” also by Frederick B. Wagner, can be found in Box 4.

Box 4 also contains family photographs and images. There are separate folders for each family member, as well as a folder of mixed family photographs. Additionally, there is a signed image of Ronald Regan addressed to Mignon Davis. Boxes 6, 7, and 8 also contain images; notably, Box 8 houses a mid-twentieth century photo portfolio featuring images of the grounds of La Ronda after a heavy snowfall.

Rounding out the collection are several volumes, including a memorial address which honored Robert H. Foerderer, Florence Foerderer’s photo album which includes camp and family pictures, and Mignon Davis’s personal and financial journal which covers almost forty years, from 1939 to 1977. There is also a photo album dedicated to the 1982-1983 renovation of the Foerderer Pavilion and ceremonies held in 1983 honoring Ethel Brown Foerderer. Mignon and Shirley Foerderer attended the ceremonies and were given a tour of the updated facilities. In addition to photographs, the album contains flyers and pamphlets on the rededication of the pavilion. Photocopies of the albums pages are available in Box 3.

Separation report

To HSP library:

Wagner, Frederick B. Jr., ed. *Thomas Jefferson University: Tradition and Heritage*. Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1989.

The following duplicate book was discarded from the collection. It is available in HSP's library:

Cornell, John W. Jr. *History of a Philadelphia Builder*. N.p.: John W. Cornell, Jr., 1975.
[UPA/Ph TH 140.C6 C6 1975]

Related materials

At Thomas Jefferson University:

Jefferson Medical College. Finance Committee. Records, 1932-1955 (ARCHIVES UA-JMC 038) (*Description: Primarily financial records relating to memorial funds used to support operations of the Medical College and Hospital, including professorships, bed funds and fellowships, between 1932 and 1955. Records were primarily kept by Percival E. Foerderer, JMC Trustee and Chairman of the Finance Committee.*)

Bibliography

Glen Foerd on the Delaware – A Historic Estate. <http://www.glenfoerd.org/index.html> (accessed 21 March 2008).

The Lower Merion Historical Society. “The Lower Merion Historical Society Photo Collection.” <http://www.lowermerionhistory.org/photo.html> (accessed 21 March 2008).

Wagner, Frederick B. *The Foerderer Foundation: Its Impact*. Philadelphia: Thomas Jefferson University, 1994.

_____. *Percival E. Foerderer : A “Mr. Jefferson.”* s.l.: s.n., ca. 1997.

For further information on the Foerderer's residence, La Ronda see:

Cornell, John W. Jr. *History of the Philadelphia Builder*. N.p.: John W. Cornell Jr., 1975.
[UPA/Ph Th 140.C6 C6 1975]

Subjects

Bryn Mawr (Pa.) – Estates

Leather goods – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia

Leather industry and trade – Equipment and supplies

Painting – Italian – 15th century

Painting – Italian – 16th century

Philadelphia (Pa.) – Social life and customs – 20th century

Tanneries – Pennsylvania

Robert H. Foerderer, Inc.
Thomas Jefferson University
Thomas Jefferson University. Hospital
Vici kid

Davis, Mignon Estabrook Foerderer, 1911-2002
Foerderer, Ethel Brown Tillyer, 1885-1981
Foerderer, Florence, 1926-1999
Foerderer, Percival E., 1884-1969
Foerderer, Robert Hermann, 1860-1903
Foerderer, Shirley, 1927-1999

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Gift of Ethel Davis, 2006.

Accession number 2006.052.

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], Foerderer Family Papers (Collection 3102),
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Processing note

Processing made possible by a generous donation from Ethel Davis.

