Guide to the Ellet Family Papers, 1839-1968

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Collection number: M698

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Ellet Family Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1839-1968
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Extent: 2 linear ft.
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Gift of Elizabeth Ellet Nitz and Frances Ellet Ward, 1994

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BIOGRAPHY

Mary Israel (1780-1870) and Charles Ellet (1777-1847) were married in Philadelphia in 1801. They lived alternately in the city and on two farms, one near Tullytown, Pennsylvania (purchased 1807) and one in Delaware (purchased 1818). Between 1802 and 1823 Mrs. Mary I. Ellet bore fourteen children, many of whom died in childhood or early adulthood.* At the start of the Civil War, only Charles Ellet, Jr., John I. Ellet, Edward Carpenter Ellet, and Alfred Washington Ellet were still living.

Charles Ellet, Jr. left the family farm in 1826 or 1827 to pursue a career in engineering. In 1827 he became a rodman on the Susquehanna Survey and in 1828 he entered the service of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. His success on these two early projects allowed him to go to Europe in 1830 to gain, as his mother explains it in her Memoirs, *a perfect knowledge of the
profession he had chosen." He returned to the United States in 1831 and began a successful career as one of the country’s most important engineers. He married Elvira Daniels in 1837. They had four children: Mary Virginia Ellet (later Cabell), Charles Rivers Ellet, Cornelia Ellet and William Ellet. The Charles Ellet family lived in Wheeling Virginia, Washington D.C., and finally in the country home "Clifton" in Georgetown. When the Civil War broke out Charles Ellet, Jr. joined the Union Army as a Colonel in charge of the Ram Fleet, hoping to serve his country and to put into action his innovative naval warfare strategies. These strategies proved their merit in battle near Memphis on June 6, 1862, when the fleet under Colonel Ellet's command destroyed seven out of eight engaged Confederate ships. The victory was so complete that only one Union soldier was injured. Colonel Ellet himself was hit by a Rebel bullet and died June 21, 1862 on the Steam Ram Switzerland at Cairo, Illinois. Unable to bear the loss of her husband, Elvira Ellet died two days after his burial, leaving their daughter Mary to care for her younger siblings. Their older son, Charles Rivers Ellet, had joined the army that year as a medical cadet, and (along with his uncle Alfred and cousin Eddie) was present at the battle that cost his father’s life.

John I. Ellet also left home in the late 1820s, settling near Alton, Illinois where he married Miss Laura Scarrett in 1830. Mr. and Mrs. John Ellet had several children, including John A. Ellet and Richard Ellet, who served in the Civil War under their uncle, Alfred Washington Ellet. The John Ellet family relocated several times in the coming decades, and were living in California at the time of the Civil War. Edward Carpenter Ellet attended Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, and received his degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1849. He set up practice and residence in Bunker Hills, Illinois, married Lydia Little c. 1850, and still lived in Bunker Hills in 1870 when his mother wrote her Memoir.

Alfred W. Ellet also settled in Bunker Hills, where he married Sarah Roberts and purchased a dry goods store, which he later sold to purchase a farm. Alfred Ellet joined the Union army in 1861 as a captain in the 59th Illinois Infantry. In 1862 he was called to his brother's service in the Ram Fleet, and succeeded to its command after his brother's death, obtaining the rank of Brigadier General. At the time of the Civil War Alfred and Sarah Ellet had three children, Edward Carpenter Ellet ("Eddie" who joined the army at the beginning of the war and later served under his father and uncle), Elvira ("Ellie") and William ("Willie").

General Ellet served as commander to his son and three nephews, all of whom were distinguished for bravery in fighting for the Union. Of these nephews only Charles Rivers Ellet did not survive the war. His health broken from service, he retired from duty (after some estrangement from his uncle Alfred) in the summer of 1863 to stay with his uncle Edward in Bunker Hills. He died there in October at the age of twenty, possibly from a morphine overdose.

Mrs. Mary Israel Ellet spent the last decades of her life in frequent bereavement, and in frequent travel to visit those relatives who remained spread across the country. Throughout her life she upheld values of Christianity, hard work, duty, and sacrifice, and seems to have imparted these values to most of her children and grandchildren. She died in 1870 at the age of ninety years.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection of 2 linear feet of Civil War papers was received by Stanford as a gift from Elizabeth Ellet Nitz and Frances Ellet Ward in 1994. The collection consists primarily of correspondence, including extensive letters of Brigadier General Alfred Washington Ellet to his wife, Sarah Roberts Ellet between 1861 and 1864. The collection also includes some letters from Sarah Ellet to her husband, and correspondence between various members of the Ellet family. These primary correspondents are Ellet's mother, Mrs. Mary Israel Ellet; brothers, Charles Ellet, Jr. and Edward Carpenter Ellet; sister-in-law Mrs. Elvira Daniels Ellet; niece Miss Mary Virginia Ellet (later Mrs. Cabell); nephews Charles Rivers Ellet, John Ellet and Richard Ellet; and Alfred Ellet's two younger children, Miss Elvira (Ellie) Ellet and William (Willie) Ellet.

