

Stephen Benton Elkins, Letter Copy Book, 1875-1878 A&M 3979

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Descriptive Summary

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Unit Date

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Abstract

Letter copy book kept by Stephen Benton Elkins, a politician and businessman who would later become a prominent citizen of West Virginia. The book was kept from 23 October 1875 to 1 May 1878. It contains roughly 150 letters as well as a partial index of recipients. During the time this book was kept, Elkins resided in Santa Fe, New Mexico, practiced law, represented the territory in Congress, and acted as president of the Maxwell Land Grant Company. Letters concern political and business topics, including Elkins's involvement with the Santa Fe Ring, an illegal land speculation group. Please see "Scope and Content Note" and "Historical Note" for further information.

Creator

Elkins, Stephen B. (Stephen Benton), 1841-1911

Extent

0.1 Linear Feet Summary: 1 in. (1 folder)

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Repository

West Virginia and Regional History Center

Administrative Information

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Biographical / Historical

Stephen Benton Elkins (26 September 1841 - 4 January 1911) was born in Ohio then moved with his family to Missouri, where he spent the rest of his early life. During the Civil War, Elkins served in the Union Army, holding the rank of captain with the 77th Missouri Infantry. He left the army in 1863 and started practicing law.

Elkins moved out to the New Mexico in 1864, where he became active in local business and politics. He held a number of political offices, eventually being elected to represent the New Mexico Territory in Congress in 1872. He was also implicated as a member of the Santa Fe Ring, an illegal land speculation group, during the same period.

In 1875 Elkins married Hallie Davis, daughter of West Virginia Senator Henry Gassaway Davis. Elkins moved to West Virginia in 1878, becoming a partner in the Davis family's business ventures. During this time, he remained active in national politics, including serving as Secretary of War under President Harrison. Elkins was elected Senator from West Virginia in 1895 and held that office until his death.

Scope and Contents

Letter copy book kept by Stephen Benton Elkins, a politician and businessman who would later become a prominent citizen of West Virginia. The book was kept from 23 October 1875 to 1 May 1878. It contains roughly 150 letters as well as a partial index of recipients. During the time this book was kept, Elkins resided in Santa Fe, New Mexico, practiced law, represented the territory in Congress, and acted as president of the Maxwell Land Grant Company. Letters concern political and business topics, including Elkins's involvement with the Santa Fe Ring, an illegal land speculation group.

The following is a copy of an auction lot description offering the letter copy book for sale:

This is a remarkable letter copy book featuring over 200 letters from Stephen B Elkins, future Senator and Secretary of War, when he was out in Santa Fe, New Mexico starting in 1875. The letters are all handwritten by Elkins and these are his retained copies of those letters. They go from 1875 to 1878 and feature a lot of incredible content including letters to well known early settlers of New Mexico, a letter to President Grant and much more. The best part of the collection is related to what was known as the Santa Fe Ring, one of the largest land schemes in US history. There are many letters related to the Maxwell Land Grant Company and the evicting of squatters and his connection to work on land grants throughout New Mexico. There is a fantastic 8 page letter to the editor of the New York Daily Sun about accusations that he was involved in the murder of Rev [Reverend] Tolby, where he claims that they were murdered by 2 Mexican men who believed he had gold. Elkins spends all 8 pages defending himself and laying out the facts as he wanted them to be known. There are many letters related to T.B. Catron and there connection and so much more. It is really a fantastic piece of New Mexico history. The later letters still have New Mexico related content but are written while he is in Washington, DC. Some of the letters are faded and hard to read but it is otherwise in good condition. I will give you a small sample of what the letters say below:

I arrived here a few days since and write you immediately about Railway matters. I find that the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway co have extended their line to Los Animas and by Feb will complete it to Pueblo without question. The Kansas Pacific Co have built and complete their line twenty miles from Los Animas in the direction of? The Denver and Rio Grande have graded to the Cuchoras and will complete their line to Trinidad at once they raised the money in Philadelphia...

