Eliza Poor Donner Houghton Papers: Finding Aid

Processed by Brooke M. Black, completed February 8, 1999; machine-readable finding aid created by Xiuzhi Zhou; supplementary encoding and revision by Diann Benti.

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
© 2000
The Huntington Library. All rights reserved.
Overview of the Collection
Title: Eliza Poor Donner Houghton Papers
Dates (inclusive): 1820-1978
Bulk dates: 1900-1920
Collection Number: mssHM 58111-58197
Creator: Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner.
Extent: 89 items in 4 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 chiefly contains material dealing with Donner Party and their ill-fated overland journey to the Pacific in 1846, as well as several items written by Eliza Poor Donner Houghton (1843-1922) dealing with California history. Half of the correspondence deals with the Pioneer (Donner) Monument, which was financed by the Native Sons of the Golden West. The bulk of the collection dates from 1900-1920.
Language: English.
Access
Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.
Publication Rights
The Huntington Library does not require that researchers request permission to quote from or publish images of this material, nor does it charge fees for such activities. The responsibility for identifying the copyright holder, if there is one, and obtaining necessary permissions rests with the researcher.
Preferred Citation
[Identification of item]. Eliza Poor Donner Houghton Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Provenance
Biographical Note
Eliza Poor Donner Houghton (1843-1922), the youngest daughter of George and Tamsen Donner, was three years old when her family left their home in Illinois to head out west to California. This group of travelers, who became trapped in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 1846, ultimately became known as the ill-fated Donner Party. In March 1847, after several months of entrapment, Eliza and her sisters were rescued by the third relief party to reach the camps. George and Tamsen Donner both died in the mountains, and Eliza and her sister Georgia were taken in by Christian and Mary Brunner, elderly immigrants from Switzerland. In 1854, Eliza moved to Sacramento to live with her oldest half-sister, Elitha Donner Wilder, also a survivor of the Donner Party.
In 1861, Eliza married Sherman Otis Houghton (1828-1914), the widower of Mary Donner, Eliza's cousin and fellow Donner Party survivor. Sherman Houghton was a prominent lawyer in San Jose who served in the U. S. House of Representatives from 1871-1875. Eliza's experience with the Donner Party was the defining event of her life; she kept in contact with fellow survivors and documented their stories. Eliza wanted to tell the true account of the Donner Party, and while doing her research for her book, she became very interested in the history of California and the pioneers who came to this new land. In 1911 she published her book, The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate. The first half of this book gives Eliza's account of the events in the winter of 1846-47. In the second half of the book, Eliza tells of her life growing up in Sonoma and Sacramento in the 1850s, and her memories of "gold fever." The book ends with her marriage in 1861. Eliza attended the dedication ceremony of the Pioneer (Donner) Monument, near Truckee, California, in 1918 with fellow survivors Francis Donner Wilder and Patty Reed Lewis. Eliza died in Los Angeles in 1922.
Scope and Content
The collection contains correspondence, notebooks, manuscripts, land tracts, scrapbooks, cartes-de-visites and ephemera. Although the majority of the material in the collection deals with the Donner Party, several items written by Eliza Poor Donner Houghton deal with California history. These items are chiefly about the discovery of gold in California in 1849 and
its effect on American history and the development of California as a state. In addition to Eliza, nine other Donner Party members are represented in this collection, both in correspondence and photographs. The collection contains 89 cataloged items, including 49 pieces of correspondence and three oversize items. The collection spans the period 1820-1978, but the bulk of the material is from 1900-1920.

About half of the 49 pieces of correspondence (1910-1918) deal with the planning, building and dedication of the Pioneer (Donner) Monument; most of this correspondence consists of letters between Eliza Poor Donner Houghton and C. W. Chapman, the Chairman of the Donner Monument Committee. There are also seven letters (1820-1842) by Tamsen Donner to her sister Elizabeth Eustis Poor, of which six were written before Tamsen’s marriage to George Donner. The letter from Eliza to “My Children” was written immediately after her visit in 1884 with John Baptiste Trudeau, during which he gave his account of events at the mountain camps, his relationship with the Donners, his last words with George and Tamsen Donner, and his rescue by the third relief party. This letter contains material that Eliza did not publish in her book.

