

“Incredible Gladys Pyle” Collection

Collection Summary

Identifier: MA 20

Title: “Incredible Gladys Pyle” Collection

Dates: 1918-1987

Extent: 0.42 linear feet (1 document case), sound recordings

Creator: Kinyon, Jeannette; Walz, Jean; Pyle, Gladys, 1890-1989

Language: English

Repository: South Dakota State University Archives & Special Collections, University Station, Box 2115, 1300 North Campus Drive, Brookings, South Dakota, 57007

Access Note: Open. Materials must be used in-house and do not circulate.

Preferred Citation: Title or description of item, date, MA 20, box number, folder number, “Incredible Gladys Pyle” Collection, South Dakota State University Archives and Special Collections, Brookings, South Dakota.

Abstract

Gladys Pyle (1890–1989) was a pioneering South Dakota politician and the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate without prior appointment. A graduate of Huron College, she taught high school before becoming the first woman elected to the South Dakota House of Representatives (1923–1927) and later serving as Secretary of State (1927–1931). She was also active in the women’s suffrage movement. In 1938, Pyle won a special election to the U.S. Senate, serving briefly from November 9, 1938, to January 3, 1939. Researchers Jeanette Kinyon and Jean Walz, known for their historical and biographical work, began compiling materials for a biography of Pyle in 1981, conducting interviews and gathering historical records.

The *Incredible Gladys Pyle* Collection contains clippings, correspondence, financial records, manuscripts, research materials, transcripts, and audiocassettes documenting Pyle's political career and personal life. It includes book advertisements, correspondence about its publication, and manuscripts under two titles. Audio recordings capture Pyle's reflections on her career, as well as discussions on political and social issues. The collection serves as a valuable resource for understanding Pyle's legacy as a political trailblazer, preserving firsthand accounts of her experiences and contributions to South Dakota and national politics.

Biography

Gladys Pyle (1890–1989) was a South Dakota politician and the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate without prior appointment. She was also the first female Republican senator, the first female senator from South Dakota, and the first to serve without marrying.

A graduate of Huron College (1911), Pyle taught high school from 1912 to 1918 before entering politics. She became the first woman elected to the South Dakota House of Representatives (1923–1927), later serving as Secretary of State (1927–1931). In 1930, she ran for governor but lost after multiple recounts. She also served on the State Securities Commission (1931–1933) and worked in life insurance.

Pyle and her family were active in the women's suffrage movement, frequently hosting meetings at their home. In 1938, she was elected to the U.S. Senate to complete Peter Norbeck's term, serving briefly from November 9, 1938, to January 3, 1939.

In 1981, Jeanette Kinyon and Jean Walz began researching Pyle's life for a biography, gathering materials from interviews, manuscripts, letters, and news reports. This collection represents a selection of their research.

Scope and Content

The *Incredible Gladys Pyle* Collection comprises clippings, correspondence, financial records, manuscripts, research materials, transcripts, and audiocassettes, documenting the life and contributions of Gladys Pyle, a trailblazing political figure in South Dakota.

The clippings include advertisements for the book *The Incredible Gladys Pyle* and news articles marking Pyle's 96th birthday. Correspondence features letters discussing the book's publication, including corrections suggested by Pyle and a handwritten letter from Governor

Sigurd Anderson commending her political contributions. Financial records are minimal, consisting of itemized expense lists.

Two manuscripts of the book are included—one with the published title *The Incredible Gladys Pyle* and another under the alternative title *Gladys Pyle: Always a Pioneer*. Research materials span from 1918 to 1984, providing historical context. The collection also includes transcripts of interviews with Pyle, some accompanied by notebooks containing interview questions.

The audiocassettes document Pyle's reflections on her career, including her tenure in Pierre, involvement in the ERA committee, and business endeavors. Additional recordings capture her 90th birthday recollections, childhood memories, and insights into Huron College. Other tapes contain travel logs from unidentified individuals recounting experiences in Taiwan, India, Sri Lanka, China, and Japan, as well as *Radio Issues Forum* broadcasts from 1976. A recording of guitar music is also included, though its significance is unclear.

This collection provides valuable insight into Pyle's legacy as a pioneering woman in politics, preserving firsthand accounts of her experiences and historical contributions through written and audio materials.

Access Points

Subjects

- Women legislators
- Women teachers

Names

- Pyle, Gladys, 1890-1898
- Kinyon, Jeanette
- Walz, Jean

Places

- South Dakota

Genre

- Audiocassettes
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Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open to all researchers, with Materials accessible on-site only and not available for circulation.

For extensive research, scheduling an appointment in advance via phone or email is encouraged, including details about the research topic and intended use.

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Container List

Box	Folder	Description	Dates
1	1	Clippings	1986-1987
1	2	Correspondence	1981-1985
1	3	Financial records	1982
1	4	Manuscript: "Gladys Pyle : Always a pioneer"	undated
1	5	Manuscript: "The Incredible Gladys Pyle"	undated
1	6	Research	1918-1984
1	7	Transcripts of taped interviews	1971, 1982
1	MA 20-0004	Huron College continues, business career, time on claim, ERA committee involvement, views, recollections of years in Pierre (audiocassette)	1982
1	MA 20-0006	Travel log of Merrill ? - Taiwan (audiocassette)	undated
1	MA 20-0003	Gladys Pyle 90th birthday, Territory incidents, childhood, qualities, Huron College items (audiocassette)	1982
1	MA 20-0009	Gladys Pyle interview [side 1-2] (audiocassette)	undated
1	MA 20-0011	Gladys Pyle interview [side 4-5] (audiocassette)	undated
1	MA 20-0008	Travel log of Robert ? - India/Sri Lanka (audiocassette)	undated
1	MA 20-0002	Radio Issues Forum [side 3] (audiocassette)	1976
1	MA 20-0001	Radio Issues Forum [side 1-2] (audiocassette)	1976
1	MA 20-0010	Gladys Pyle interview [side 3] (audiocassette)	undated
1	MA 20-0005	Continuation of resolutions, questions, Banberg (?), Ins. Incident (audiocassette)	1982
1	MA 20-0007	Travel log of Robert ? - China/Japan (audiocassette)	undated
1	MA 20-0012	Gladys Pyle interview [side 6] (audiocassette)	undated
1	MA 20-0013	GG [guitar Music] - some practicing? (audiocassette)	undated