Finding Aid to the Ella Sterling Mighels papers, 1870-1934MS 1470

Finding aid prepared by Processed by California Historical Society staff.
California Historical Society
678 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA, 94105
415-357-1848
reference@calhist.org
2001
Title: Ella Sterling Mighels papers
Date (inclusive): 1870-1934
Collection Number: MS 1470
Creator: Mighels, Ella Sterling, 1853-1934
Contributing Institution: California Historical Society
678 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA, 94105
415-357-1848
reference@calhist.org
Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.
Physical Description: 13 boxes (6.5 linear feet)
Location: Collection located onsite.
Abstract: Correspondence; diaries (1900-1927), called "soulbooks"; literary manuscripts; four scrapbooks; and miscellaneous papers. The bulk of the collection consists of typescripts and manuscripts of Mighels' writings and stories. Correspondence includes letters to and from her second husband, Philip V. Mighels, an author, mainly about personal matters, including finances, real estate purchases, and literary sales. Many of the letters are from Mrs. Mighels to friends and fellow writers, often identified by first name or nickname only. Includes papers of Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters of California, a cultural and educational group for neighborhood children, established by Mighels in her home; and papers of the California Literature Society, of which Mighels was secretary. Correspondents include Ina Coolbrith, Ann Clark Hart, Clarence M. Hunt, Rockwell D. Hunt, David Starr Jordan, Carleton Kendall, James D. Phelan, Richard E. White, and League of American Pen Women. Also includes a small amount of genealogical material. Diaries include two by Mighel's daughter, Genevieve (Viva) Cummins Doan, chronicling a trip to England (1900-1901). One of the scrapbooks is organized by Mighels' first husband, Adley Cummins (1873) and contains clippings and information about his mother's death.
Access
Collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
Copyright has not been assigned to the California Historical Society. All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the Director of Research Collections. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the California Historical Society as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the reader.
Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Ella Sterling Mighels Collection, MS 1470. California Historical Society, Manuscript Collection.
National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections Number
NUCMC 82-431
Separated Materials
Photographs, two postcards, and one lantern slide shelved as MSP 1470.
The Postman's Song, with words by Ellas Sterling Cummins, shelved in Sheet Music Collection, Box 6: 1890-1899.
Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters of California.
California Literature Society.
Cummins, Adley Hooks
Doan, Genevieve (Viva) Cummins
Mighels, Philip V.
American fiction--Women authors
Diaries.
Scrapbooks.
Women authors, American--California
Women authors, American--California--Correspondence
Index to Correspondence

California Literature Society
  1919 May 28
  1926 March 22

Coolbrith, Ina Donna, 1842-1928
  1913 October 7
  1914 September 21
  1914 September 23
  1914 October 6
  1914 October 11
  1916 January 25
  1916 March 1
  1916 March 7
  1916 March 8
  1915 July 17
  1916 December 2
  1916 December 7
  1916 December 19
  1917 January 13
  1917 January 24
  1917 March 16
  1917 December 19
  1918 January
  1918 May 7
  1928 March 12

Fischer, Frank
  1928 April 21

Hart, Ann Clark
  1921 May 14
  1921 August 8
  1926 May 6

Hearst, Phoebe Apperson
  1916 July 24

Jordan, David Starr, 1851-1931
  1914 December 29
  1924 July 22
  1924 December 10

Kendall, Carleton
  1928 March 12

Mighels, Philip Verril
  1911 October 16
  1912 February 14
  1928 March 12

Older, Fremont
  undated

Phelan, James Duval, 1861-1930
  1914 January 21
1917 September 1
1920 October 19
1925 August 17
1928 January 1
1928 January 13
1928 June 13
Race discrimination
1911 June 25
1916 January 15
1920 November 25
1920 November 29
1924 February 7
1926 October 3
1927 January 15
1927 March 28
1928 April 21
Sterling, George
1916 November 26
Tilden, Douglas
undated
Wagner, Harr
1926 April 18
1932 April 15
Women - Suffrage
1906 July 18
1917 September 1
1917 October 16
1920 June 21
1928 April 21
undated

Acquisitions
Gift of Edson Adams, Ernestine Adams, and Mrs. Hutchins.

Accruals
No additions are expected.

Processing Information
Processed by CHS staff.

Biography
Ella Sterling Mighels, California pioneer, author and literary historian, was born Ella Sterling Clark in Mormon Island, the first established California gold mining camp, near Sacramento, on May 5, 1853.

