

C Searing, Laura Redden (1839-1923), Papers, 1846-1963
2290 4 linear feet

This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri. If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

INTRODUCTION

The papers of Laura Redden Searing, a poet and author whose works appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines, consist of correspondence, newspaper clippings, photographs, and Searing's writings. Also included are correspondence, publicity clippings, and photographs of Searing's daughter, Elsa Searing McGinn.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Laura Redden Searing Papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Searing's great-grandson, Thomas McGinn Smith, on 5 January 1998 (Accession No. 5744). Additions to the collection were made on 14 April 1998, 28 July 1998, 12 January 1999, and 16 August 2000. The papers are part of the National Women and Media Collection.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Laura Catherine Redden was born on 9 February 1839 in Somerset County, Maryland. (There is some dispute over the date- many sources, including some written in Searing's own hand, list 1840 as her birth year). Her family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, when she was a child. At about the age of eleven or twelve, Redden lost her hearing as the result of a bout with spinal meningitis.

She spent a brief time with a family in Pekin, Illinois, before enrolling at the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in Fulton, Missouri, in 1855. In 1858 she returned to St. Louis and took a job as editor of the *St. Louis Presbyterian* and also wrote a number of poems and articles that appeared in the *Missouri Republican* under the penname Howard Glyndon.

Shortly after the beginning of the Civil War Redden was sent to cover Washington, D.C. for the *Republican*. In 1862 she published her first book, *Notable Men*, a collection of biographies of member of Congress. Two years later she published a book of poems, *Idylls of Battle*. She also composed the words to the song "Belle Missouri" which became the war song for the state. During the war she befriended many political and military figures including General Ulysses S. Grant and Senator George F. Edmunds.

In 1865 she went to Europe to study the French, German, Italian, and Spanish languages. She spent much of the next three years in Italy, writing stories for the *New York Times*, *New York Sun*, *Missouri Republican*, and various magazines, as well as collecting material for the U.S. Department of Agriculture on orange and silkworm culture. She kept company with some of the prominent men and women who lived and traveled in Europe including Empress Eugenie of France, publisher Howard Ticknor, and writer Bayard Taylor.

She also met and fell in love with artist Michael Brennan while in Italy. They became engaged but Brennan suffered an aneurysm and died after Redden had returned to New York in 1868. Upon her return she wrote articles and poems for the *New York Evening Mail* and magazines such as *Harper's*, *Putnam's*, and *The Silent Worker*.

In 1870, she entered the Clarke Institution to study speech and lip reading. After two years at the institution she studied under Alexander Graham Bell for a year and then entered the

Whipple Home School for the Deaf and Dumb in Mystic River, Connecticut. Although never able to master lip reading, Redden did regain a limited ability to speak and, in her newspaper articles, advocated the teaching of speech, along with sign language, in all schools for the deaf.

After publishing her second book of poetry, *Sounds from Secret Chambers*, in 1873, she spent the next two years traveling in Cuba, New Orleans, and the American West, returning to New York in December 1875. In 1876 she married Edward Whelan Searing, a lawyer from New York. They had one child Elsa Waller Searing on 4 May 1880, and separated a short time later. Searing received a divorce from her husband in 1889.

In 1886 Searing and her daughter moved to Santa Cruz, California. In 1896, Elsa enrolled at Miss Head's Preparatory School for Girls in Berkeley and in 1898 she went to San Francisco to find work. Not long after, she moved to Alaska and married Roderick Marston. Elsa returned to California alone in 1901 and divorced Marston in 1904. That same year she went back to Alaska and married attorney John L. McGinn. They had two children, Laura and John. Searing stayed with her daughter's family for a time in Fairbanks.

In 1916, the McGinns and Searing moved to San Mateo, California, where Elsa became involved in politics and civic affairs. During World War I she chaired the county's liberty bond drive. She also headed the San Mateo Woman's Club for five terms and was appointed Chairman of Community Service in San Mateo County in 1920.

That same year, McGinn was the top vote getter for the position of town trustee and was chosen to head the Commission of Public Health and Safety that oversaw the fire department. She was appointed acting mayor when the elected mayor became ill. After running unsuccessfully for the state legislature in 1926, she served on the San Mateo Planning Commission from 1931 to 1952.

