Eldred J. Simkins Papers: Finding Aid

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Overview of the Collection
Title: Eldred J. Simkins Papers
Dates (inclusive): 1842-1977
Bulk dates: 1842-1929
Collection Number: mssSIM 1-475
Creator: Simkins, Eldred James, 1838-1903.
Extent: Approximately 475 pieces in 10 boxes
Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Manuscripts Department
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Abstract: This collection chiefly contains the correspondence of the family of lawyer and Texas state senator Eldred J. Simkins (1838-1903). Subjects discussed include the California Gold Rush and life in Mariposa County, Calif., during the 1850s and 1870s; the Civil War in Charleston, South Carolina, from a confederate soldier's point of view; life in South Carolina and Florida after the Civil War; and life in Austin and Corsicana, Texas, during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Language: English.

Access
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item]. Eldred J. Simkins Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance
Gift of Lydia Marcus of Ojai, California, December 15, 1981. The collection was given to Marcus by Louise Rousseau, the granddaughter of Eldred J. and Eliza Josephine (Trescot) Simkins.

Biographical Note
Eldred J. Simkins (1838-1903) was born October 13, 1838, in the Edgefield District of South Carolina. In 1843, his parents, Eldred Simkins and Pattie (Bythewood) Simkins, moved their family (which included children William Stewart and Pattie) to Monticello, Florida. Soon after the move, both parents died and the children returned to the Beaufort District of South Carolina where they were raised by their maternal grandparents, Sarah (Fickling) Bythewood and Benjamin Russell Bythewood. Among the other residents of the Bythewood's Beaufort plantation household were Anne Maria (Bythewood) Trescot, a married daughter, and her two children, Eliza Josephine Trescot and E. Bocquet Trescot. Anne Maria Trescot's physician husband, Edward Henry Trescot (probably the brother of William Henry Trescot, diplomat and historian) went to California in 1849 to search for gold and never returned to South Carolina.

Having graduated in 1859 from South Carolina College in Columbia, Eldred J. Simkins was studying law with his uncle, Frank Fickling (who married Sarah Bythewood of Beaufort) when the Civil War broke out. Simkins enlisted July 28, 1861, at Grahamsville, S.C., as a private in Company C, Cavalry Battalion, Hampton Legion, and he served in West Virginia and Virginia before ending up in the hospital at Howard's Grove near Richmond in September, 1862. In December 1862, Simkins was promoted to second lieutenant and transferred to the 1st Regiment of South Carolina Artillery; during 1863, he was again promoted to first lieutenant. Simkins served in various companies at fortifications in and around the Charleston harbor until the Confederate troops abandoned Charleston in early 1865. Until the war's end, the regiment marched and fought in South and North Carolina with Rhett's brigade, which was part of the Talliaferro division of Johnston's army.

Eliza Josephine Trescot and other members of the Trescot and Bythewood families remained at the Beaufort plantation until the region was taken by U.S. forces in November, 1861. Apparently, the plantation was confiscated. With the exception of Eliza Trescot and her brother, Bocquet, the family evacuated to Madison County, Florida, where Joseph Bythewood, a son of Sarah and Benjamin Bythewood, worked a plantation called "Blythewood." Eliza obtained a teaching position with Mrs.
Catherine G. White in Monck's Corner, S.C., where she remained for almost two years before leaving in mid-1863 to take another post with the Elias Earle family in Anderson, S.C. Bocquet Trescot eventually joined the Confederate navy. In 1860, Eliza Trescot and Eldred Simkins began a correspondence which lasted through their wartime separation. They were engaged to marry, broke the engagement, and became engaged again in late 1863. After months of discussion, they were finally married in December, 1864, in Florida. Eliza remained in Florida until the end of the war, whereupon Eliza and Eldred settled on Eldred's inherited property in Monticello, Florida. Simkins practiced law with his brother, William Stewart, and in 1868, was elected Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee.