Her father, Sterling Benjamin Franklin Clark of Rutland, Vermont, came to California in 1849 and was propertied, prosperous and the Alcalde, or judge, of the Sacramento district within three years. He then returned east to marry and bring his bride, the former Rachel Hepburn Mitchell, to California. Rachel was a native of Philadelphia and the daughter of John Mitchell, the County Superintendent of Schools.

Several months before Ella’s birth, as her parents arrived in California, her father died. Rachel opened the first school in the Sacramento area and, in 1854, married Dudley H. Haskell, a 49er and member of the first Nevada Legislature (1864). The Haskells, including Ella’s baby stepbrother and stepsisters, lived in Sacramento until 1863 when Rachel and the children moved to Pennsylvania. Three years later the Haskell family reunited and moved to Aurora (or Esmeralda), Nevada, a Comstock boom town. They maintained a toll road during the waning years of the town and Mr. Haskell was pleased to accept the position of railroad land agent in Reno, offered by Leland Stanford in 1869. The Haskell family moved...
back to Sacramento where Ella remained until her marriage to Adley H. Cummins in 1872. Adley Cummins, a native of Chester County, Pennsylvania, came to California in 1869 at the age of nineteen and worked for several years for the railroad. Cummins was a well known philologist, author, lecturer and lawyer. He was the love of Ella’s life and the father of her only child, a daughter named Genevieve or Viva, born October 17, 1875. The Cummins family traveled a great deal but maintained a base in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1889, at the age of thirty-nine, Adley died of heart disease.

Ella had spent much of her life writing articles and short stories, but now, following her great loss, she began to work on a mammoth project, a compendium of early California journalism and literature to be published in 1893 as The Story of the Files. This same year Ella was appointed Lady Commissioner from San Francisco to the Columbian Exposition. During the writing of The Story, Ella met Philip Verril Mighels, a native of Carson City, Nevada, a lawyer by education and a newspaper artist and writer by trade. They were married in 1896 and moved to London the same year.

In 1901, following the death of Ella’s mother, the Mighels family returned to the United States and lived in New York for several years. Here Ella claims to have persuaded her husband to develop his literary skills. Regardless of her influence, Philip became an acclaimed novelist and playwright while he continued to work for newspapers. Viva Cummins married Augustus Doan in 1896 and spent several years at music school in London on a scholarship provided by Phoebe Hearst. Viva performed as a “Race Impersonator”, singing and dancing in the style of the Native American, Hungarian, Hindu, etc.

Both Viva and Dudley Haskell died in 1905 and two years later Ella returned to California, never to leave her San Francisco home again. She and her husband grew apart in temperament and career aspirations, and Ella divorced him in 1910. Philip died in 1911 as a result of a hunting accident.

During the later part of her life, Ella developed a philosophy called “Ark-adianism”, which reflected her pioneer California and Victorian up-bringing. She described Ark-adianism as, “...a system of philosophy which substitutes normal things for abnormal things in every department of life especially the home life” (letter, 5/19/11).

Ella believed in kindness and humanism, in Church and the Bible, in the purity of the white race, in democracy and freedom, and in the benign dominance of men. She was opposed to moral corruption, “chaos and socialism”, Jewish, Japanese and Black immigration, scientific education and the medical profession.

She believed that children, who were in a conspiracy against authority, should be kept disciplined, innocent and happy. She identified a child’s seven friends--work, bread, music, art, letters, invention and common sense--and believed that women should dedicate their lives to the upbringing of children as their mothers had before them. She did not believe in women’s suffrage (“They have no caution, no principles, when it comes to voting”, letter, 9/1/17), and she was opposed to birth control (“Parents who lend themselves to exercising ‘Birth Control’ are punished for interferring with Nature and they fall victim to epilepsy, nervous prostration, insanity or lingering death”, letter, 12/28/16).

Children loomed large in Ella’s life, and in her later years she developed a neighborhood literary program for the moral uplift of young people which she named the “Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters”. Her program included providing “books one ought to read”, and organizing both annual burnings of “bad” books and “potlatches” or gift giving parties. The motto of her little club was “Thou shalt keep the peace” and she stressed the importance of innocence and happiness among her young neighbors.

In order to bring the children of her club into association with “nice friends”, Ella organized the California Literature Society which met monthly at the home of Ina Coolbrith, California's first poet laureate, until 1916, and then met elsewhere until Ella’s death.

