

Seawell, Molly Elliot papers

Molly Elliot Seawell Papers

1859-2001

Title Statement

Seawell, Molly Elliot papers Guide to the Molly Elliot Seawell Papers Mss. Acc. 1995.36

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Mss. Acc. 1995.36

Unit ID

/repositories/2/resources/1300

Unit Date

1859-2001

Unit Date

1889-1916

Language

English

Creator

Seawell, Molly Elliot, 1860-1916

Creator

Edwards, Maria Seawell, b. 1815?

Extent

0.80 Linear Feet

Repository

Special Collections Research Center

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access:

Collection is open to all researchers. Manuscript collections and archival records may contain materials with sensitive or confidential information that is protected under federal or state right to privacy laws and regulations, such as the Virginia Public Records Act (Code of Virginia. § 42.1-76-91); and the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (Code of Virginia § 2.2-3705.5). Confidential material may include, but is not limited to, educational, medical, and personnel records. If sensitive material is found in this collection, please contact a staff member immediately. The disclosure of personally identifiable information pertaining to a living individual may have legal consequences for which the College of William and Mary assumes no responsibility.

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Acquisition Information:

Purchases. Mss. Acc. 1995.36 received on 7/20/1995; Mss. Acc. 2000.45 (formerly 2000 Se9); Mss. Acc. 2000.53a received on October 13, 2000; Mss. Acc. 2001.24B received on May 11, 2001. Mss. Acc. 2010.398 is a gift of Philip Hairston Seawell, per Gene L. Hardin, 7303-B River Rd., Newport News, VA 23607.

Processing Information:

Processed by Ellen Strong in 1995.

Preferred Citation:

Molly Elliot Seawell Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

Biographical Information:

"Molly Elliot Seawell (October 23, 1860 Gloucester, Virginia - November 15, 1916 Washington, D. C.) was an American writer. Baptized as "Mary," Molly Elliot Seawell was born into one of the older families of English language-speaking North America and one of the first families of Virginia." (From wikipedia (7/6/2007))

Scope and Contents

The papers of American writer Molly Elliot Seawell include personal diaries, correspondence, memoirs, photographs, news clippings, and other materials. Also included are photocopies of Seawell's business papers housed at the New York Public Library and at the Columbia University Library. The collection also contains other records from the Seawell family, mostly relating to Molly's aunt Maria Seawell Edwards, John T. Seawell and wife Isabella Josephine Brady, and Philip Hairston Seawell. The collection comprises four series: Diaries, 1900-1914; Personal Records, 1901-1916; Professional Records, 1889-1915; and Seawell Family Records, 1859-2001.

Separated Materials:

-- 1 silver spoon engraved with Molly Elliot Seawell's name and an image of her home "The Shelter" in Gloucester, Va., is housed in the Artifacts Collection.

-- 22 books written by Molly Elliot Seawell and 2 books written by Elizabeth Gordon Biddle Gordon are housed in the Rare Books Collection. They were bequeathed by P. Hairston Seawell and can be located using the Swem Library catalog.

Keywords

Business records
Clippings (information artifacts)
Correspondence
Photographs
Portraits
American diaries--Women authors
Authors, American--20th century
Authors, American--Women
Gloucester County (Va.)--History--19th century
Gloucester County (Va.)--Social life and customs

United States--American Authors
United States--Women--History
Women--History--Virginia
Women--Virginia--Social life and customs
Gordon, Elizabeth Gordon Biddle

Arrangement of Materials:

Formerly arranged by accession. Combined with Mss. Msv D37-38 (Personal Diaries) and reorganized by series (see Scope note for details about the series' content). Folders within series chiefly organized by type of materials and creators, following broad chronological order. Items within folders organized chronologically, but Molly Elliot Seawell's handwriting being often ambiguous, some dates are unclear.