Laura Redden Searing died at the home of her daughter on 10 August 1923. Elsa Searing McGinn died on 13 May 1963.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Laura Redden Searing Papers consist of the correspondence, photographs, and writings of Searing and her daughter Elsa McGinn. The papers document Searing's work as a poet and author and McGinn's youthful exploits in San Francisco and Alaska. They are divided into six series: **Correspondence, Articles, Poetry, Other Writings, Photographs, and Subject Files.**

The **Correspondence** series contains letters, arranged chronologically, to Searing from her family, friends, publishers, and many acquaintances. Elsa's letters from Alaska describe in great detail the perilous journey to reach her betrothed, Roderick Marston, and the hardships faced by those living in Alaska during the gold rush.

This series also contains notes, most written on the backs of envelopes, which appear to be part of Searing's day-to-day communication with her daughter and others. These notes are interesting in that they provide a glimpse into some of the daily conversations that are usually not recorded.

The **Articles** series contains Searing writings that appeared in newspapers and magazines. Searing pasted these articles into books which were arranged either by the name of the publication or the topic which was covered. Topics include women's issues, teaching of the hearing impaired, Washington, D.C. gossip, and accounts of her travels around the country and the world. The articles have been photocopied for preservation purposes and the originals were returned to the donor. They are arranged alphabetically.

The **Poetry** series consists of both published and unpublished poems by Searing. In addition to *Sounds From Secret Chambers*, a book of Searing's poetry, *Echoes of Other Days*, which was compiled by her daughter in 1921, is included in this series but her first volume, *Idylls of Battle*, is not.

Many original handwritten poems are also contained in this series, as is a scrapbook of criticisms, notices, and correspondence relating to her work. Notable correspondents include Joaquin Miller and John Wilkes Booth. The series is arranged alphabetically by title.

The **Other Writings** series contains Searing's diaries and notes from her trips to Cuba and Italy as well as miscellaneous articles and short stories. The diary of her Italian experiences has been transcribed and a copy included in the collection. This series is arranged alphabetically by title.

The **Photographs** series includes photographs of Searing, her family, and friends. One album with photographs from the 1860s and 1870s is a fine example of a carte de visite album. Also of note in this series are a small notebook filled with personal snapshots from the mid-1890s and a photo album containing pictures of Elsa Searing McGinn spanning the 1900s to 1940s.

The **Subject Files** series contains biographical and publicity materials on Searing and McGinn and also some of McGinn's writing. Legal and financial documents and other miscellaneous items are included, such as the program from President Grant's inauguration and an advertisement for Switzler's *Illustrated History of Missouri*.

FOLDER LIST

Correspondence Series

This series contains letters, arranged chronologically, to Searing from her family, friends, publishers, and many acquaintances. The series also includes many letters written by Searing to her family during her teen years when she was at the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and offer insight into her early frustration at being labeled deaf and dumb and of being away from home. Letters written between Searing and two close friends, George Sluter and Newton Bartholow, reveal her passion to work professionally as a writer.

Later correspondence in this series includes letters from Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), John Greenleaf Whittier, Bayard Taylor, Ulysses S. Grant, Emily Howland, Celia Thaxter, Ina Coolbrith, and other prominent literary and political figures.

In the mid-1880s a series of letters from Chancy Barns, a St. Louis publisher, detail her efforts to publish a volume on the Mormon Church, which was to be subtitled, "The Plague of Utah." Searing was in the midst of her divorce and was unable to secure the funding to complete the project.

Letters from this period show how Searing was struggling financially due to her inability to get a fair divorce settlement from her husband. Correspondence from her siblings in Missouri, New Orleans, and Maryland describe some of the difficulties of raising their families.

Elsa's letters from Alaska describe in great detail the perilous journey to reach her betrothed, Roderick Marston, and the hardships faced by those living in Alaska. Elsa also describes in similar detail and excitement New York's subway system and the amusements at Coney Island, such as the Steeple Chase, during her visit there in 1920.

This series also contains notes, most written on the backs of envelopes, which appear to be part of Searing's day-to-day communication with her daughter and others. These notes are interesting in that they provide a glimpse into some of the daily conversations that are not usually recorded.

f. 1	1846-1957
f. 2-3	1858-1859
f. 4-6	1860-1862
f. 7-8	1863-1865
f. 9	1867-1869
f. 10	1870-1871
f. 11	1872
f. 12	1873
f. 13	1874-1876
f. 14	1877-1878
f. 15	1879
f. 16	1880 January-September
f. 17	1880 October-1881 February
f. 18	1881 March-April
f. 19	1881 May-August
f. 20	1881 September-December
f. 21	1882-1883
f. 22	1884 January-February
f. 23	1884 March 2-20
f. 24	1884 March 21-April 15
f. 25	1884 April 16-May
f. 26	1884 June-September
f. 27	1884 October-1885 April
f. 28	1885 June-December
f. 29	1886 January-May
f. 30	1886 June
f. 31	1886 July-October
f. 32	1886 November-1887 August
f. 33	1887 September-1888
f. 34	1889; 1880s, n.d.
f. 35	1890-1891
f. 36	1892
f. 37	1893 January-July
f. 38	1893 August-1894 January
f. 39	1894 February-May
f. 40	1894 June-December
f. 41	1895
f. 42	1896 January-August
f. 43	1896 September-1897 September
f. 44	1897 October
f. 45	1897 November