In 1871, Eldred and Eliza Simkins moved to Corsicana, Texas, where Eldred edited the local newspaper until he was elected District Attorney for the 25th Judicial District. More appointive and elective offices followed: 1882 - Regent, University of Texas; 1884 - Delegate, Democratic National Convention; 1886 & 1890 - State Senator, 15th Senatorial District; 1884 - Court of Criminal Appeals. Prior to his election to the Senate, Simkins also practiced law with his brother, William Stewart, who followed Eldred to Texas in 1873. Following Eldred's failure to win reelection to the Court in 1894, he again practiced law with his brother. This partnership was dissolved in 1899 when William Stewart Simkins accepted a teaching job at the law school of the University of Texas.

After the Civil War, Eliza's mother, Anne Maria (Bythewood) Trescot, joined her husband, Edward, who had been in Mariposa County, California, since 1849. Her son, Bocquet, who followed her to California, raised sheep in the vicinity. Neither family prospered and Bocquet, who married Matilda Givens in California in 1875, left California for Texas sometime after the late 1870's. When her husband died, Anne Maria Trescot also moved to Texas. Living alternately with both her children, Anne Trescot died in 1911 at the age of 91.

Eliza and Eldred Simkins had five children, Martha ("Mattie"), Benjamin B. ("Ben"), Joseph Stewart ("Joe"), Frances Earle ("Fannie"), and Emma. Martha, who never married, pursued a fairly successful career as a portrait artist after training in Paris and New York City. Hopeful of a career in music, Ben studied in New York City in the 1890s, but returned to Corsicana and the real estate business. Joe, born in 1877, attended the University of Texas and practiced law in Corsicana. Fannie, who also studied music, married Louis V. Rousseau in New York in 1910, had a daughter, Louise, the same year, and was divorced in 1911. She apparently supported herself by teaching. Nothing is known about the youngest child, Emma, who does not figure in the correspondence.

By 1901, Eldred Simkins was ill, and spent much time at hospitals in New York, New Jersey, and Austin, Tex. On June 25, 1903, he died. Eliza moved to Dallas after Eldred's death, but also spent time with her children in New York City, Provincetown, Mass., Woodstock, N.Y., Abilene, Tex., and Corsicana. She seems to have occupied herself by devising schemes to enlarge the family's fortune until her death in 1934.

Note: Eldred J. Simkins' middle name appears variously James and Joseph in the genealogical papers and in printed sources.

Bibliography

Artillery Organizations, C.S.A. Washington, 188-.

Scope and Content

The majority of the collection, which is arranged chronologically, consists of the correspondence of the Eldred J. Simkins family and their close relatives. Subjects covered include the gold rush and life in Mariposa County, Calif., in the 1850's and 70's, the Civil War in Charleston, S.C., from a Confederate soldier's point of view, civilian life in South Carolina and Florida during the war, and small-town Texas life during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Edward Henry Trescot, a physician, who left his family in South Carolina in 1849 to seek gold in California, wrote a series of letters home to his wife. One of his first letters contains a full description of his voyage around Cape Horn aboard the ship, "Thomas Bennet", and of his experiences in Panama. His letters from California, written infrequently in the 1850's, reveal his poverty, hard work, loneliness, and desire to return to South Carolina.
The Civil War correspondence of Eldred J. Simkins and his cousin and future wife, Eliza Josephine (Trescot) Simkins, is the highlight of the collection. These letters are remarkable for several reasons. It is unusual that the letters of both correspondents survived. Also, although Eldred and Eliza were both excellent writers, Eldred wrote particularly descriptive letters. While stationed with the 1st South Carolina Artillery Regiment in the harbor of Charleston, he wrote frequently and in detail about Confederate defenses, Federal offensives, naval engagements, the daily life of a Confederate army officer (living quarters, food, clothing, amusements), recruiting drives, prospects of a Confederate victory, etc. After the fall of Charleston in 1865, Eldred wrote of the heavy losses his regiment suffered as they marched and fought in South and North Carolina. The letters of both Eldred and Eliza are full of the unhappiness of separation and problems regarding their engagement and marriage. In their comments, and in the letters of family and friends, the hardships for civilians in wartime South Carolina are also evident.

The correspondence of the late 1860s and 1870s reveal the poverty that beset the former slaveholding family in the aftermath of the war. For the Ficklings in South Carolina, the Bythewoods in Florida, and the Trescots, now reunited in Mariposa County, California, obtaining the basic necessities seems to have been a constant struggle. Employment, food, gardens, clothing, illnesses and remedies, the political climate in South Carolina, and drought and sheep herding in California are all discussed.

