American writer Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) had been living in France for three decades when she returned to her home country for the first time in 1934. As a result of the runaway success of her 1933 book, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, American readers were fascinated by Stein; a lecture tour was planned for her triumphant return. With her life partner and muse, Alice B. Toklas, Stein sailed to New York City, where her friend Carl Van Vechten arranged for her to speak at museums and universities. When Stein’s lectures received robust press coverage, she became a literary sensation; new dates were added to her tour in Chicago and later in California. Hosts in Chicago offered to pay for Stein and Toklas to fly from New York—commercial air travel was novel in the 1930s and neither had flown before. Traveling with Van Vechten they boarded the flight carrying beaded lucky charms he’d given them to ease the journey. Since the cabin was noisy, Stein, Toklas, and Van Vechten exchanged notes to communicate about their experience in the air. Writing on airline letterhead, postcards, and in the margins of flight maps, the friends enthused about the flight crew and about their first views from the airplane windows. The text of the many talks on her tour were published in Stein’s *Lectures in America* in 1935.

Photograph of Carl Van Vechten, Alice B. Toklas, members of the flight crew, and Gertrude Stein boarding airplane; Carl Van Vechten, photographs of Gertrude Stine and Alice B. Toklas with good luck charms; Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, notes made during flight, including postcard addressed to Stein’s cook “M. Trac”; Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers; *Lectures in America*, New York: Random House, 1935

47-52

TRANSCRIPTIONS

En Route New York M. Trac
To Chicago

Mlle Stein
Mlle Toklas
Mr Van Vechten

—

You never knew anything like this before?
You do feel peaceful + secure? (Carl Van Vechten)

It is so unbelievable that
I cannot believe it, I
real can’t, when Carl says
go then we go and when we go when
Carl says go it is alright.
An airplane is made for writers as it is the only way to communicate.

I’m collecting your impressions. Write some more you delightful woojums! (Carl Van Vechten)

I am going to get the pilot’s autograph (Gertrude Stein)

In a kind of a way the light up here on the wing is the most beautiful thing.

When you go through so many miles of clouds to get to the earth the wonder is how does the sun ever do it at all.

Objects

Lectures in America
Za St34935Lb

Notes made on airplane trip in US Will include SCAN of fronts/backs and transcription labels
Photos boarding plane
YCAL MSS 76 Box 149 folder 3497 &
YCAL MSS 76 Box 159 Folder 4121