Box and folder listing

Folder title	Date	Box/Vol.	Folder
Genealogical records	1881, 1883, 1935-1984, 2002	1	1
<i>Memorial Address on the Life and Character of Robert H. Foerderer</i>	10 April 1904	Vol. 1	n/a
Scrapbook of clippings and family memorabilia	1908, 1910, 1923-1935	1	2-3
Mignon Foerderer – address and accounts book	ca. 1924- ca. 1927	Vol. 2	n/a
“History of Italian painting” notes by Ethel Brown Foerderer	1928-1929	1	4-5
Mignon Foerderer – invitation scrapbook	1929-1930	1	6
Mignon Foerderer – invitation scrapbook	1929-1930	2	1-2
La Ronda estate maintenance	1929, 1931, 1941, 1942, n.d.	2	3
Mignon Foerderer – notebook	1930	2	4
“Monograph of Robert H. Foerderer Incorporated Industrial Fellowships, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6”	1930-1936	Vol. 3	n/a
La Ronda clippings	1930, 1973, 1974, 1980, 1982	2	5
Florence Foerderer – photo album	1934- ca. 1943	Vol. 4	n/a
Mignon Foerderer – financial journal	1939-1977	Vol. 5	n/a
Florence Foerderer – camp journal	1942	2	6
Percival Foerderer – address book	ca. 1950- ca. 1960	2	7
Legal documents concerning settlement of Percival E. Foerderer Trust	April 1954	2	8
Florence Forderer – writings, images, clippings	1958-1986, n.d.	2	9

Legal documents concerning land sale to Villanova University	1967, 1968	3	1
Percival Foerderer – mausoleum documents	1960-1961	3	2
Mausoleum stone samples	n.d.	5	n/a
<i>Cross Currents</i> newsletter	May-June 1969	3	3
Estate appraisal [Haverford]	30 April 1981	3	4
Foerderer Foundation reports and transfer to Thomas Jefferson Hospital	1981, 1990-1994	3	5
Ethel Brown Foerderer bequeathed funds	ca. 1982-1983, 1985, 1986	3	6
Foerderer Pavilion memorabilia album	1983	Vol. 6	n/a
Foerderer Pavilion memorabilia album (photocopies)	1983	3	7
Glen Foerd clippings	1983	3	8
“History of the Board of Trustees of Thomas Jefferson University,” by Frederick B. Wagner	ca. 1986	3	9
“The Foerderer Foundation: Its Impact”	1994	3	10
“Percival E. Foerderer: A ‘Mr. Jefferson’,” by Frederick B. Wagner	ca. 1997	4	1
Miscellaneous	1935-1938, 1960-1964, n.d.	4	2
Images: Ethel Brown Foerderer	1894, ca. 1927-1930, ca. 1944, 1954, ca. 1980	4	3
Image: Ethel Tillyer Brown (Foerderer) [hand painted photo on glass]	ca. 1900	6	n/a
Images: Percival Foerderer	1895-ca. 1960	4	4
Images: mixed family	ca. 1911-ca. 1920, ca. 1950-ca. 1970	4	5

Images: Florence Foerderer	ca. 1927, ca. 1960, ca. 1980	4	6
Image: Florence Foerderer [painted cameo]	ca. 1927	7	n/a
Images: Mignon (Foerderer) Davis	ca. 1930- ca. 1960	4	7
Image: Shirley Foerderer	ca. 1940	4	8
Image: Ronald Regan (addressed to Mignon Davis)	ca. 1984	4	9
La Ronda photo portfolio	n.d.	8	n/a

Genealogy report

Generation No. 1

1. ROBERT HERMAN³ FOERDERER (*EDWARD*², *BENJAMIN*¹) was born May 16, 1860 in Frankenhausen, Prussia, and died July 26, 1903. He married CAROLINE FISCHER June 08, 1881, daughter of FREDERICK FISCHER and CAROLINE KOHL. She was born May 04, 1861, and died August 03, 1934.

Children of ROBERT FOERDERER and CAROLINE FISCHER are:

2. i. FLORENCE A.⁴ FOERDERER, b. March 05, 1882; d. 1972.
3. ii. PERCIVAL EDWARD FOERDERER, b. October 25, 1884, Philadelphia, PA; d. January 1969, Bryn Mawr, PA.