As did other writers of her time, Ella identified herself with the early California pioneer spirit, writing constantly, if not brilliantly, about the kind of pioneer Californians who had rocked her “to sleep in a goldrocker once used to wash the pay dust from the American river sands” (O’Brien, 1946).

Ella tended to focus more on self-identified “fairy tales” and the mythology of the gold rush than on historical fiction. Yet she also wrote as a chronicler of early California literary history and was named “first historian of literary California” by the state legislature in 1919.

Ella’s literary career began at the age of ten, when the Aurora Union published a fairy story she had written, and she was the first native Californian to publish a novel, Little Mountain Princess, in 1880. Her best known later works were The Full Glory of Diantha (1909), Literary California (1918), an expansion of The Story of the Files; and The Story of a Forty-Niner’s Daughter (1934). She also authored a play, Society and Babe Robinson (1914) and persuaded James Phelan to publish her father's travel diary, How Many Miles From St. Jo? (1929).

Ella occasionally wrote on other subjects of interest to her, such as the importance of maintaining the purity of the white race (“The Fairy Tale of the White Man”) and the benign dominance of men (“The Mid-Victorian Man”). Most of her works on
these other subjects were in the form of fairy tales or common sense discussions and only a small number were published. Ella died in 1934 following the publication of The Story of a Forty-Niner's Daughter, written under the pen name of Aurora Esmeralda. Her autobiography reflected Ella's life long belief that “she was destined to be the link between the Gold Rush days and the 20th century's brave new world” (O'Brien, 1946).

References:
Who's Who of Literary America, 1927.

Scope and Content
The Ella Sterling Mighels collection consists of correspondence, diaries, genealogical material, writing and stories, miscellaneous material and scrap-books.
The correspondence includes personal letters between Ella and her family, particularly her second husband, and other personal and business letters. Some of her letters to others are handwritten or typed, but many are carbon copies of typed letters.
Ella's correspondence with Philip Mighels reflect and describe the course of her second marriage, which ended in divorce in 1910.
Ella's other correspondence was generally with authors, publishers, newspaper editors and politicians, including Ina Coolbrith, James Phelan, David Starr Jordan, Phoebe Hearst, George Sterling, Ann Clark Hart, Harr Wagner, Fremont Older, Douglas Tilden, Frank Fischer and Carleton Kendall.
She regularly discusses her current literary projects, complaining about her difficulties and frustrations with writing and publishing, and assigning her works great social and moral value.
She also draws from her background in the California gold rush to discuss her childhood and the history of her family. She often laments the passage of the pioneer mothers and fathers, their stories, their customs and their memories, and she writes about being involved in many pioneer remembrance displays, including the erection of a statue of the “Pioneer Mother”.
Throughout much of her correspondence are discussions of her personal philosophy “Ark-adianism”, particularly as it concerns women, the family and the raising and education of children. Her correspondence also contains references to her neighborhood neophytes, known as the “Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters”, including several men and women who continued to inform her of their lives and literary adventures long after they had left her fold.
The diaries include two written by Ella's dauthter, Genevieve (Viva) Cummins Doan, chronicling her trip to England (1900-1901). They contain descriptions of her boat trip, daily activities, studies, entertainment and dance productions as a “Race Impersonator”.
Ella also contributed a number of diaries or “Soulbooks”, which chronicle her thoughts, concerns, writing and daily activities between 1904 and 1927. The “Soulbooks” contain little sayings (i.e., “Marriage is a custom invented by man for the protection of woman and the conservation of the family”); copies of her published letters to editors, articles and short stories; letters received and written; notes to herself (i.e., “Doe the next thyngge”); hand-bills, reviews, articles and ephemera concerning her published works and her activities; material concerning the construction of a “Pioneer Mothers” statue; descriptions of family and friends such as Adley Cummins, Philip Mighels, Ina Coolbrith and the Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters; material concerning the California Literature Society and her title confirmation as “first historian of literary California”; discussions of her current literary works and publishing problems, her health and financial concerns.
The genealogical material includes two family trees of the Mighels family, questions regarding the Clark family and “The Book of the House of Mitchell”, which contains a genealogy of the Mitchell, Clark and Haskell families. In “The Book”, Ella states, “The descendents of William Mitchell[UNK]her great-grandfather[UNK]...have produced a race with such marked characteristics that they are a source of constant inquiry to themselves and to others.”
The writing and stories include typed and handwritten drafts of numerous lectures, stories, fairy tales, poems, plays and novels by Ella, such as “Wawona”, “The Deathless Romance of Herman and Thusnelda”, “The Seven Faithful Fairies”, “Society and Babe Robinson”, “Killarg and Thotha”, “Seven Men of Borealis”, “The Full Glory of Diantha”, and “Ar Vyvah”, as well as “thoughts and scribblings” on miscellaneous subjects such as Ark-adian education.
The *miscellaneous material* includes unorganized writing by others, particularly Ella’s first husband, Adley Cummins; ephemer, reprints of Ella’s articles, newspaper clippings, and material relating to the California Literature Society and the Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters.