Description of Subordinate Components

Series 1: Diaries

Unit ID id242317

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126050

Unit Date 1900-1914

Scope and Contents

This series contains two personal diaries kept by Molly Elliot Seawell while living in Washington, D.C., and traveling in the United States, Canada, Germany, and France. Themes discussed include her frequent travels, social life, health, personal finance, reading, writing, psychological and emotional life, and recollections from the past. The first diary covers the years 1900 to 1905. The second diary covers the years 1905 to 1914. Both diaries are in very fragile condition. (Formerly Mss. MsV D37-38).

Diary

Unit ID id242318

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126054

Unit Date October 1900-September 1905

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 1 (folder)

Diary

Unit ID id242319

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126055

Unit Date December 1905-August 1914

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 2 (folder)

Series 2: Personal Records

Unit ID id242176

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126051

Unit Date 1901-1916

Scope and Contents

This series consists of personal correspondence, sent by Molly Elliot Seawell to family members and friends, documenting her personal life. The bulk of the series consists of letters written by Molly to her nephew John T. Seawell and his wife Isabella (Belle) Josephine Brady, spanning the years 1907 to 1916. Throughout the correspondence, Molly writes from her home in Washington, D.C. to the Seawells in Newport News, VA, with a few exceptions. There are also two letters to Mrs. Arthur Scribner, discussing friends and social events, as well as three photographs of Molly at the end of the series.

Two Letters from M. E. Seawell, Washington D.C., to Mrs. Arthur Scribner, New York

Unit ID id242177

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126056

Unit Date 1901-1902

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 3 (folder)

Scope and Contents

Formerly Mss. Acc. 2001.24B

Letters from M. E. Seawell to Belle and John Seawell

Unit ID id242178

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126057

Unit Date 19[07]-1913

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 4 (folder)

Scope and Contents

Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398

Letters from M. E. Seawell to Belle and John Seawell

Unit ID id242179

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126058

Unit Date 1914-1916

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 5 (folder)

Scope and Contents

Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398

Three Photographs of M. E. Seawell

Unit ID id242180

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126059

Unit Date undated

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 6 (folder)

Scope and Contents

Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398

Series 3: Professional Records

Unit ID id242181

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126052

Unit Date 1889-1915

Scope and Contents

This series documents Molly Elliot Seawell's writing career through a variety of materials including business letters, contracts, and contemporary reviews and newspaper clippings. See the folder descriptions for more specific details.

Letter from M. E. Seawell to Mrs. H. C. Christianson, Fanwood NJ

Unit ID id242182

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126060

Unit Date 1895 June 23

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 7 (folder)

Letter from M. E. Seawell to Edward Bok**Unit ID** id242183**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival_objects/126061**Unit Date** 1901 January 18**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 8 (folder)**Scope and Contents**

Formerly Mss. Acc. 2001.24B

Two Letters from M. E. Seawell to "Dear Sir"**Unit ID** id242184**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival_objects/126062**Unit Date** 1902 April 7 and undated**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 9 (folder)**Scope and Contents**

Regarding Molly's book "Papa Bouchard." (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2000.53a)

Photocopies of Correspondence Between M. E. Seawell and Editors/Publishers**Unit ID** id242185**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival_objects/126063**Unit Date** 1889-1898**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 10 (folder)**Scope and Contents**

These numerous letters cover topics such as offers to publish her books and stories, negotiations over compensation, editors' mistakes, and deliberations behind her authorial decisions, like how to write stories that appeal to specific groups of people. The bulk consists of letters addressed Mr. [Robert Underwood] Johnson, editor at the Century Magazine, in New York. Of particular interest is a July 2, 1895 letter from Molly to Johnson accompanied by copies of two letters between Molly's acquaintance U.S. Navy Engineer Harrie Webster to Admiral Ito in preparation of an article on the 1894 Battle of the Yalu River during the First Sino-Japanese War. Additionally, there is a November 30, 1898 letter accompanied by a seven-page autobiographical sketch that describes Molly's family's history, the family plantation, her education, the inspiration for some of her stories, her experiences traveling abroad (also recounted in her personal diaries), and the decision to move from Virginia to Washington D.C. Photocopies of originals housed at the New York Public Library and Columbia University Library. (Photocopies formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Photocopies of Correspondence Between M. E. Seawell and Editors/Publishers**Unit ID** id242186**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival_objects/126064**Unit Date** 1900-1915**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 11 (folder)**Scope and Contents**

