Overview of the Collection
Title: Mary A. Forman Papers
Dates (inclusive): 1853-1908
Bulk dates: 1904-1908
Collection Number: mssHM 68517-68598
Creator: Forman, Mary A. Gray (Mary Agnes Gray), 1843-1918.
Extent: 158 pieces in 2 boxes
Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Manuscripts Department
1151 Oxford Road
San Marino, California 91108
Phone: (626) 405-2129
Email: reference@huntington.org
URL: http://www.huntington.org
Abstract: This collection consists mainly of letters and questionnaires written between 1904-1908 related to the inquiries of Mary Forman (1843-1918) about specific details of the history of mid 19th-century Los Angeles, California. General topics include Los Angeles history, California state and local government, crime, medicine, architecture, education, land allotment, churches, agriculture, Indians, the Mexican War, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.
Language: English. Some correspondence is in Spanish.
Access
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item]. Mary A. Forman Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Provenance
Biographical Note
Mary Agnes Gray Forman (1843-1918) came to the Los Angeles, California, area as a child in 1851 from Covington, Kentucky, via El Paso, Texas. Her father was killed by Indians during the journey from Texas to California; her mother, Charlotte, married John Rowland in 1852. In 1862, Mary Agnes Gray married Charles Forman (1835-1919), a California and Nevada pioneer who was, among other things, the owner of a successful coal mine, a Major General of the Nevada Volunteers, a Knight Templar, a Deputy Secretary of State (of California), and a surveyor (in Los Angeles). After moving to Los Angeles from Nevada, Charles Forman founded the Kern River Company, which provided Los Angeles with electricity from the Kern River, and which later merged with the Pacific Light and Power Company, of which Forman became secretary. He was also a prominent member of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.
The Formans began their married life in Virginia City, Nevada, but in 1887 they had their house, to which Charles Forman was quite attached, taken apart, shipped to Los Angeles, and then reassembled on a new site near Pico and Figueroa streets (the Forman house, one of the city’s show pieces, was razed in 1913, to make way for the Los Angeles Railway). Largely through the efforts of Mary A. Forman, who became known as a benefactor and an accomplished hostess, the Forman house became one of the most prominent centers of social life in the city: the New Year Watch at the house was one of the main social events in the city. Mary Forman was also a highly active member of local social and other groups. She belonged to a social and historical society of former Los Angeles schoolchildren, the Auld Lang Syne Club, which was formed for the purpose of verifying the members’ memories of early Los Angeles through the membership and through historical inquiry. She was instrumental in reactivating the club in the first decade of the 20th century. The Formans had two children, Eloise and Charles, Jr.
Scope and Content
The collection consists mainly of letters and questionnaires written between 1904-1908 on the topic of mid-19th-century Los Angeles. Most of the questionnaires, composed by Mary A. Forman, include a correspondent’s answers, and most of the letters were written to Forman in response to her questionnaires or other inquiries. Forman presumably conducted the correspondence as a result of her involvement in the Auld Lang Syne Club. There are also a few other documents that she probably acquired as part of her research, including a small number of letters written by Southerners (possibly relatives of A. J. King) during the Civil War and a few 19th-century California letters, most of them written in Spanish.

The purpose of most of Mary Forman's inquiries was to obtain very specific details or confirmation of details of Los Angeles history, from what kind of roof a certain house had to which band of Apaches killed a certain man. Because of this, the responses cover a markedly wide range of topics, and the number of authors and other people involved is unusually large for a collection of this size. General topics addressed in the documents include Los Angeles history, California state and local government, crime, medicine, architecture, education, land allotment, churches, agriculture, Indians, the Mexican War, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.

Photocopies of photographs and a brief biography of Mary A. and Charles Forman, compiled by John Steven McGroarty in Los Angeles: From the Mountains to the Sea, published in 1921, can be requested with the paper version of this finding aid. Some correspondence is in Spanish.

**Arrangement**

Documents organized alphabetically by author, followed by ephemera.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the [Huntington Library's Online Catalog](https://www.huntington.org).  

**Subjects**

- Foster, Stephen Clark, 1820-1898.
- Frémont, John Charles, 1813-1890.
- Forman, Charles, 1835-1919 -- Family.
- Forman, Mary A. Gray (Mary Agnes Gray), 1843-1918 -- Archives.
- Foster, Thomas, d. 1863.
- Kearny, Stephen Watts, 1794-1848.
- King, Andrew Jackson, 1833-1923.
- Sánchez, Tomás A., 1826-1882.
- Stevenson, J. D. (Jonathan Drake), 1800-1894.
- Stockton, Robert Field, 1795-1866.
- Auld Lang Syne Club.
- Architecture -- California -- Los Angeles -- History -- 19th century.
- Dwellings -- California.
- Education -- California, Southern -- History.
- Frontier and pioneer life -- California, Southern -- History -- Sources.
- Indians of North America -- Wars -- West (U.S.)
- Indians of North America -- Wars -- 1815-1875.
- Land subdivision -- California -- Los Angeles.
- Local history -- Education -- California -- Los Angeles.
- Mexican War, 1846-1848 -- Anecdotes.
- Pioneers -- California, Southern.
- Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877)
- Vineyards -- California.
- Women -- California.
- Los Angeles (Calif.) -- History -- Societies, etc.
- Los Angeles (Calif.) -- History -- Sources.
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.

**Forms/Genres**
Letters (correspondence) -- United States -- 20th century.
Questionnaires.

Additional Contributors
Caballería y Collell, Juan.
Davis, William Heath, 1822-1909.
Johnston, Mary Alice Eaton, b. 1850.
Foster, Thomas, d. 1863.
Guirado, R. C., fl. 1905.
Hansen, George, 1824-1897.
Hazard, George Washington, 1842-1914.
Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner.
Ingersoll, Luther A., b. 1851.
King, Andrew Jackson, 1833-1923.
King, Laura Evertson, d. 1925.
Kuhrts, J.
Macy, Oscar, fl. 1905.
Rowland, William R., b. 1846.
Sánchez, Tomás A., 1826-1882.

Correspondence, manuscripts, and ephemera

Box 1

Authors B-J (HM 68517-68559)
Authors B-J, including: Caballeria, Juan, fl. 1905; Davis, William Heath, 1822-1909; Foster, Thomas, d. 1863 Guirado, R. C., fl. 1905; Hazard, George Washington, 1842-1914 Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner, 1843-1922 Ingersoll, Luther A.,b. 1851; and Johnston, Mary Alice Eaton, b. 1850

Box 2

Authors K-Y (plus anonymous); Ephemera (HM 68560-68598)
Authors K-Y (plus anonymous and ephemera), including: King, Andrew Jackson, 1833-1923; King, Laura Evertson, d. 1925; Kuhrts, J. Macy, Oscar, fl. 1905; and Rowland, William R., b. 1846.