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Recommended Citation

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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 733 GENTRY, Martha Beck “Mattie” (Spangler), 1862-1940

½ box. 7 folders. 17 items. 1878-1906. Originals, photographs, typescript.

SC2021.69.1

Related collection: [MSS 713](#)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Martha Beck “Mattie” Spangler, the daughter of William V. Spangler and Harriett M. Carter, was born in Owen County, Kentucky on 2 April 1862 and lived in Covington, Kentucky as a child. From 1878-1879, Mattie attended boarding school at Hamilton College in Lexington, Kentucky, and from September 1879 to spring 1880 attended school in Orléans, France. She subsequently taught music at Corinth Academy in Corinth, Kentucky, then in 1890 married Robert Turner Gentry (1865-1950) of New Liberty, Kentucky. The couple moved to Sonora, Kentucky, where Robert founded the Bank of Sonora. Mattie Gentry died on 2 June 1940 and was interred in Sonora Cemetery, Hardin County, Kentucky.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of two journals of Mattie Spangler, a letter from a former teacher, and two photographs. Mattie’s first journal (Folder 2) covers the years 1878-1880, when she attended school at Hamilton Female College in Lexington, Kentucky, and in Orléans, France. Mattie was required to maintain that portion of the journal pertaining to Hamilton Female College, as the journal was graded from time to time with corrections and comments made by the school’s president, John T. Patterson. The journal opens with Mattie’s arrival at Hamilton College, and describes her studies, activities, teachers, friendships with other students, and struggles with homesickness. It offers an interesting look at the life of a young woman at a female school of the time: the close supervision of the president and female faculty; the restricted social opportunities provided by church, shopping, visits to classmates’ homes and other excursions; minor excitements such as a gas leak (p. 119) and a small fire (p. 143); and the undercurrent of routine and monotony. Mattie longs for Saturdays, dreads Mondays, and often thinks of home and of her two brothers traveling in the South. To provide content for her journal, she frequently summarizes President Patterson’s Bible lessons. When she takes up music studies, she is dismayed to find that she must compete against another student for a “blue ribbon” (p. 166). She refers to the prevalence of yellow fever in the South (pp. 2, 39, 67)

and relief efforts for its victims. When a fellow student becomes ill with scarlet fever (p. 115), the school is apparently closed for two weeks (p. 116). In September 1879, Mattie departs for further study in France (p. 179). Her chaperones appear to be one Etienne Quetin, a French teacher in Lexington, his wife, and two members of their household (“Mary” and “Allie,” the latter possibly Quetin’s son Alex). Mattie describes the voyage by steamer, including an unfortunate (but amusing) incident with a seasick Mary and a “vomiting can” hooked to each berth (p. 182), and a bizarre remedy for seasickness offered by an artist on board as he sketches her (p. 183). Boarding in Orléans at the “Pension Clavel,” she continues to battle homesickness and the “blues”; she complains of “ennui,” observing that students dawdle at their lessons without set times for “real” work and “real” play (p. 209). Nevertheless, Mattie makes friends with both French and English classmates, studies the French language, eyes French boys, remarks on Mardi Gras festivities (pp. 207, 211), and in one instance gives a full account (p. 198) of an average “day’s doings.” She also comments on a few school routines she finds unusual, such as remaining in session on Saturday with days off on Thursday and Sunday, and of being forbidden to write letters on any day but Thursday (p. 207). She also enjoys daily walks, but becomes angry when she and an English classmate are forbidden to walk together and are paired off with French girls (p. 214). Her stay in France ends in April 1880, after a few weeks spent in Paris shopping and sightseeing with the Quetin family.

While in Orléans, Mattie notes the receipt of a “newsy” letter from the president of Hamilton Female College, John T. Patterson (p. 205). The letter (Folder 4), is indeed newsy and remarkably personal. Patterson expresses his affection for her and warns her to keep out of “danger’s way.” He also brings her up to date on the students, teachers and routines at Hamilton Female College, making wry comments about the immaturity of some of the girls and their schemes to catch a glimpse of their beaux in town; he also offers gossip on the romantic lives of some of the teachers.