A continuation of Molly's business correspondence with various editors and publishers, including Mr. Johnson, Mr. Gilder, and Mr. Yarde. A February 15, 1911 letter is accompanied by a typed opinion piece on proposed legislation to increase postage fees on magazine advertisements. Photocopies of originals housed at the New York Public Library and Columbia University Library. (Photocopies formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Contracts between M. E. Seawell and Harper & Brothers

Unit ID id242374

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126065

Unit Date 1895-1912

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 12 (folder)

Scope and Contents

This folder contains the photocopies of five contracts: 1895 for "A Virginia Cavalier"; 1896 for "The Sprightly Romance of Marsac"; 1897 for "The Rock of the Lion"; 1899 for "Gavin Hamilton" and 1912 for "Diego, the Son of Columbus." Originals held at the Columbia University Libraries. (Photocopies formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Newspaper Article, Reviews, and Biographical Clipping

Unit ID id242188

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126066

Unit Date 1910-1911 and undated

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 13 (folder)

Scope and Contents

This folder contains a clipping in very fragile condition of Molly's famous text on woman suffrage, "The Ladies' Battle," as published in the Richmond Times-Dispatch on October 16, 1910 (formely in Mss. MsV D37-38). It is possible to consult the microfilm version of the article at Swem Library. The folder also contains photocopies of published reviews on Molly's position on the suffrage question, as well as on her book "The Jugglers." The originals are held at the New York Public Library. Finally, there is an undated biographical clipping about Molly and photograph from a magazine (includes originals and a photocopy). (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Series 4: Seawell Family Records

Unit ID id242189

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126053

Unit Date 1859-2001

Scope and Contents

This series contains papers from various members of the Seawell family and genealogical materials. See the folder descriptions for more details.

Memoir of Maria Seawell Edwards of Gloucester County, VA, entitled "Family Records"

Unit ID id242190

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126067

Unit Date 1859 June 22

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 14 (folder)

Scope and Contents

Molly's aunt, Maria Seawell Edwards (b. 1815) was the daughter of John B. Seawell and Maria Henry Tyler, and thus sister of John Tyler Seawell. Her eighteen-page, handwritten memoir notably discusses the origins of the name "Seawell" and describes family houses, as well as her parents, siblings, and various relatives. (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2000.45 - 2000 Se9)

Four Letters to Belle and John Seawell

Unit ID id242191

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126068

Unit Date 1918-1928

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 15 (folder)

Scope and Contents

This folder contains four letters to Belle and John Seawell, dated 1918, 1920, 1926, and 1928. (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Letters addressed to John and Belle regarding the settlement of Molly's estate after her death in 1916 and other family news. Correspondents are Betty Ingles and S. Contesse Smith, one of John Seawell's cousins. (Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Notes on Correspondence

Unit ID id242323

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126069

Unit Date 1907-1928

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 16 (folder)

Scope and Contents

Notes by an anonymous contributor describing the main content of some letters of the Seawell family present in this collection.

