

S Symington Family Papers, 1775 - 2010
1211 0.2 cubic feet

This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri. If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org.

INTRODUCTION

The Symington Family Papers contain genealogical research on the Johnston, Boggs, and Symington families 1775 to 2010, as well as correspondence to members of the Johnston and Symington families 1817 to 1883.

DONOR INFORMATION

The papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Stuart Symington, Jr. on August 25, 2017 (Accession No. SA1208).

PREFERRED CITATION:

Specific item; box number; folder number; *The Symington Family Papers* (S1211); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-STL].

RELATED COLLECTIONS

S0433 *Symington, James W., Papers, 1965-1976*
SA0996 *Symington, James W., Addenda*
C3562 *Symington, Stuart (1901-1988), Papers, 1953-1976*
C3637 *Symington, Stuart (1901-1988), Scrapbooks, 1945-1976*
C3874 *Symington, W. Stuart (1901-1988), Papers, 1918-1995*
C4159 *Symington, Stuart, Jr., Interview, 1994*

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Symington Family Papers contains correspondence to and from several members of the Symington family, however, John Symington, Sr., 1797-1864 and his wife Elizabeth McCaw Johnston Symington, 1807-1878, and their son, William Symington, 1841-1899 are the most notable and recurrent within the papers.

John D. Symington, Sr., 1797-1864 was born in Delaware to James Symington and Margaret Fife Duff Symington. He graduated from the Military Academy in 1815 and served on ordnance duty at various arsenals throughout his military career, including command of St. Louis Arsenal in the 1830s. On September 17, 1862, while under Symington's command, the Allegheny Arsenal outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, blew up with the loss of 78 lives, making it the largest civilian disaster of the war. Controversy surrounded the explosion, but the court concluded that the cause of the explosion could not be determined and Symington was found innocent of any wrongdoing. He retired from active service, June 1, 1863 and died April 4, 1864 in Maryland.

Elizabeth McCaw Johnston Symington, 1807-1878, daughter of Robert Johnston and Elizabeth McCaw Johnston, married John D. Symington Sr. ca. 1830. Together they had four children: Mary "Molly" Sophia Symington Boggs, 1831-1906, William Newton Symington, 1841-1899, and John D Symington, Jr., 1846-1894, all of whom are

represented in the letters. Elizabeth's sister, Mary Johnston Pickett, 1805-1860 was the mother of Confederate Major General George Edward Pickett, 1825-1875.

William Newton Symington, 1841-1899, son of Elizabeth McCaw Johnston Symington and John D. Symington, Sr. was born in at Washington Arsenal, District of Columbia. He studied at Lafayette College in Easton Pennsylvania, as well as Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Later in life he studied in Freiberg, Germany and School of Mines, Paris, France. At the onset of the Civil War, William volunteered for the Confederacy. He was captured near Wilmington, North Carolina in May 1864 while trying to run a blockade, and was a prisoner of the Union for seven months at Fort LaFayette, New York and Fort Warren, Massachusetts. After his release in 1865, William was commissioned as Captain in the Corps of Engineers. After the war, he continued his career as mining engineer and metallurgist, at one point working in St. Louis, Missouri. He married Florence DeTreville in New York in 1883, and he died in North Carolina.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers have been arranged into the two series, **Genealogy** and **Correspondence**, with the first four folders containing genealogical materials, and the remaining twelve folders containing correspondence.

The **correspondence** is arranged by individual and chronologically. There are several notable items within the correspondence.

A letter from John Symington's subordinates at the Allegheny Arsenal pledging their support to Symington despite the controversy, can be found in folder 9. Letters regarding William Symington's imprisonment can be found in folders 12-14. He was exchanged in 1865 by personal intervention of Abraham Lincoln, and a photocopy of this letter can be found in folder 1. The politics regarding William's exchange involve his uncle, Whig Andrew Johnston and his friendship with Lincoln. The politics of the exchange are detailed in the MA thesis in folder 2, entitled "Lincoln's Relationship with Four Quincy, Illinois Republicans" by Norma Lorene Johnston, 1955. A letter from John D. Symington, Sr. to his brother in law, Robert Pickett, regarding George Pickett's admittance into the Military Academy, can be found in folder 6. Letters to Mary "Molly" Symington Boggs can be found in folder 10, including love letters from Brigadier General William R. Boggs, which he signed "WRB."

FOLDER LIST

- f. 1 Assorted, photocopied genealogical and research materials regarding Abraham Lincoln, George E. Pickett, and the Symington family
- f. 2 Photocopy of unpublished thesis: "Lincoln's Relationship with Four Quincy Republicans" by Norma Lorene Johnston, 1955, University of Wisconsin.
- f. 3 Handwritten Symington-Boggs family tree, prepared ca. 1860, listing births, deaths, and marriages between 1775-1858
- f. 4 Handwritten book, "Narrative of the Descendants of Robert Johnston and Elizabeth McCaw." Originally prepared for Edith Symington in 1884; additions made ca. 1960.

- f. 5 Correspondence between members of the Johnston family, including Elizabeth McCaw Johnston Symington, her brothers Andrew, James, and Robert Johnston, Jr., and their parents, Robert Johnston Sr. and Elizabeth McCaw Johnston, 1817-1829
- f. 6 Letter from John Symington, Sr. to his brother in law Robert Pickett, 1839, regarding George Pickett. Letter is written on the back of "Regulations Relative to the Admission of Cadets in to the Military Academy," War Department, January 1840
- f. 7 Letters to John Symington, Sr. from Union sympathizers regarding the display of the American flag, 1861
- f. 8 Letter to John Symington from Abraham Lincoln, 1862
- f. 9 Letter to John Symington, November 3, 1862, from his subordinates at Allegheny Arsenal, Pennsylvania, pledging their support for him after the arsenal explosion in September 1862
- f. 10 Letters to Mary "Molly" Symington Boggs, 1847 – 1871
- f. 11 Poem by Elizabeth Symington, 1855; Correspondence to Elizabeth Symington
- f. 12 Letter to Elizabeth Symington from prisoner of war camp commissary William Hoffman denying her request to visit her son, William Symington, 1864
- f. 13 Letter from Captain Martin Burke to Captain McAllister regarding the allegiance of William Symington, 1864; Letter to Elizabeth Symington regarding the allegiance of William Symington, 1864
- f. 14 Letters from William Symington to his mother Elizabeth while he was a prisoner of war, 1864-1865, at Fort Lafayette, New York and Fort Warren, Boston Harbor.
- f. 15 Letters to Edith Symington from William and John Symington, Jr. 1883
- f. 16 Unidentified correspondence, 1864-1865

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