Finding aid of the Ella Sheldon Diaries

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Finding aid of the Ella Sheldon Diaries

Collection number: MSS 310

Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections
University of the Pacific Library
Stockton, California

Processed by:
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Ella Sheldon diaries

Dates: 1892-1904

Collection number: MSS 310

Creator: Sheldon, Ella

Collection Size: .25 linear feet

Repository: University of the Pacific Library. Holt-Atherton Dept. of Special Collections
Stockton, California 95211

Abstract: Collection consists primarily of diaries written by Sheldon while serving as a stewardess on Pacific-based steamer ships in the 1890s.

Physical location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the library's online catalog.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access
Collection open for research.

Publication Rights
Permission for publication is given on behalf of Special Collections as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the researcher.

Preferred Citation
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Biography / Administrative History

Little is known about Ella J. Sheldon (b. October 13, 1856) outside of the accounts of her being a stewardess for the Occidental & Oriental Steamship Company in the early 1890s. According to the donor, Francis Hull Charles, Sheldon may have never married and probably died in San Francisco in the late 1930s. Her diaries were passed on to her friend Heddy Smith, who gave them to the donor.

Scope and Content of Collection

Series I, Diaries, consists of the three diaries of Ella Sheldon's trips as a stewardess on steamer ships in between December 1892 and August 1894. Her diaries are filled with descriptions of the places that she visited and the passengers and crew that she worked with. Her first four voyages as a stewardess were on the steamer Belgic under Captain Walker and Captain Bryan. The Belgic sailed from San Francisco to Hong Kong and had stops in other ports in China, Japan, and Hawaii. The last voyage that she writes about is from San Francisco to Panama and back with stops at Mexican ports on the steamer Colon under Captain McKinnon. There is a forth diary of poetry and other writings that was probably written between 1914 and the 1930s.

Sheldon describes her trips in detail. She includes excursions off the boat at Hong Kong, Nagasaki, Kobe, Yokohama, and Honolulu. She suffered from Malaria and seasickness while on her journeys and had vivid discussions with madams of prostitution, missionaries, and other shipmates. In Hawaii, she learned of the leprosy colonies and was initially unable to go...
ashore due to the pending revolution. She witnessed a burial at sea and considered changing her diet after seeing the conditions in which beef cattle lived. She is articulate and witty and describes the cities and their residents that she visits in some detail.

Series II, Ephemeral Material, consists of two photocopies of photographs of Ella Sheldon and Christy Corlett from about 1900.

**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged in two series: I. Diaries, and II. Ephemeral Material.

**Indexing Terms**

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

- Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company
- Women - Diaries
- Ocean travel
- Women travelers
- Passenger ships - United States

**Series I: Diaries**

**Box 1**

- **Folder 1:** December 15, 1892 to February 17, 1893 (voyage #35 of the Belgic) to Hong Kong.
- **Folder 2:** February 23, 1893 to April 22, 1893 (#36). May 4, 1893 to July 5, 1893 (#37) to Hong Kong. July 13, 1893 to September 9, 1893 (#38) to Hong Kong. September 21, 1893 to November 18, 1893 (#39) to Hong Kong.
- **Folder 3:** June 8, 1894 to August 2, 1894 (the Colon) to Panama.
- **Folder 4:** 1914-c1930 poetry and writing.

**Series II: Ephemeral Material**

- **Folder 4:** Photocopy of photograph of Ella Sheldon with an unknown man, c.1899.
- Photocopy of photograph of Christy Corlett (a friend of Sheldon’s), 1903.