General Ellet's letters are sent from various Union Army encampments and include descriptions of conditions, events and politics pertaining to the Civil War. They also deal with family matters, both personal and economic, as do the rest of the family letters. The letters represented in this collection are but a part of the total Ellet correspondence and a great deal of family events seem to be left out due either to the absence of certain letters or due to the limited scope of the original letters. They do, however, provide a detailed glimpse into the history of the Civil War and one of its most influential families.

War correspondence in the Ellet Collection deals primarily with General Ellet's role in the war. It includes incoming and outgoing correspondence with other military officers, including Rear Admiral Farragut, Acting Rear Admiral David D. Porter, and Secretary of War Edward M. Stanton, and various miscellany.

The collection also includes 15 pamphlets by Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr., an influential civil engineer. The last of these pamphlets regard Colonel Ellet's controversial criticism of the management of the Union Army during the Civil War. Other materials include a biography describing the career of Charles Ellet, Jr. by Gene D. Lewis, "The Memoirs of Mary Israel Ellet (1780-1870)" (Mrs. Mary I. Ellet's autobiography and the most specific information in the collection regarding the names, birth dates and death dates of Ellet family members), and "The Autobiography of Edward Carpenter Ellet." The latter was written in 1914 by the younger Edward C. Ellet (the son of Alfred and Sarah Ellet, referred to as "Eddie" in the
family letters) and describes Civil War events in which he, his father, his uncle and his cousins took part. Other biographical miscellaneous, including copies of photographs of Ellet family members, comprises the remainder of the collection. Other collections of Ellet family materials are privately owned and in other institutions.

Family Correspondence (see also oversized correspondence)

Box 1, Folder 1  Alfred Ellet to Charles Ellet, Jr.
Box 1, Folder 2  Alfred Ellet to Charles Rivers Ellet
Box 1, Folder 3  Alfred Ellet to Edward Carpenter Ellet
Box 1, Folder 4  Alfred Ellet to Miss Elvira (Ellie) Ellet
Box 1, Folder 5  Alfred Ellet to Mrs. Elvira Ellet
Box 1, Folder 6  Alfred Ellet to Miss Mary V. Ellet
Box 1, Folder 7  Alfred Ellet to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet
Box 1, Folder 8  1861-62 (includes letter of April 12, 1861, Miss Ellie Ellet to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet)
Box 1, Folder 9  Alfred Ellet to Sarah Ellet,
Box 1, Folder 10  Sept. 1861
Box 1, Folder 11  Oct. 1861
Box 1, Folder 12  Nov. 1861
Box 1, Folder 13  Dec. 1861-Jan. 1, 1862
Box 1, Folder 14  Jan. 1862
Box 1, Folder 15  Feb. 1862
Box 1, Folder 16  Mar. 1862
Box 1, Folder 17  Apr. 1862
Box 1, Folder 18  May 1862
Box 1, Folder 19  June 1862
Box 1, Folder 20  July 1862
Box 1, Folder 21  Sept. 1862
Box 1, Folder 22  Oct. 1862
Box 1, Folder 23  Nov.-Dec. 1862
Box 1, Folder 24  Jan.-Feb. 1863
Box 1, Folder 25  Mar. 1863
Box 1, Folder 26  Apr. 1863
Box 2, Folder 1  May-June 1863
Box 2, Folder 2  July 1863
Box 2, Folder 3  Aug.-Oct. 1863
Box 2, Folder 4  Nov.-Dec. 1863
Box 2, Folder 5  Jan. 1864
Box 2, Folder 6  Feb. 1864
Box 2, Folder 7  Mar. 1864
Box 2, Folder 8  Apr. 1864
Box 2, Folder 9  May 1864
Box 2, Folder 10  June 1864
Box 2, Folder 11  July 1864
Box 2, Folder 12  Aug. 1864
Box 2, Folder 13  Alfred Ellet to William "Willie" Ellet
Box 2, Folder 14  Charles Ellet, Jr. to Alfred Ellet
Box 2, Folder 15  Charles Ellet, Jr. to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet
Box 2, Folder 16  Charles Rivers Ellet to Alfred Ellet
Box 2, Folder 17  Charles Rivers Ellet to Sarah Ellet
Box 2, Folder 18  Charles Rivers Ellet to John [Ellet?]
Box 2, Folder 19  Edward Carpenter Ellet to Mrs. Hannah Davenport (sister of Mrs. Mary I. Ellet)
Box 2, Folder 20  Edward Carpenter Ellet to Alfred Ellet
Box 2, Folder 21  Edward Carpenter Ellet to Charles Ellet, Jr.
| Box 2, Folder 22 | Edward Carpenter Ellet to Sarah Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 23 | Mrs. Elvira Ellet to Edward Carpenter Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 24 | Mrs. Elvira Ellet to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 25 | Mrs. Elvira Ellet to Sarah Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 26 | John A. Ellet to Alfred Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 27 | Miss Mary V. Ellet to Alfred Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 28 | Miss Mary V. Ellet to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 29 | Miss Mary V. Ellet to Sarah Ellet |
| Box 2, Folder 30 | Mrs. Mary I. Ellet to her sons (Charles, Edward and Alfred Ellet) and their families 1860 |
| Box 2, Folder 31 | 1861-1862 |
| Box 3, Folder 1 | Mrs. Mary I. Ellet, incoming miscellaneous |
| Box 3, Folder 2 | Richard Ellet to Alfred Ellet |
| Box 3, Folder 3 | Sarah Ellet to Alfred Ellet |
| Box 3, Folder 4 | Sarah Ellet to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet |
| Box 3, Folder 5 | Sarah Ellet and Miss Ellie Ellet, miscellaneous outgoing/incoming |
| Box 3, Folder 6 | Ellet Special Orders, 1862 |
| Box 3, Folder 7 | Alfred Ellet miscellaneous: |
| | Paper regarding a bet between Ellet and S. Clemens commendations of Ellet by his men |
| | Ellet letters to newspaper editors |
| | Letters to Ellet from Mrs. Duncan |
| Box 3, Folder 8 | Rear Admiral Farragut to Alfred Ellet |
| Box 3, Folder 9 | Ordnance Office correspondence |
| Box 3, Folder 10 | Acting Rear Admiral David Porter, incoming/outgoing correspondence: Alfred Ellet; John Ellet; miscellaneous |
| Box 3, Folder 11 | Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, incoming/outgoing correspondence with Alfred Ellet |
| Box 3, Folder 12 | George White: receipts for horse sales to Alfred Ellet |
| Box 3, Folder 13 | Miscellaneous war correspondence |
| Box 3, Folder 14 | Miscellaneous lists/statistics |
| Box 3, Folder 15 | Charles Ellet, Jr. Pamphlets |
| Box 3, Folder 16 | 1839: "A Popular Exposition of the Incorrectness of the Tariffs of Toll..." |
| Box 3, Folder 17 | 1839: "Report in Relation to Water Power on the Line of the James River and Kanawha Canal" |
| Box 3, Folder 18 | 1841: "Exposition of the Causes which have Conduced to the Failure of Many Rail-Roads in the United States" |
| Box 3, Folder 19 | 1847: "Report of the President and Managers of the Schuylkill Navigation Company to the Stockholders" |
| Box 3, Folder 20 | 1848: "Report on a Rail-Way Suspension Bridge across the Connecticut..." |
| Box 3, Folder 21 | 1850: "Report on the Location of the Western Portion of the Baltimore and Ohio Rail-Road..." |
| Box 3, Folder 22 | 1850: "Second Report on the Location of the Western Portion of the Baltimore and Ohio Rail-Road..." |
| Box 3, Folder 23 | 1850: "Remarks on the Revised Comparative Estimates of the Grave Creek and Fish Creek Routes" |
| Box 3, Folder 24 | 1852: "Report on the Overflows of the Delta of the Mississippi" |
| Box 3, Folder 25 | 1854: "Report on a Suspension Bridge across the Potomac, for Rail-Road and Common Travel..." |
| Box 3, Folder 26 | 1856: "The Mountain Top Track. A Description of the Railroad across the Blue Ridge at Rock Fish Gap, in the state of Virginia" |
| Box 3, Folder 27 | 1858: "Report on the Improvement of the Kanawha and Incidentally of the Ohio River, by Means of Artificial Lakes" |
| Box 3, Folder 28 | 1858: "Report on the Tariff of Toll for the Virginia Central Rail-Road" |
| | 1862: "Military Incapacity and What it Costs the Country" |
Box 3, Folder 29

