Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: SJSU Special Collections & Archives
Title: Edwin Markham Family Papers
source: Thomas family
creator: Markham, Edwin, 1852-1940
creator: Markham family
Identifier/Call Number: MSS.2005.10.01
Physical Description: 2 boxes (4 linear feet)
Date (inclusive): 1898-1994 (bulk 1910-1940)
Abstract: The Edwin Markham Family Papers (1898-1994) includes a variety of documents and photographs chronicling the life of Edwin Markham, noted poet and California State Normal School, San Jose, graduate. This artificial collection includes newspaper clippings, printed poems and pamphlets, photographs, and limited correspondence. The bulk of the material dates from 1910-1940.
Access
The collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Edwin Markham Family Papers, MSS-2005-10-01, San Jose State University, Library Special Collections & Archives.
Processing Information
Processing completed by and EAD encoded by Anneliese Eisentraut, 2006.
Biographical History
Charles Edward Anson Markham (1852-1940), later known as Edwin, was the youngest of nine children, born on April 23, 1852, in Oregon City, Oregon. His parents, Elizabeth Winchell and Samuel Markham, were married in Michigan and traveled by wagon train to settle in the Oregon Territory. His parents divorced shortly after his birth and his mother and her younger children moved to Suisun Hills, northeast of San Francisco.
Markham received his teacher's certificate in 1870 from the California College in Vacaville, graduated from California State Normal School, San Jose, in 1872, and then studied classics at Christian College in Santa Rosa. After graduation, Markham taught in many communities across Central and Northern California. His first teaching position was in El Dorado County and in 1879 he was elected county superintendent of schools. In 1884, he was a school headmaster in Hayward, and in 1890, he was hired as the principal of the Tompkins Observation School in Oakland.
After two brief failed marriages, Markham married Anna Catherine Murphy (1859-1938) in 1898 and in 1899 their son Virgil was born. The Markhams moved to New York and in 1901 settled on Staten Island where they would reside for the remainder of their lives.
Markham began writing poetry in the 1870s and first sold one of his poems in 1880. He later contributed to Harper's Century, Scribner's Magazine, and the Overland Monthly. He also developed friendships with literary celebrities such as Joaquin Miller, Ina Donna Coolbrith, William Dean Howells, and Ambrose Bierce.
Markham rose to fame as a poet with the publication of "The Man with the Hoe," which was inspired by a Francois Millet woodcut of the same name. On New Year's Eve of 1898, Markham read the poem at a party, which led to its publication in the San Francisco Examiner. Because Markham's populist views were in line with the social reform movements of the day, his poem became an overnight sensation.
His second-most famous poem, "Lincoln, the Man of the People" was commissioned for the centennial of Lincoln's birth and was published in 1901 in Lincoln and Other Poems. In 1922 Markham read the poem at the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial. Although Markham's later works failed to receive the critical acclaim of "The Man with the Hoe" and "Lincoln, the Man of the People," he was a popular figure who lectured and made public appearances at a range of events, including labor and radical gatherings as well as literary ones.
Scope and Content of Collection

The Edwin Markham Family Papers (1898-1994) includes a variety of documents and photographs chronicling the life of Edwin Markham, noted poet and California State Normal School, San Jose, graduate. The varied clippings in the collection indicate the depth of local and national interest in his career and the esteem in which he was held at the normal school. Secondary subjects represented in the collection include Markham's wife and son, the Markham Cottage on the San José State University campus, and the Poetry Society of America.

This artificial collection includes materials from multiple sources, many of which are unidentified. A portion of the collection was given to the university as a bequest from the C.W. Thomas family, local residents and friends of the Markham family. The collection is organized by subject. The bulk of the collection relates to Edwin Markham and includes biographical information, newspaper clippings and select correspondence. The remainder of the collection includes correspondence from Anna C. Markham and Virgil Markham, miscellaneous printed materials and correspondence about Markham at SJSU. The bulk of the material dates from 1910-1940.

Notable items in the collection include a letter from Markham to the Thomas family informing them of Anna Catherine's death, two letters from Markham to the poet Henry Meade Bland, several signed poems, and family photographs.

Arrangement

The collection is organized by format.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Poets, American -- 19th century
Markham, Edwin, 1852-1940
San José State University -- History
San Jose State Normal School
Poetry Society of America
Markham, Anna Catherine, 1859-1938
Markham, Virgil, 1899-1973
Thomas family
Markham, Edwin, 1852-1940
Markham family