Mattie’s second journal (Folder 5) opens in April 1889. Although she has lost her father and a brother, she is happy teaching music at Corinth Academy in Corinth, Kentucky. She becomes fond of a Mrs. Montgomery, a visitor from Washington, D.C., and they develop a close friendship. Among her beaux is Robert T. Gentry, who she sometimes calls “Robin” or “Robert the Faithful.” Mrs. Montgomery, however, has urged her to marry only for love (p. 12) and she has resolved not to be pressured into marrying until she is ready (p. 49). At the end of the school year she spends time at home in New Liberty, Kentucky with her now-widowed mother, to whom she remains devoted. She reports (p. 60) that Robert and a partner plan to open a bank in Corinth. Her journal entries end in February 1890, then resume in September 1892; she is now living in Sonora, Kentucky, married to Robert and the mother of a son (p. 77). An entry in April 1894 mourns her deceased mother (p. 79). Final entries in September 1898 (pp. 87-88) note her poor health and her son starting to school. This journal also includes some clippings related primarily to Gentry family reunions in Crab Orchard, Kentucky (pp. 80-85), and later reflections on Mattie’s and her own life by Mattie’s granddaughter, Margaret (Gentry) Pounds. (pp. 93-96).

SHELF LIST

| BOX 1 | Mattie (Spangler) Gentry | 1878-1906 | 17 items |
|--------------|--|------------------|-----------------|
| Folder 1 | Inventory | | 1 item |
| Folder 2 | Journal | 1878-1880 | 1 item |
| Folder 3 | Loose items found in journal | 1890-1906, n.d. | 4 items |
| Folder 4 | Letter from John T. Patterson, Hamilton Female College | 1880 | 1 item |
| Folder 5 | Journal/scrapbook (includes 2001 addendum by Margaret Jane Pounds) | 1889-1898 | 1 item |
| Folder 6 | Loose items found in journal/scrapbook | 1903, n.d. | 7 items |
| Folder 7 | Photographs | n.d. | 2 items |

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS 733 GENTRY, Martha Beck "Mattie" (Spangler), 1862-1940 1878-1906

Journal, 1878-1880, of Mattie (Spangler) Gentry, Covington, Kentucky, chronicling her attendance at Lexington's Hamilton Female College and at boarding school in Orléans, France; also her journal, 1889-1898, recording her life as a music teacher and her courtship and marriage. Includes photographs and a letter to Mattie in France from the president of Hamilton College.

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SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Brown, Francis Headley, 1847-1926 – Relating to B1,F2,p.157
 Clay, Henry, 1777-1852 – Comments about, 1878 B1,F2,p.35
 Corinth – Comments about, 1890 B1,F5,p.69
 Corinth Academy – Corinth – Relating to B1,F5
 Diaries – Gentry, Martha Beck "Mattie" (Spangler), 1862-1940 B1,F2,5
 Flirting – Comments about, 1878 B1,F2,p.42

France – Mardi Gras B1,F2,pp.207,211
 France – New Years Day, 1880 B1,F2,p.185
 France – Paris – Travel and description, 1880 B1,F2,pp.231-240
 France – Streets – Comments about, 1880 B1,F2,p.193
 Gentry family – Relating to B1,F5,pp.80-85
 Gentry, Martha Beck “Mattie” (Spangler), 1862-1940 – Photographs B1,F7
 Gentry, Robert Turner, 1865-1950 – Relating to B1,F5,pp.41,43,45,51,55,56,60,66
 Hamilton Female College – Lexington – Relating to B1,F2,4
 New York City – Travel and description, 1879 B1,F2,p.180
 Ocean travel, 1879 B1,F2,pp.181-183
 Patterson, John Thomas, 1826-1904 B1,F4
 Patterson, John Thomas, 1826-1904 – Relating to B1,F2
 Patterson, Louisa M. “Lou” (Ragan), 1832-1915 – Comments about, 1879-1880
 B1,F2,p.150; B1,F4
 Pounds, Margaret Jane (Gentry), b. 1944 B1,F5,pp.93-96
 Quetin, Etienne, d. 1895? – Relating to B1,F2,p.179
 Ragan, Anna, b. 1852? – Comments about, 1879-1880 B1,F2,p.142; B1,F4
 Scarlet fever, 1879 – Relating to B1,F2,p.115
 Schools – Fayette County, 1878-1879 B1,F2
 Schools – Grant County, 1889-1890 B1,F5
 Schools – Orléans, France, 1880 B1,F2
 Spangler, Harriett M. (Carter), 1826-1893 – Comments about, 1894 B1,F5,p.79
 St. Clair, Franklin Pierce, 1853-1893 – Comments about, 1880 B1,F4
 St. Clair, Franklin Pierce, 1853-1893 – Relating to B1,F2,p.82
 Teachers and teaching – Grant County, 1879-1880 B1,F5
 Withers, William Temple, 1825-1889 – Relating to B1,F2,p.43
 Yellow fever, 1878 – Relating to B1,F2,pp.2,39,67

Niedermeier 12/09/2021