The notebooks and manuscripts, all written by Eliza, deal either with the Donner Party or the history of California. There is an incomplete handwritten draft of The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate. Although this draft is missing sections of the published book, it contains material that does not appear in the published version.

The scrapbooks (1860-1920) contain mostly news clippings concerning Sherman Houghton’s political career in California, although there are some clippings concerning the Donner Party.

**Arrangement**
The collection is alphabetically arranged by author in the following series:

1. Manuscripts and Notes (Box 1)
2. Correspondence (Box 2)
3. Manuscripts and Ephemera (Box 3)
4. Land Tracts (Box 4)
5. Oversize Items

**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**
Donner, Tamsen, 1801-1847.
Trudeau, John Baptiste, 1830-1910.
Native Sons of the Golden West.
Donner Party.
Overland journeys to the Pacific.
Pioneer Monument (Nevada County, Calif.)
California -- Description and travel.
California -- Gold discoveries -- Personal narratives.
California -- History -- Sources.

**Forms/Genres**
Cartes-de-visite (card photographs) -- California.
Letters (correspondence) -- California.
Manuscripts -- California.
Notebooks -- California.
Scrapbooks -- California.
Tracts (land areas) -- California.

**Alternate Authors**
Donner, Tamsen, 1801-1847.
Lewis, Patty Reed, 1838 or 1839-1923.
McGlashan, C. F. (Charles Fayette), 1847-1931.

**Indexing: Subjects**
Donner, George.
• Subject in Tamsen Donner letter (1842, Apr. 3-May 14) to Elizabeth Eustis Poor. HM 58158.
  Donner, Jacob.
  • Subject in Francis "Frankie" Eustis Bond letter (1879, Mar. 30) to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. HM 58131.
  Donner, Tamsen, 1801-1847.
  • Subject in Francis "Frankie" Eustis Bond letter (1894, Feb. 12) to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. HM 58132.
  Donner, Tamsen, 1801-1847.
  • Subject in Ben F. Caldwell letter (1912, Jan. 3) to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. HM 58137.
  Hastings, Lansford Warren, 1819-ca.1870.
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton essay "California Before the Argonauts" [1900]. HM 58112.
  Marshall, James Wilson, 1810-1885.
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton speech to the Van Nuys Woman's Club re: California history [before 1915]. HM 58125.
  Reed, James Frazier, 1800-1874.
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton letter (1912, Mar. 18) to Patty Reed Lewis, 1838 or 9-1923. HM 58163 and HM 58164. (original and copy).
  Reed, James Frazier, 1800-1874.
  • Subject in Patty Reed Lewis, 1800-1874 letter (1912, Mar. 6) to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. HM 58169.
  Sutter, John Augustus, 1803-1880.
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton essay "California Before the Argonauts" [1900]. HM 58112.
  Sutter, John Augustus, 1803-1880.
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton speech to the Van Nuys Woman's Club re: California history [before 1915]. HM 58125.
  Sutter's Fort (Sacramento, Calif.).
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton essay "California Before the Argonauts" [1900]. HM 58112.
  Sutter's Fort (Sacramento, Calif.).
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton speech to the Van Nuys Woman's Club re: California history [before 1915]. HM 58125.
  Trudeau, John Baptiste, 1830-1910.
  • Subject in Eliza Poor Donner Houghton letter (1884, Nov. 11-12) to "My Children." HM 58166.

Indexing: Name Added Entries
Houghton, Mary Donner.
  • Addressee of Margret Wilson Reed letter (1858, Apr. 5). HM 58175.
Houghton, Sherman Otis.
  • Addressee of Jessie Benton Frémont letter ([1890], Oct. 23). HM 58160.
Lewis, Patty Reed, 1838 or 9-1923.
  • Addressee of Eliza Poor Donner Houghton letter and copy (1912, Mar. 18). HM 58163 and HM 58164 (original and copy).
McGlashan, C. F. (Charles Fayette), 1847-1931.
  • Addressee of Eliza Poor Donner Houghton letter (1920, July 13). HM 58165.

Box 1  Manuscripts/Notes

Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. "Drops From a Pioneer Pitcher": essay, [1900], with hand written corrections. Note: includes letter from Collisto Willard Scott to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1896 May 20 HM 58114.


Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. Note on an illustration of the Pioneer Monument to be used in an edition of The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate. 1920 October HM 58117.


On verso: Letter to "My Dear Elizabeth" by Eliza Poor Donner Houghton, incomplete.


------. Review of The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate by Eliza Poor Donner Houghton, with hand written corrections. [1911] HM 58129.

Box 2

Correspondence

Alliott, Hector. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1912 January 25 HM 58130.

Bond, Frances "Frankie" Eustis. 2 letters to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1879-1894 HM 58131-58132.

Brunner, Christian. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton and Georgia Ann Donner Babcock. 1861 March 25 HM 58133.

Brunner, Mary. 1 letter to Georgia Ann Donner Babcock and Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1861 January 12 HM 58134.
Brunner, Christian, and Mary Brunner. 1 letter to Georgia Ann Donner Babcock and Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1856 September 10 HM 58135.

Brunner, Mary, and Christian Brunner. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1856 July 3 HM 58136.

Caldwell, Ben F----. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1912 January 3 HM 58137.

Chapman, C---- W----. 11 letters to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1910-1918 HM 58138-58148.

Chapman, C---- W----. 1 letter to Fred H. Jung. 1918 March 7 HM 58149.

Chapman, C---- W----. 1 letter to "All Parlors of the Native Sons of the Golden West." 1918 March 1 HM 58150.

Chapman, C---- W----. 1 letter to Douglas Tilden. 1911 January 31 HM 58151.

Donner, Tamsen, 1801-1847. 7 letters to Elizabeth Eustis Poor. 1820?-1842 HM 58152-58158.

Estrada, E---- M----. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1918 December 30 HM 58159.


Guinn, J. M. (James Miller), 1834-1918. 1 letter to Sherman Otis Houghton and Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1897 April 29 HM 58161.

Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. 1 letter to C. W. Chapman. 1911 August 9 HM 58162.

Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. 1 letter to Patty Reed Lewis. 1912 March 18 HM 58163.

Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. 1 letter to Patty Reed Lewis, 1838 or 9-1923, typewritten copy of HM 58163. 1912 March 18 HM 58164.


Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. 1 letter to "My Children". 1884 November 11-12 HM 58166.

Houghton, Mary Donner. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1860 April 15 HM 58167.

Jung, Fred H----. 1 letter to C. W. Chapman. 1918 March 4 HM 58168.

Lewis, Patty Reed, 1838 or 9-1923. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1912 March 6 HM 58169.

McGlashan, C. F. (Charles Fayette), 1847-1931. 3 letters to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1911-1920 HM 58170-58172.

Murphy, William Green. 2 letters to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1896 HM 58173-58174.

Reed, Margret Wilson. 1 letter to Mary Donner Houghton. 1858 April 5 HM 58175.


Wolfskill, Susan Cooper. 1 letter to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton. 1900 February 2 HM 58178.

Box 3

Manuscripts & Ephemera


Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. Draft of *The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate*, 2 items, they are not continuous or complete. [Before 1911] HM 58180 (1) and (2).


Houghton, Eliza Poor Donner. Notebook re: Donner Party [typed transcripts of some of this material can be found in HM 58183]. [Before 1911] HM 58182.


Carte-de-visite copy print of Eleanor Priscilla Eddy. [Before 1846] HM 58185.

Carte-de-visite copy print of William Henry Eddy. [Before 1846] HM 58186.

Box 4

Abstract of Title: Beaudry Tract #2, Los Angeles. [Approximately 1890] HM 58191.
Abstract of Title: Main Street, Los Angeles. [Approximately 1890] HM 58192.
Abstract of Title: Rancho Santa Anita. [Approximately 1890] HM 58193.
Abstract of Title: Rancho Santa Anita. [Approximately 1890] HM 58194.

Oversize

Houghton, Sherman Otis. Notarial Record 1857 September-1860 January HM 58195
Scrapbook, Volume 1. 1860-1920 HM 58196
Scrapbook, Volume 2. 1860-1920 HM 58197

Contains letter (1896 March 23) from George W. Foote to Eliza Poor Donner Houghton.