Finding Aid to the Virginia Elizabeth Reed Letter Collection MS.543

Finding aid prepared by Holly Rose Larson
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Title: Virginia Elizabeth Reed Letter Collection
Identifier/Call Number: MS.543
Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Braun Research Library
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 0.2 Linear feet (12 folders)
Date (bulk): Bulk, 1846-1955
Date (inclusive): 1846-1981
Abstract: This collection includes letters written by Virginia Elizabeth Reed, a member of the Donner Party, at age 12, as well as manuscripts written about her by George Wharton James and Frances Watkins. This collection also includes magazine articles and newspaper clippings from 1912-1955 regarding Reed and other Donner Party survivors, and photocopies of two postcards Reed sent to her grandchildren around 1918.

creator: James, George Wharton, 1858-1923
creator: Murphy, Virginia Reed, 1834-
creator: Watkins, Frances E. (Frances Emma), 1899-1987

Processing history

Scope and Contents
This collection includes letters written by Virginia Elizabeth Reed (later Virginia Reed Murphy), a member of the Donner Party, at age 12, as well as manuscripts written about her by George Wharton James and Frances Watkins. This collection also includes magazine articles and newspaper clippings from 1912-1955 regarding Reed and other Donner Party survivors, and photocopies from about 1981 of two postcards Reed sent to her grandchildren around 1918.

Preferred citation
Virginia Elizabeth Reed Letter Collection, 1846-1981, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.543; [folder number] [folder title][date].

Use
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Access
Collection is open for research. Appointments to view materials are required. To make an appointment please visit http://theautry.org/research/research-rules-and-application or contact library staff at rroom@theautry.org. An item-level list is available from the library staff.

Acquisition
Donation from George Wharton James estate, 1943 December and others through 1981.

Biographical note
Virginia Elizabeth Reed Murphy (1834-1921) was 12 years old when her family joined the Donner Party in 1846 to travel to California. Daughter of Margaret Reed, step-daughter of James Reed, Virginia and her family were among the few survivors of the unfortunate emigrant wagon train. Virginia later wrote about the events in her book Across the Plains in the Donner Party. Once they reached California, the family settled in San Jose, where Virginia met and married John Marion Murphy in 1850. They had nine children together.

Inventory
3. Letter to Mrs. M. Gillespie – Edwardsville, Ill., 12 July 1846 – from Independence Rock, Kansas (written by Virginia) Original Letter from Josephine Gillespie Prickett sending the letter to Mr. (Henson) Robinson 24 May 1895 (Letter contains information on the death of Virginia’s grandmother and the early part of the Donnor party’s trip)
4. . Material for biography by George Wharton James – much concerning her conversion to Catholicism

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5. Article proofs for Masterkey May 1944 by Frances E. Watkins re: Reed letter (the July one)
6. Part of pages from Ave Maria magazine – Jan 1911 #1-4
7. 21 c. Century Magazine v. 42 #53 pp. 409 - 426 – Narrative by V.E.B. Reed, Across the Plains with the Donner Party 1846, With reprint Notre Dame Qtrly v. 5 #3 Jun 1913
8. Touring Topics (Westways) Dec 1934 by George R. Stewart Jr., Clipping Pasadena Star News 20 Feb 1918 “Story of the Donner Party as Told by Member” Virginia B. Reed Murphy by Charles E. Bond

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Articles  
Clippings  
Correspondence  
Donner Party  
Frontier and pioneer life -- California  
Manuscripts  
Overland journeys to the Pacific  
Overland travel  
Photocopies