1862: "The Army of the Potomac, and its Mismanagement..."

Biographical and Miscellaneous

Box 4, Folder 1
Charles Ellet, Jr.: The Engineer as Individualist, biography by Gene D. Lewis. 1968

Box 4, Folder 2
"Memoirs of Mary Israel Ellet (1780-1870)"

Box 4, Folder 3
Writings by Edward "Eddie" Ellet (son of Alfred and Sarah Ellet):
  "An Old Time School Episode"
  Piece beginning, "I was the first member of a family of nine..."
  "Autobiography of Edward Carpenter Ellet": original manuscripts, 1914

Box 4, Folder 4
"Autobiography of Edward Carpenter Ellet", typed copy

Box 4, Folder 5
Ellet family miscellaneous:
  Later generation correspondence regarding Civil War collections
  Biographical articles

Oversized Correspondence

Box 4, Folder 6
Alfred Ellet to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet

Box 4, Folder 7
Alfred Ellet to Sarah Ellet

Box 4, Folder 8
Charles Rivers Ellet to Alfred Ellet

Box 4, Folder 9
Charles Rivers Ellet to Sarah Ellet

Box 4, Folder 10
Charles Rivers Ellet to "Uncle" (Edward Ellet?)

Box 4, Folder 11
Edward C. Ellet to Alfred Ellet

Box 4, Folder 12
Edward C. Ellet to Mrs. Mary Ellet

Box 4, Folder 13
Edward C. Ellet to Sarah Ellet

Box 4, Folder 14
Miss Mary V. Ellet to Mrs. Mary I. Ellet, including forwarding letter, Mrs. Mary I. Ellet to Alfred and Edward Ellet

Box 4, Folder 15
War Correspondence, oversized miscellaneous