

C Stephens, Margaret Nelson (1862-1929), Papers, 1823-1927
311 .8 linear feet

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INTRODUCTION

The diaries of Margaret Nelson Stephens, the wife of Missouri Governor Lon V. Stephens, 1897-1901, document her daily life from 1876 to 1927. Genealogy notes describe Margaret's ancestry and other documents cover a wide range of topics pertaining to relatives through her sister Nadine's marriage to Charles E. Leonard. Most deal with Charles E. Leonard himself, and his brothers Leverett and Abiel. Two Missouri Militia muster rolls, 1862-1863, and a bill of sale for slaves, 1849, are most notable.

DONOR INFORMATION

Transcripts of Margaret Nelson Stephens's diaries for 1897 to 1903 were donated to the University of Missouri by Mary Pat Abele for Missouri Mansion Preservation, Inc. on 13 June 1977 (Accession No. 4082). Material was transferred from the State Historical Society on 22 October 2002 (Accession No. 5956). An addition to the collection was made on 18 March 2010 by Laurel Wilson.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Margaret Nelson Stephens from Boonville, Missouri, had two brothers and one sister. Both of her parents, James M. Nelson (b. 1816) and Margaret (Wyan) Nelson were from prominent Boonville, Missouri, business families. Margaret was a capable and accomplished student who was educated at the Cooper Institute of Boonville and at Mrs. Reid's Select School in New York City. She chose as her husband Lon V. Stephens, a boy from another prominent local family, and they wed on 5 October 1880. In 1890 the couple moved to Jefferson City. Her husband eventually became Governor of Missouri, and Margaret performed exceptionally as governor's wife from 1897 to 1901. They had no children. After Lon V. Stephens's death in 1923, Margaret married John W. Johnson of St. Petersburg, Florida, on 26 March 1928. She died on 17 April 1929 and was buried next to her first husband in Boonville.

As a governor's wife, she had a reputation as a charming, stylish, and graceful hostess who was fond of entertainment, beautiful clothes, and the company of young people. She also advocated temperance, was active in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and made numerous visits to the inmates of the state prison. A contemporary biography of Margaret describes her impact:

In her high position she has elevated the standards of society in the capital city, and placed higher ideals before the people, affording evidence that public life may be adorned with the same refinement and uplifting graces which beautify the home. (Howard L. Conrad, ed. *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri*, v. VI, 1901, p. 74).

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The bulk of this collection is made up of diaries kept by Margaret Nelson Stephens between 1876 and 1927. Genealogical notes cover the Nelson, Shanks, and Wyan families. Assorted other records in this collection pertain to the Leonard family of Cooper County, Missouri,

related to Margaret through the marriage of her sister Nadine to Charles E. Leonard. The records are divided into the following categories:

Diaries**Correspondence****Poetry****Genealogy of Nelson, Shanks, and Wyan Families****Family Financial Records****Muster Rolls****Miscellaneous**

The **Diaries**, 1875-1927, document most of her life from age 13 to 41, with some significant lapses. The diaries from 1897 to 1903 are transcripts. The frequency of entries varies, but diaries kept after 1906 tend to have daily entries. Her diary entries describe daily life in considerable detail, including travels throughout Missouri, to Washington, D.C., and to Hot Springs, Arkansas, illnesses, family events, church meetings, society entertainment, and pastimes. The volume documenting 1879 to 1892 contains 3 specimens of pressed plant material, so care should be used to avoid spilling them.

Correspondence, 1877, 1882, n.d., contains two personal letters to Margaret Nelson Stephens from one of her sisters, 1877, and two business letters, 1882, n.d., sent from Europe by Abiel Leonard to his brother Charles E. Leonard. One of these discusses business meetings, importation of livestock, and the nature of polled cattle; including prices, market demand, and characteristics of the breed.

Poetry, 1859, 1874, contains three documents. Two of these are short anonymous love poems in honor of Leverett Leonard brother of Charles E. Leonard. The third document, "Carriers Address – January 1st, 1874," is three pages. Though unsigned, Margaret Nelson Stephens probably wrote this last document.

Genealogy of Nelson, Wyan and Shanks Families, n.d., consists of two typed documents, totaling four pages. Focus is given to the arrival of the families in Missouri.

Family Financial Records, 1823, 1849, 1863, 1894-1895, contain records of assorted financial transactions. Typed copies of receipts for education expenses paid by David Shanks on behalf of John and Eliza Shanks, 1823, and a manuscript copy of a bill of sale paid by Nathaniel Leonard for three slaves, 1849, are most notable. The other four bills and receipts document miscellaneous purchases by Charles Leonard, 1863, Phi Lambda Epsilon fraternity, 1894, and A.H. Nelson, 1895.

Two **Muster Rolls** for Company H, 52nd Regiment, Missouri Militia, 22 July 1862 and 1 March 1863, record the names, ages, and membership dates of individual soldiers, including Captain Charles E. Leonard.

Miscellaneous records contain a photocopy of "Specifications of the Labor and Work required in the construction of the new Brick dwelling for Mr. Chas E. Leonard – Bell Air, Cooper County, Missouri." A memorial booklet for James Martin Nelson contains reprinted articles written to commemorate his life, 1902.

FOLDER LIST

- f. 1 Diary, 1875 April-August
- f. 1a Diary, 1875 September-1876 September
- f. 1b Diary, 1876 October-1877
- f. 2 Diary, 1878
- f. 3 Diary, 1879-1892
- f. 3a Diary, 1894-1896
- f. 4 Diary, 1897 (transcript)
- f. 5 Diary, 1898 (transcript)
- f. 6 Diary, 1900 (transcript)
- f. 7 Diary, 1900-1903 (transcript)
- f. 8 Diaries, 1906-1907
- f. 9 Diaries, 1908, 1911
- f. 10 Diaries, 1913, 1915
- f. 11 Diaries, 1916-1917
- f. 12 Diaries, 1918, 1920
- f. 13 Diaries, 1921, 1927
- f. 14 Correspondence, 1877, 1882, n.d.
- f. 15 Poetry, 1859, 1874
- f. 16 Genealogy of Nelson, Wyan, and Shanks Families, n.d.
- f. 17 Family Financial Records, 1823, 1849, 1863, 1894-1895
- f. 18 Muster Rolls, 1862-1863
- f. 19 Miscellaneous, 1859, 1902, n.d.

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