f. 46	1897 December
f. 47	1898 January-March
f. 48	1898 April-May
f. 49	1898 June-October
f. 50	1898 November-1899 January
f. 51	1899 February-April
f. 52	1899 May-October
f. 53	1899 November-December
f. 54	1900 January-June
f. 55	1900 July-1908
f. 56	1909-1920
f. 57	1923 July-August 19
f. 58	1923 August 21-1960
f. 59	Letterbook, 1865-1880
f. 60-61	n.d.
f. 62	Notes

Articles Series

These are Searing writings that appeared in newspapers and magazines. Searing pasted these articles into books which were arranged either by the name of the publication or the topic which was covered. Topics include women's issues such as fashion, employment, and suffrage; teaching of the deaf; Washington, D.C., gossip; and accounts of her travels around the country and around the world. The articles have been photocopied for preservation purposes and the originals were returned to the donor. They are arranged alphabetically by name of publication or topic.

f. 63	About Women
f. 64	<i>Auburn News</i>
f. 65	<i>Christian Union</i>
f. 66	Deaf and Dumb, 1872
f. 67	<i>Evening Mail</i>
f. 68	<i>Evening Star and Republican</i>
f. 69	Farm and Garden
f. 70	Foreign Findings, 1870-1871
f. 71	<i>Herald of Health</i> , 1871-1872
f. 72	<i>Metropolitan</i>
f. 73	Miscellaneous
f. 74	Miscellaneous Prose, Volume I
f. 75	Miscellaneous Prose, Volume II
f. 76	Miscellaneous Prose, Volume III
f. 77	<i>St. Louis Republican</i>

Poetry Series

The **Poetry** series consists of both published and unpublished poems by Searing. She wrote many poems about the places she lived or visited including Santa Cruz and Alaska. *Sounds From Secret Chambers*, a book of Searing's poetry, and *Echoes of Other Days*, which was compiled by her daughter in 1921, is included in this series but her first volume, *Idylls of Battle*, is not.

Many original handwritten poems are also contained in this series, as is a scrapbook of criticisms, notices, and correspondence relating to her work. Notable correspondents include Joaquin Miller and John Wilkes Booth. The series is arranged alphabetically by title.

f. 78	<i>Echoes of Other Days</i>
f. 79	<i>Greetings From the Tanana</i>
f. 80	<i>The Hills of Santa Cruz</i>
f. 81-82	Miscellaneous Poems
f. 83	<i>Of El Dorado</i>
f. 84	<i>Of Santa Cruz</i>
f. 85-86	Original Poems Book
f. 87	Original Poems, A-G
f. 88	Original Poems, H-O
f. 89	Original Poems, P-Y
f. 90	<i>Sounds From Secret Chambers</i>
f. 91-92	Unidentified Poems and Fragments
f. 93	Criticisms, Notices, and Correspondence

Other Writings Series

This series contains Searing's diaries and notes from her trips to Cuba and Italy in addition to miscellaneous articles and short stories. This series is arranged alphabetically by title.

f. 94-103	Cuba Notes
f. 104	"The Dress Reform Question"
f. 105	"In Defense of Country Living"
f. 106-108	Italy Diary
f. 109	"Little Pretty"
f. 110	"Marriages of Maturity"
f. 111-112	Miscellaneous
f. 113	Miscellaneous- England
f. 114	Miscellaneous- Fragments
f. 115	Miscellaneous- New England
f. 116	Miscellaneous- Women
f. 117	"The Mormon Question"
f. 118	"President Lincoln's Life Might Have Been Saved"
f. 119	"Salmon Fishing in Monterey Bay, California"
f. 120	"The Sheridans"

- f. 121 Story Ideas
- f. 122 "Their First Christmas in the Tanana"
- f. 123 "Who Was Your Great Grandfather?"

Photographs Series

The series includes photographs of Searing, her family, and friends, which are arranged chronologically. One album with photographs from the 1860s and 1870s is a fine example of a carte de visite album. Among those pictured are Ulysses S. Grant, Abraham Lincoln, Emily Howland, Bayard Taylor, and Lydia Huntley Sigourney.