The Texas letters, dating from the 1890s, are mainly those of the Eldred J. Simkins family. By the 1890's, the children of Eliza and Eldred J. Simkins were beginning to leave home. Eldred wrote newsy letters to his daughter, Martha, while she was studying art in Paris (1894-5) and in New York City (1890's) and to his son, Joseph Stewart, when he attended the University of Texas at Austin (1897-1901). These letters, as well as the letters Eliza wrote to Joseph, are about daily happenings at work, at home, and in Austin and Corsicana. There is also a series of letters (1896-1899) from William Stewart Simkins (1842-1929) to his brother, Eldred, regarding their law practice. After Eldred died in 1903, Eliza frequently wrote her son, Ben, about Eldred's estate, the need for money, and her property speculation schemes.

The collection also contains the papers of Martha Simkins and Benjamin B. Simkins. Letters and documents to and from Martha Simkins offer some insight into the life of a single woman attempting to support herself as an artist in New York City, Woodstock, N.Y., and Texas. There are also papers throughout the collection dealing with Benjamin B. Simkins' land sales and trades in Texas in the early 1900's.

Finally, a great deal of the later material in the collection (1925-1930) has to do with the Bythewood family's former plantation lands in Beaufort, S.C. Part of these lands had been confiscated by the U.S. and used by the Freedman's Bureau before being returned to the heirs. Concerning lawsuits, property management, and taxes, this material is concentrated in the correspondence of George W. Beckett, the Christensen Realty Company, Benjamin B. Simkins, and Joseph Stewart Simkins.

Some notable items include:

- SIM 89. Lee, Thomas S. To Anne Maria (Bythewood) Trescot. (1862, Jan. 7.) Sketch of Charleston, S.C., and its defenses after invasion scare.

The following letters from Eldred J. Simkins to Eliza Josephine (Trescot) Simkins:

- SIM 134. (1862, Dec. 19.) Confederate troops' food and clothing; skirmish at Dumfries, Va.
- SIM 138. (1863, July 9.) Defenses at Charleston harbor; chances of Federal forces taking Charleston.
- SIM 143. (1863, Aug. 25-26.) Yankee attacks on Battery Wagner and Fort Sumter; defenses at Charleston harbor.
- SIM 145. (1863, Sep. 7.) Abandonment of Battery Wagner and Morris Island by Confederates; description of Charleston and of U.S.S. Ironsides.
- SIM 151. (1863, Nov. 2-4.) Jefferson Davis reviews Confederate troops at Charleston harbor.
- SIM 172. (1864, July 9.) Simkins ordered to James Island, where he and his company are mixed up in Yankee lines; relative strengths of Confederate Charleston harbor positions.
- SIM 173. (1864, July 10.) Yankee assault on James Island and engagement at Battery Pringle, Charleston harbor.
- SIM 177. (1864, Aug. 8-9.) Blockade runners at Charleston harbor.
- SIM 181. (1864, Sep. 5.) Fears for Confederacy after Hood's Atlanta defeat; Yankees at Charleston harbor place Confederate prisoners on their batteries.
- SIM 191. (1864, Oct. 21.) Confederate soldiers salvaging wrecked blockade runners in Charleston harbor.
- SIM 197. (1864, Dec. 18.) Description of Savannah lines; Yankee prisoner battalion.
• SIM 204. (1865, Mar. 21.) Retreat from Charleston; Yankee looting in Charleston and Columbia.
• SIM 206. (1865, Apr. 6.) March of Simkins' brigade to North Carolina and losses sustained.
• SIM 422. Trescot, Edward Henry. To Anne Maria (Bythewood) Trescot. (1849, Aug. 16.) Long letter of gold seeker, describing his voyage from Charleston, S.C., to Panama, aboard the ship "Thomas Bennet" and his experiences in Panama.