Generation No. 2

2. FLORENCE A.⁴ FOERDERER (*ROBERT HERMAN*³, *EDWARD*², *BENJAMIN*¹) was born March 05, 1882, and died 1972. She married WILLIAM T. TONNER. He died April 14, 1948.

Children of FLORENCE FOERDERER and WILLIAM TONNER are:

4. i. MARJORIE⁵ TONNER.
5. ii. CAROL TONNER.

3. PERCIVAL EDWARD⁴ FOERDERER (*ROBERT HERMAN*³, *EDWARD*², *BENJAMIN*¹) was born October 25, 1884 in Philadelphia, PA, and died January 1969 in Bryn Mawr, PA. He married ETHEL TILLYER BROWN June 01, 1910 in Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion, Philadelphia, PA, daughter of JOHN BROWN and HARRIET TILLYER. She was born September 03, 1885 in Philadelphia, PA, and died April 09, 1981 in Haverford, PA.

Children of PERCIVAL FOERDERER and ETHEL BROWN are:

6. i. MIGNON ESTABROOK⁵ FOERDERER, b. 1911, Philadelphia, PA; d. April 28, 2002, Connecticut.
- ii. FLORENCE DE RAPELYE FOERDERER, b. February 26, 1926; d. November 12, 1999.
7. iii. SHIRLEY AVRIL FOERDERER, b. 1927; d. October 05, 1999, Cold Spring Harbor, NY.

Generation No. 3

4. MARJORIE⁵ TONNER (*FLORENCE A.*⁴ *FOERDERER*, *ROBERT HERMAN*³, *EDWARD*², *BENJAMIN*¹) She married WILLIAM BUCHANAN GOLD.

Children of MARJORIE TONNER and WILLIAN GOLD are:

- i. FLORENCE TONNER⁶ GOLD, b. July 16, 1943.
- ii. KATHARINE KELLY GOLD, b. April 15, 1946.
- iii. MARJORIE TONNER GOLD, b. July 09, 1949.
- iv. CAROL HAYS GOLD.

5. CAROL⁵ TONNER (*FLORENCE A.*⁴ *FOERDERER*, *ROBERT HERMAN*³, *EDWARD*², *BENJAMIN*¹) She married CHARLES H. HAYS.

Children of CAROL TONNER and CHARLES HAYS are:

- i. CAROL L.⁶ HAYS, b. October 29, 1942.
- ii. MARJORIE TONNER HAYS, b. June 30, 1944.
- iii. TONNER HAYS, b. August 28, 1948.

6. MIGNON ESTABROOK⁵ FOERDERER (*PERCIVAL EDWARD*⁴, *ROBERT HERMAN*³, *EDWARD*², *BENJAMIN*¹) was born 1911 in Philadelphia, PA, and died April 28, 2002 in Connecticut. She married JOHN MOORE KELSO DAVIS 1939.

Child of MIGNON FOERDERER and JOHN DAVIS is:

- i. ETHEL⁶ DAVIS

7. SHIRLEY AVRIL⁵ FOERDERER (*PERCIVAL EDWARD*⁴, *ROBERT HERMAN*³, *EDWARD*², *BENJAMIN*¹) was born 1927, and died October 05, 1999 in Cold Spring Harbor, NY. She married (1) CHARLES OAKES AMES. She married (2) THOMAS LEE HIGGINSON. She married (3) FRANCIS WISNER MURRAY III.

More About SHIRLEY AVRIL FOERDERER:

Burial: October 09, 1999, St. John's Church, Cold Spring Harbor, NY

Children of SHIRLEY FOERDERER and CHARLES AMES are:

- i. CHARLES FOERDERER⁶ AMES, b. January 1953.
- ii. SHELLEY FOERDERER AMES, b. December 1954; m. HARTZ.
- iii. PERCIVAL FOERDERER AMES, b. May 28, 1957.