

Finding Aid for the Gmelich family papers collection 538

This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on August 01, 2025.

Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids History Center

Grand Rapids Public Library

111 Library Street NE

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

Business Number: 616-988-5497

localhis@grpl.org

URL: <https://www.grpl.org/history/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids History Center
Title:	Gmelich family papers
ID:	collection 538
ID [aspace_uri]:	/repositories/4/resources/770
Date [inclusive]:	1915-1973
Physical Description:	.25 Linear Feet 1 slim box.
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	Mabel Gork Gmelich died from a post-delivery infection in 1930, leaving her newborn Marilyn, her daughter Lezette, and her husband, Herman Gmelich, alone. Mabel and Herman, both born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, were married there in 1925. This collection was anonymously donated to the Grand Rapids Public Library in July 2025. It contains a 1918 yearbook of Camp Custer, Michigan—where Herman Gmelich served as a butcher during World War I—and Mabel Gork's 1915 Union High School yearbook, which includes programs and ephemera affixed to the back. The collection also includes a portrait of Mabel and photocopies from a book about the U.S. Marines in World War II by S.E. Smith, detailing the heroism of Lieutenant Colonel George Owen Van Orden, a highly decorated U.S. Marine and the great uncle of Richard M. Van Orden, husband of Marilyn Gmelich Van Orden. Those researching Camp Custer, George O. Van Orden, or the Gmelich family will find this collection of interest.

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Biographical / Historical

Mabel Gork was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1896 to Henry and Mary Gork. Mabel graduated from Union High School in 1915. Herman Gmelich was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1886 to German immigrants Lisette and Wilhelm Gmelich. He worked as a butcher and served in that role at Camp Custer, Michigan, during World War I.

Herman and Mabel were married in October 1925. Their daughter Mary Lezette was born in May 1927. On February 24, 1930, Mabel gave birth to another daughter, Marilyn Ann. The following week, on March 5, Mabel died from a post-delivery infection. Three years later, in October 1933, Herman married Iola Osmer. Herman and Iola had no known children.

In 1952 Marilyn Gmelich married Richard M. VanOrden, whose great uncle was Lieutenant Colonel George Owen Van Orden, a highly decorated U.S. Marine.

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Content Description

This small collection contains Custer Memories: 214th Field Signal Battalion Yearbook of Camp Custer, Michigan, 1918, a 1915 Union High School yearbook belonging to Mabel Gork, which includes school programs affixed in the back, and an undated portrait of Mabel Gork Gmelich. Also included are photocopies of pages from The United States Marine Corps in World War II, Vol. II, by S.E. Smith, which relate to Lieutenant Colonel George O. Van Orden.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open and available for researcher use.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

This collection was anonymously donated in July 2025; accession 2025.056

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Controlled Access Headings

- World War, 1914-1918
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- World War, 1939-1945
- High schools -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids

Collection Inventory

Military

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/4/archival_objects/196536

Title/Description	Instances	
Custer Memories, 214th Field Signal Battalion, Camp Custer, Michigan, 1918 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/4/archival_objects/196538	Box 1	Folder 1
Demobilization Orders, December 13, 1918 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/4/archival_objects/196539	Box 1	Folder 2
The United States Marine Corps in World War II, Vol. II, by S.E. Smith; photocopies pgs. 655-660, related to Colonel George O. Van Orden, 1973 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/4/archival_objects/196540	Box 1	Folder 3

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Mary Gork Gmelich

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/4/archival_objects/196537

Title/Description	Instances	
Union High School yearbook, programs and ephemera adhered within, 1915 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/4/archival_objects/196541	Box 1	Folder 4
Portrait of Mabel Gork Gmelich, undated	Box 1	Folder 5

ID [[aspace_uri](#)]: /repositories/4/archival_objects/196542

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