Persons represented by 3 or more pieces consist of:
• Beckett, George W. 10 pieces, 1925-1930
• Bythewood, Elizabeth L. 16 pieces, 1864-1928
• Bythewood, Sarah (Fickling) 7 pieces, 1864-1873?
• Christensen Realty Company 6 pieces, 1928-1929
• Dandridge, Charles G. 3 pieces, 1872-1874
• Fickling, Anna Trezevant 7 pieces, 1863-1927
• Fickling, Sarah (Bythewood) 4 pieces, 1876-1877?
• Iglesias, Frances Earle (Simkins) Rousseau 8 pieces, 1898-1929
• Lee, Thomas S. 3 pieces, 1862
• Mays, Richard 3 pieces, 1903-1928
• Rodgers, S. H. 3 pieces, 1906
• Simkins, Benjamin B. 14 pieces, 1900-1930
• Simkins, Eldred J. 102 pieces, 1860-1901
• Simkins, Eliza Josephine (Trescot) 97 pieces, 1860-1917?
• Simkins, Joseph Stewart 6 pieces, 1904-1929?, 1968
• Simkins, Martha 10 pieces, c.1900-c.1940
• Simkins, William Stewart (1842-1929) 38 pieces, 1896-1922
• Trescot, Anne Maria (Bythewood) 15 pieces, 1874?-1902
• Trescot, E. Bocquet 3 pieces, 1912-1937
• Trescot, Edward Henry 10 pieces, 1849-1885
• Trescot, Sarah McCrady 10 pieces, 1915-1929

Postage Stamps
Many of the letters in the collection were retained with their original stamped envelopes. The most significant envelopes are those bearing the postage stamps of the Confederate States of America. The envelopes accompany the individual letters except where matching correspondence could not be found. The orphan envelopes are filed with the ephemera at the end of the collection.

Photographs
The Simkins Collection also contains photographs of various members of the family, including Eliza Josephine (Trescot) Simkins and Eldred J. Simkins, their children, and William Stewart Simkins. Especially interesting are a tinted ambrotype of Eliza (c. 1860), tintypes of Eliza, Eldred, and William Stewart (Feb., 1864), and full plate tintypes of the Simkins children (c. 1875). Identified photographs have been separately catalogued and given their own call numbers. Unidentified photographs will be found in a folder following the identified photographs.

Arrangement
Original correspondence, documents, and manuscripts are filed by date. Legal size letters and documents are filed together with a folder containing genealogical materials (SIM 475) and ephemera. The photographs have been placed in their own box following the correspondence. Transcripts of the original letters have been filed by correspondent and placed in a box at the end of the collection.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library's Online Catalog.

Subjects
Simkins, Eldred James, 1838-1903.
Simkins, Eliza Josephine Trescot.
Thomas Bennet (Ship)
Confederate States of America. Army -- South Carolina.
Confederate States of America. Army -- Officers.
South Carolina Artillery.
Frontier and pioneer life -- California -- Mariposa County.
Land titles -- South Carolina.
Lawyers -- Texas -- Correspondence.
Mines and mineral resources -- California -- Mariposa County.
Plantation life -- Florida -- Madison County.
Plantation life -- South Carolina -- Beaufort District.
Voyages to the Pacific coast.
Austin (Tex.) -- Social life and customs -- 19th century.
California -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
California -- Gold discoveries.
Corsicana (Tex.) -- Social life and customs -- 19th century.
Mariposa County (Calif.) -- Social life and customs -- 19th century.
South Carolina -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
South Carolina -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865.
South Carolina -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.
Texas -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.

**Forms/Genres**
Family papers -- United States.
Letters (correspondence) -- United States.
Photographs -- United States.
Tintypes -- United States.

**Additional Authors**
Simkins, Benjamin B.
Simkins, Eliza Josephine Trescot.
Simkins, Martha.
Trescot, Edward Henry.
Simkins (Family)

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**Correspondence and documents**

| Box 1 | 1842-1863 |
| Box 2 | 1864 January-September |
| Box 3 | 1864 October-1878 |
| Box 4 | 1885-1899 |
| Box 5 | 1900-1910 |
| Box 6 | 1911-1919 |
| Box 7 | 1920-1968 |
| Box 8 | Oversize; Genealogical; Ephemera |

**Box 9**
Photographs

**Box 10**
Transcripts of letters. 1849-1885