Two Postcards from Elizabeth Gordon Biddle Gordon and Publisher

Unit ID id242192

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126070

Unit Date 1951 and undated

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 17 (folder)

Scope and Contents

This folder contains an undated postcard sent by author Elizabeth Gordon Biddle Gordon (born Elizabeth Clarke Gordon) to an unidentified recipient (possibly P. Hairston Seawell, who bequeathed the item) and a 1951 postcard sent to "Mr. Hairston Seawell," Newport News, VA, announcing the publication of Gordon's book "The White Blackbird or Lest Ye Forget." (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Correspondence between P. Hairston Seawell and John Joyce Russell

Unit ID id242193

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126071

Unit Date 1958

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 18 (folder)

Scope and Contents

P. Hairston Seawell (1915-2008) was the son of John T. Seawell and Isabella (Belle) Josephine Brady. This folder contains four items from his correspondence with John Joyce Russell (1897-1993), tenth Bishop of Richmond. The documents concern Russell's installation as Bishop in 1958, including the printed program of the ceremony, Russell's new membership in the Virginia Historical Society, and charity work. (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Correspondence between Elizabeth Harwood and P. Hairston Seawell

Unit ID id242194

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126072

Unit Date 1987

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 19 (folder)

Scope and Contents

This folder contains three sketches of Molly Elliot Seawell's childhood home, "The Shelter," in Gloucester VA, made by Mrs. Harwood and sent to Mr. Hairston Seawell on July 29, 1987. An August 31, 1987 letter from Mrs. Harwood to Mr. Seawell further discusses Molly's silver spoon, engraved with her name and an image of her home, "The Shelter." The spoon is now housed in the Special Collections Research Center Artifacts Collection. (Formerly Acc. 2010.398)

Newspaper Clippings re. Seawell Genealogy and Family Home

Unit ID id242195

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126073

Unit Date 1905 and undated

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 20 (folder)

Scope and Contents

"Sewell Lineage and Arms" from the "Maryland Heraldry" chronicle in the Baltimore Sun, and an undated clipping about the history of the "The Shelter," the Seawell home, before it burned in 1925. (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Miscellaneous Portraits

Unit ID id242196

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126074

Unit Date undated

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 21 (folder)

Scope and Contents

One undated portrait of Molly Elliot Seawell's mother, Frances Elizabeth Jackson Seawell, and two unidentified portraits. (Formerly Mss. Acc. 2010.398)

Molly Elliot Seawell Quotation and Letter

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/591849

Unit Date 1896 December 2

Unit Date 1899 January 16

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 22 (Folder)

Creator Seawell, Molly Elliot, 1860-1916

Extent 0.1 Linear FeetOne legal sized folder.

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Preferred Citation

Molly Elliot Seawell Quotation and Letter, Special Collections Research Center, William & Mary Libraries.

Scope and Contents

A two page letter and quotation card, written and signed by Molly Elliot Seawell. Transcriptions were provided by the dealer.

Content warnings for derogatory language directed towards people of African descent, and cultural appropriation.

The quotation card reads "Molly Elliot Seawell, Washington D.C., December 2nd 1896. The laughing philosopher had attained the goal of all wisdom, while the weeping philosopher stood whimpering at the starting post."

The letter is addressed simply, "Dear Sir." It reads, "It has always been my aim not to coin word in writing. Having had the advantage of a good early training in the English classics, I soon found out that there was a good, plain English word for all the ideas I had, or was likely to have, and I have made it my business to try and find out that word. In writing negro dialect though as in my Virginia stories I have, in order to make it

true to life, all my negroes coin words. The negroes, as you know perhaps, are very admirable word coiners. They love to use long words, and they introduce a word wonderfully like the one they are after, and in the same senses, so that it conveys a perfectly good meaning. I hardly know whether all of the words I put in the mouths of my negroes are of my own invention, or recollections of my childhood in an old place in Virginia. Some are my own - 'reckelsome' for reckless, 'furgitive' for forgetful, 'discontemtous' for contemptuous, ect. These may be found in my novels - 'Children of Destiny' and 'Throckmorton'. In them I have strictly followed the negro manner of making [2 words illegible] right, and the sound appropriate so. I have not those books at hand. I am only at this place temporarily, but you may be able to get them at your public library. Wishing I could give you a more satisfactory and interesting explanation, I am very truly yours."

Keywords

American literature--Women authors

Authors, American--Women

Authors, American--19th century

United States--American Authors

African Americans in popular culture