Also of note in this series are a small notebook filled with personal snapshots from the mid-1890s and a photo album containing pictures of Elsa Searing McGinn spanning the 1900s to 1940s. The photographs in the notebook appear to be those of McGinn and her friends taken about the time she was in school at Berkeley. It is unique in that the pictures are lighter

hearted than the formal poses one would expect to see from this period. The photographs in McGinn's album shows her zest for life as she dressed up in a variety of costumes for the camera and always looked like she was having the time of her life.

- f. 124-125 Album, 1860s and 1870s
- f. 126 Album, 1900s-1940s
- f. 127 1850s and 1860s
- f. 128 1870s
- f. 129 1880s
- f. 130 1890s
- f. 131 1900s
- f. 132 1910s
- f. 133 1920s-1940s

Subject Files Series

This series contains biographical and publicity materials on Searing and McGinn and also some of McGinn's writings, arranged alphabetically by topic. Legal and financial documents and other miscellaneous items are included such as the program from President Grant's inauguration and an advertisement for Switzler's *Illustrated History of Missouri*.

- f. 134 Elsa McGinn, California Senate Resolution
- f. 135-136 Elsa McGinn, Publicity Clippings
- f. 137 Elsa McGinn, Writings
- f. 138 Financial and Legal Documents, 1860s-1890s
- f. 139 Financial and Legal Documents, 1900s-1910s
- f. 140 Miscellaneous
- f. 141 Personal
- f. 142 Publicity Clippings

INDEX TERMS

Subject	Folders	Image
Agriculture, 1880s	69	
Alaska, Dawson, 1898	52,54	y
Alaska--Description and travel, 1899	51-53	
Alaska--Description and travel, 1900	54	
Alcoholism	1	
Badeau, Adam (1831-1895)	8	
Barns, Chancy R.	17-26,140	
Bartholow, J. Newton	5-7,9	
Beecher, Henry Ward (1813-1887)	12,76	
Bell, Alexander Graham (1847-1922)	21,26,73,138	
Bierce, Ambrose G. (1842-1914?)	41	
Blacks--Missouri, Kansas City, 1870s	75	
Blacks--Washington, D.C., 1884	68	
Booth, Edwin Thomas (1833-1893)	16	
Booth, John Wilkes (1838-1865)	93,140	
Canada--Description and travel, 1870s	74-76	
Castilla (Cruiser)	50	y
Children--Medical care, 1880s	16,17,19,20	
Church and State--Mormon Church	17,18,20,21,24,117	
Circus, 1871	75	
Civil service, 1898	47	
Civil War--Missouri	6	
Civil War--Reminiscences	140	
Civil War--Washington, D.C.	76	
Clarke Institution, Northampton, Massachusetts	66	
Clemens, Samuel Langhorne (1835-1910)	18,19	
Colfax, Schuyler (1823-1885)	8,10,64,74	
Columbian Exposition, 1893	37	y
Comstock, Cyrus Ballou (1831-1910)	7,64	
Converts, Catholic	52	
Coolbrith, Ina (1841-1928)	45-47, 56	
Cuba--Description and travel, 1870s	75,94-103	
Dating (Social customs), 1865	7	
Dating (Social customs), 1876	14	
Dawes, Henry Laurens (1816-1903)	23	
Deaf	1,9,48,51,53,66,68,73,75,141,142	

Subject	Folders	Image
Deaf--Education	1,66,68,73,75,141	
Deaf--Means of communication	1,9,53,66,68,73,75,141	
Divorce, 1880s	29,31-34,39,41,60,138	
Drug abuse	74	
Earthquakes--San Francisco, 1906	135	
Edmunds, George F. (1828-1919)	24, 68	
Eisenhower, Dwight David (1890-1969)	58	
Emancipation Day, 1884	68	
Europe--Description and travel, 1860s	59, 76, 106-108	
Exhibitions--Columbian Exposition, 1893	37	y
Exhibitions--Paris Exposition, 1900	54	
Fashion, 1870s	65, 67	
Fischer, Angie Fuller	48, 50	
Freemasons	1	
Gallaudet, Edward Miner (1837-1917)	23, 24, 30	
Gallaudet, Thomas (1822-1902)	51, 66	
Garfield, James A. (1831-1881)--Assassination	19, 20, 75	
Germany, 1870s	70	
Gladden, Washington (1836-1918)	14	
Grant, Ulysses Simpson (1822-1885)	7, 8, 64, 68, 74, 140	
Grant, Ulysses Simpson (1822-1885)	125	y
Grant, Ulysses Simpson (1822-1885)--Inauguration	64, 140	
Greeley, Horace (1811-1872)	6, 76	
Hearst, Phebe A. (1842-1919)	38, 39, 41, 46	
Herter, Christian A. (1895-1967)	251	
Howland, Emily (1827-1929)	19, 21-26, 30, 31, 33, 38-41, 43, 57, 75	
Howland, Emily (1827-1929)	129	y
Illustrated History of Missouri	140	
Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, Fulton, Missouri	1, 76	
Lincoln, Abraham (1809-1865)	127	y
Lincoln, Abraham (1809-1865)--Assassination	8, 118	
Lincoln, Abraham (1809-1865)--Cartoons and caricatures	140	y
Lincoln, Mary Todd (1818-1882)	75	
Louisiana, New Orleans--Description and travel, 1883	75	
McComb, William	18	
McGinn family	131-133, 140	y
McGinn, Elsa Searing (1880-1963)	16, 43-58, 134-137, 139	