The *scrapbooks* include a scrapbook organized by Adley Cummins (1873), containing newspaper clippings and information about the death of his mother.

Several scrapbooks organized by Ella are also included (1893-1930). These contain published articles by Ella concerning various subjects, particularly her travels to Alaska, London and the Chicago World’s Fair of 1894; reviews of her works, particularly “The Full Glory of Diantha”; newspaper clippings concerning her divorce from Philip Mighels, and her other activities; and photographs, letters and ephemera.

Twenty one photographs, two postcards and one lantern slide were transferred to California Historical Society’s Photograph Collection. They include one postcard displaying the “Original idea of the ‘Children’s Statue of the Pioneer Mother’”, and one of the statue “The Nations of the West” from the Panama Pacific International Exposition. They also include two photographs of a mother an children (posing for the Pioneer Mother statue), one of Ella with her family (?), one of “Hal Haskell, Auburndale, Mass.”, two of John Mitchell (?), two of Ella, two of Genevieve (Viva) Cummins, one of James Phelan, one of a “Group of Citizens of Aurora, California (now Aurora, Nev.) taken 1865”, and nine of unknown individuals and places. Also included is one lantern slide of an unknown individual.

**Arrangement**

Arranged into six series:

Series 1: Correspondence
Series 2: Diaries
Series 3: Genealogical Material
Series 4: Writing and Stories
Series 5: Miscellaneous Material
Series 6: Scrapbooks

**Series 1 Correspondence 1870-1934**

*Physical Description:* 16 folders

*Arrangement*

Arranged chronologically.

*Scope and Contents*

Consists of personal and professional correspondence, in reference to her own writings, and relating to her duties as California Literary Historian, and as a member of various groups such as the California Literature Society and the Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters. Notable correspondents include Ina Coolbrith, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, James Phelan, and various State officials.

| Box 1, Folder 1 | 1870-1904 |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | 1905-1909 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | 1910-1914 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | 1915-1917 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | 1918-1919 |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | 1920-1922 |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | 1923-1924 |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | 1925 |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | 1926 |
| Box 2, Folder 10 | 1927 |
| Box 2, Folder 11 | 1928-1929 |
| Box 2, Folder 12 | 1930-1931 |
| Box 2, Folder 13 | 1932 |
| Box 2, Folder 14 | 1933-1934 |
| Box 2, Folder 15-16 | undated |
Series 2 Diaries 1900-1927

Physical Description: 17 folders
Arrangement
Arranged chronologically.
Scope and Contents
Diaries, notebooks, and logbooks, including two diaries belonging to Genevieve Cummins Doan, and Ella Sterling Mighel's "Soulbooks".

Box 3, Folder 17  Diary, Genevieve Cummins Doan 1900 July-1901 January
Box 3, Folder 18  Diary, Genevieve Cummins Doan 1901 February-July
Box 3, Folder 19  Notebook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1904
Box 3, Folder 20  Logbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1907-1908
Box 3, Folder 21  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1910 March 21-1911 January 17
Box 3, Folder 22  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1912 January 18-March 27
Box 3, Folder 23  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1912 May 10-1913 March 3
Box 3, Folder 24  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1913 March 12-November 15
Box 3, Folder 25  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1913 November 28-1915 December 16
Box 4, Folder 26  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1915 December 21-1917 November 30
Box 4, Folder 27  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1917 December 6-1919 December 28
Box 4, Folder 28  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1920 January 1-1921 February 5
Box 4, Folder 29  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1921 February 23-1924 March 2
Box 4, Folder 30  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1924 March 25-1925 October 28
Box 4, Folder 31  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1925 November 13-1926 November 4
Box 4, Folder 32  Soulbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1926 November 11-1927 August 25
Box 5, Folder 33  Address book undated

Series 3 Genealogical Material undated

Physical Description: 1 folder
Arrangement
Creator's own arrangement.
Scope and Contents
One notebook and a few loose papers containing clippings, anecdotes, keepsakes, and sketches of the family tree.

