Guide to the Mary Ellen Pleasant financial correspondence and notes

Collection number: MS-R102

Descriptive Summary

Title: Mary Ellen Pleasant financial correspondence and notes,
Date (inclusive): 1892-1897
Collection number: MS-R102
Creator: Pleasant, Mary Ellen, 1814-1904
Extent: 0.1 linear feet (1 oversize folder)
Repository: University of California, Irvine. Library. Special Collections and Archives.
Irvine, California 92623-9557
Abstract: This collection consists of materials documenting the financial affairs of Mary Ellen ("Mammy") Pleasant, an African American woman and entrepreneur known as the Mother of Civil Rights. Items include a small autograph note; a signed promissory note; three handwritten letters from A. P. Overton, president of the Savings Bank of Santa Rosa (California), to Pleasant; and three handwritten copy letters from Pleasant to Overton. All items concern a promissory note for $3,000 and a mortgage to a Mrs. Guimaraes.
Language: English.
Access
Collection open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Mary Ellen Pleasant Financial Correspondence and Notes. MS-R102. Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California. Date accessed.
For the benefit of current and future researchers, please cite any additional information about sources consulted in this collection, including permanent URLs, item or folder descriptions, and box/folder locations.
Acquisition Information
Acquired, 2002.
Processing Information
Processed by Olivier Muth, 2003.
Biography
Mary Ellen ("Mammy") Pleasant, called the Mother of Civil Rights, was an African American woman who was born a slave near Augusta, Georgia, in 1814. In the 1840s she married James W. Smith, a wealthy mulatto, who died suddenly between 1844 and 1848. In the 1850s, she became the wife of John James Pleasance (the name was later anglicized to "Pleasant"). In 1852, to escape persecution under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, she moved to San Francisco and ran her own boardinghouse. The money she earned was used to aid runaway slaves, provide legal assistance to them, and acquire
numerous other businesses in California. Pleasant became an expert capitalist, amassing a $30,000,000 fortune with her secret partner, Thomas Bell, a Scotsman. In 1858 she decided to return to the East Coast to help her former brother-in-law gain his freedom from slavery and to work with abolitionist John Brown. She continued to fight for this cause even after the Emancipation Proclamation and the California Right-of-Testimony (the right to testify in court) were promulgated in 1863. In 1883 she even helped challenge the powerful Senator William Sharon in a highly publicized human rights case. Mary Ellen Pleasant died in 1904.

For further biographical information, see Lynn M. Hudson, *When 'Mammy' becomes a millionaire: Mary Ellen Pleasant, an African-American entrepreneur* (dissertation: Indiana University, 1996) and Susheel Bibbs, *Heritage of power* (San Francisco: MEP Productions, 1998). A biographical article on Mary Ellen Pleasant is also available online through "MEP Productions" (http://www.mepleasant.com).

**Scope and Content of Collection**

This collection consists of materials documenting the financial affairs of Mary Ellen ("Mammy") Pleasant, an African American woman and entrepreneur known as the Mother of Civil Rights. Items include a small autograph note; a signed promissory note; three handwritten letters from A. P. Overton, president of the Savings Bank of Santa Rosa (California), to Pleasant; and three handwritten copy letters from Pleasant to Overton. All items concern a promissory note for $3,000 and a mortgage to a Mrs. Guimaraes.

**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged by genre of material.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog.

**Subjects**

Pleasant, Mary Ellen, 1814-1904 -- Archives.
Pleasant, Mary Ellen, 1814-1904 -- Finance, Personal -- Archives.
African American businesspeople -- California -- San Francisco -- Archives.
African American women -- California -- San Francisco -- Archives.

**Genres and Formats of Materials**

Letters -- California -- 19th century -- Women authors.

**Occupations**

Abolitionists.
Businesspeople.

**Other authors**

Overton, A. P.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box FB-21 : 13</th>
<th><strong>Correspondence with A. P. Overton,1897</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box FB-21 : 13</td>
<td><strong>Financial note,1894</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box FB-21 : 13</td>
<td><strong>Promissory note,1892</strong></td>
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