Subject	Folders	Image
McGinn, Elsa Searing (1880-1963)	126, 129-133, 140	y
Medical care, 1870s	71	
Miller, Joaquin (1837-1913)	13, 61, 93	
Missouri, Boonville--Description and travel, 1875	75	
Missouri, Fulton--Description and travel, 1875	75	
Missouri, Jefferson City--Description and travel, 1875	75	
Missouri, St. Louis--Politics and government, 1865	8	
Missouri. Constitutional Convention, 1865	8	
Missouri. Constitutional Convention, 1865	8	
Missouri. Militia	1	
Money--Confederate States of America	93	
Mormons--Attitudes toward	17-20, 22, 117	
Morse, Samuel F. (1791-1872)	75	
National Women and Media Collection		
New Hampshire, Isles of Shoals--Description and travel, 1870s	76	
New York, New York--Description and travel, 1920	56	
New York, Sherwood--Description and travel	75	
Paris Exposition, 1900	54	
Phelan, James D. (1861-1930)	41-43, 45, 47, 60, 136	
Poetry	78-93	
Porter, Horace (1837-1921)	10	
Redden family	1, 7, 8, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 25-29, 31, 32, 35-40, 46, 47, 52, 54-56, 140, 141	y
Redden family--Genealogy	57, 141	
Reid, Whitelaw (1837-1912)	7, 8, 13, 36, 125	y
Reina Cristina (Cruiser)	50	y
Roosevelt, Theodore (1858-1919)	56	
Rose City Cannery, Santa Rosa, California, 1898	130	y
Searing family	13-16, 25, 33, 56, 58, 139	
Searing family	127, 129	y
Searing, Edward	127-130	y
Searing, Edward W.	15, 29, 31-34, 36, 38-43, 59, 141	
Searing, Laura C. Redden (1839-1923)	1-142	
Searing, Laura C. Redden (1839-1923)	124, 126-128, 131-133	y
Sigourney, Lydia Huntley (1791-1865)	4, 64	
Sigourney, Lydia Huntley (1791-1865)	125	y

Subject	Folders	Image
Sluter, George	1-5, 28	
Snapshots, c1896	130	y
Spanish-American War, 1898	50	y
St. Louis Presbyterian	3, 4	
Steamboats	1	
Stevens, Thaddeus (1792-1868)	6	
Stevenson, Robert Louis (1850-1894)	36	
Taylor, Bayard (1825-1878)	9-14, 21, 27, 41, 60, 76	
Taylor, Bayard (1825-1878)	125	y
Thaxter, Celia (1835-1894)	10, 12	
Thomas H. Gallaudet Memorial	34	
Ticknor, Howard M.	10-13, 124	y
Warren, Earl (1891-1974)	151, 203, 468, 501, 1162, 2342, 4482	
Warren, Earl (1891-1974)	58	
Whipple's Home School for Deaf Mutes, Mystic River, Connecticut	73, 75, 141	
Whitman, Walt (1819-1892)	75	
Whittier, John Greenleaf (1807-1892)	11-14, 17, 19, 27, 33, 36, 61	
Wife abuse	141	
Women athletes, 1900s	135	
Women authors	63	
Women journalists	3-6	
Women poets	4	
Women politicians	135, 136	
Women--Civil rights	2, 21, 32, 63	
Women--Employment	18, 39, 49-51, 63	
Women--Fashion, 1870s	63, 71-73, 75	
Women--Housing, 1870s	63, 75	
Women--Marriage	63, 73	
Women--Mormon--Civil rights	21	
Women's movement	64-73	
Women--Suffrage	135	