Box 5, Folder 34  Family tree, Mighels family; “The Book of the House of Mitchell” undated

Series 4 Writing and Stories 1897-1914, undated

Physical Description: 49 folders
Arrangement
Arranged by story.
Scope and Contents
Manuscripts and typescripts of stories and fairy tales. Includes poetry, lectures and editorial writing.

Box 6, Folder 35  Fairy tales undated
Box 6, Folder 36  Wawona undated
Box 6, Folder 37  Followers of the Sun undated
Box 6, Folder 38  The Children of Una Materna 1911
Box 6, Folder 39  The Awakening of Dior and King of the Forest undated
Box 6, Folder 40  The Meadow Elf's Bride undated
Box 6, Folder 41  Sir Galahad versus Tannhauser undated
Box 6, Folder 42  Deathless Romance of Herman and Thusnelda undated
Box 6, Folder 43  The Touch Bearers 1906
Box 6, Folder 44-45  The Seven Faithful Fairies undated
Box 7, Folder 46-47  Seven Men of Borealis circa 1909-1913
Box 7, Folder 48-50
Box 7, Folder 51
Box 7, Folder 52
Box 7, Folder 53
Box 7, Folder 54
Box 8, Folder 55
Box 8, Folder 56-63
Box 9, Folder 64
Box 9, Folder 65-67
Box 9, Folder 68-69
Box 9, Folder 70
Box 9, Folder 71
Box 9, Folder 72
Box 10, Folder 73-82
Box 10, Folder 83
Box 11, Folder 84-85
Box 11, Folder 86
Box 11, Folder 87
Box 11, Folder 88
Box 11, Folder 89
Box 11, Folder 90
Box 11, Folder 91-92
Box 11, Folder 93
Box 12, Folder 94-95
Box 12, Folder 96
Box 12, Folder 97
Box 12, Folder 98-99
Box 12, Folder 100
Box 12, Folder 101-102
Box 12, Folder 103

**Series 4 Writing and Stories 1897-1914, undated**

- Miscellaneous stories and writing 1897-1914
  - The Full Glory of Diantha undated
  - The Inscription undated
  - Its Adios to Violetta undated
  - Ar Vyvah undated
  - Streets of Old San Francisco undated
  - Society and Babe Robinson undated
  - Silver-Cloud and Diamond-Crown undated
  - Daintytree's Quest undated
  - Killarg and Thotha undated
  - Ark-adian Education undated
  - Lectures by Ella Sterling Mighels undated
  - Miscellaneous thoughts and scribblings undated
  - Miscellaneous writing undated

**Series 5 Miscellaneous Material 1880-1933**

- Physical Description: 20 folders
- Arrangement
  - Arranged by subject.
- Scope and Contents
  - Consists of miscellaneous print and manuscript items - programs, invitations, advertisements, and other ephemera relating to Mighels' personal life. Also copies of Senate Weekly Histories proclaiming her appointment as California Literary Historian, literary magazines, a handmade childrens book of nursery stories, fragments of Mighels' writings from printed sources, news clippings, and log books and records of the Ark-adian Library.

- Ephemera 1896-1933
  - Invitations, programs 1901-1933
  - Senate Weekly Histories 1919
  - Pamphlets, reprints 1907-1932
  - Literary magazines undated
  - *Mother Goose's Gosling* undated
  - Reprints 1883-1926

- Poems by others undated
- Writing by and about Adley Cummins 1880-1918

- Information about Ella Sterling Mighels' will 1924
- Newspaper clippings regarding Ella Sterling Mighels 1881-1933
- Miscellaneous clippings 1913-1933

- Miscellaneous papers of the California Literature Society and the Ark-adian Brothers and Sisters 1922-1932
- Little Ark-adian Library log-books 1910-1917

- Ark-adian records 1917
Series 6 Scrapbooks 1873-1930

Physical Description: 4 folders

Arrangement
Arranged chronologically.

Scope and Contents
Scrapbooks containing writings, newscippings, letters, and cards.

Box 13, Folder 105
Scrapbook, Adley H. Cummins, Sacramento 1873

Box 13, Folder 106
Scrapbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1893-1912

Box 13, Folder 107
Scrapbook, Ella Sterling Mighels 1917-1930

Box 13, Folder 104
Unknown scrapbook undated