To the Board of Directors of the Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Co, Gentlemen I herewith tender my resignation as President Director and Attorney of your company and beg you will accept the same...

In the New York Daily Sun of the 16th inst will be found a letter from Santa FE New Mexico under the caption of Territory of Elkins not having the papers before me I don't remember the name. I feel that I cannot allow the incrimination contained in this letter to go uncorrected because it connects me with a most horrible murder...

To convince anyone of the entire untruthfulness of this insinuation. I need only call to mind the fact you so well know that I attended the last session of congress and immediately after the adjournment I went to Europe and did not return to New Mexico until October making my absence from the Territory about one year, during this which against my wishes and in the face of my declination I was elected as Delegate, receiving as in the election preceding while mainly supported by Republicans... my support in both elections coming from the business men of the Territory...

It was in August while I was in Europe that the Rev [Reverend] Mr Tolby party named in the letter was murdered he came into the Territory after I had left to attend the last session of Congress and I never knew nor heard of the man until my return to New Mexico from abroad in October last. These facts no one will dispute. So far as I could learn while out there Tolby was a Methodist preacher residing at ? he was murdered by two Mexicans Cruz Bega and Manual Cardinas the last named being an old murderer and formerly convicted in Laos, it is supposed that the Mexicans took the preacher on his return from Elizabethton to be the mail and express carrier who generally brought gold from the mines to Camarron. It seems that Carinas was induced by some persons at Elizabethton to implicate Dr Longvill Mills and other parties' names in the letter by saying that they paid him money to do this deed but afterwards before and during the Justice of the peace he retracted and declared these parties had nothing to do with the murder...

Was asserted by their enemies who supposed Tolby's friends would kill them and as far my having any possible connection with the murder such a thing has never been heard of till it made its appearance in the sun... and my worst enemies and I have some never breathed an inclination of the kind and this correspondent has only done so through malice hoping he will never be found out. I can hardly believe the Editor of the Sun would knowingly injure me and in order to convince himself I would be glad if he would demand of his correspondent if he knew or believed I had anything to do with the affair referred to in any shape or manner...

In the Rofer matter I only received \$1700 and should be charged only with the ? If I should receive any further money on the note I will advise you. I had not heard of the attempt to deprive you of the possession of the books... By this mail I send to the Board of Directors my resignation...

I have started to visit Dona Ana County and thank all of my friends for their kindness in the last election but when at last Los Lunos I was called back to Santa Fe on pressing business and partly to see about the telegraph line.

I forwarded my resignation as Pres [President] Director and attorney of the Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Company... The Company owes me \$16.214. I have ceased to take any further interest in its

I write you about the building of the Military telegraph line from Santa Fe to Fort Begard. It has become necessary for the people to render some assistance... Furnish the poles at \$50 apiece provided he could get them within 38 miles of his place... by going to the T Reservation...

My dear sir you will remember me as being with Mr Collison in your city in connection with the Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Co in May last. You were then acting as attorney in behalf of some of the shareholders of the company...

To the President [Grant] The appointment of Mr TB Catron as US Attorney for New Mexico will expire in early March. Having known Mr Catron from his early youth I can bear testimony to his character and can state from actual knowledge that he is an able energetic and efficient prosecutor and a lawyer of undoubted ability indeed he stands at the head of the bar in New Mexico. He is an old resident of the Territory, acquainted with the people and speaks fluently the Spanish language... the success of a District Attorney in New Mexico in enforcing the laws...

I beg to advise you that a few days since in a written communication to the President favorably ? by Senators Windom, McMillan and Gov [Governor] Ramsey. I asked the reappointment of Judge Bastel as Justice Supreme Court, New Mexico...

Charges lately made against Judge Bristol by parties to Grant County New Mexico and from what I know and can learn they are entirely unfounded...

Dear Catron... I wrote you a few days since about the suit of ? and others in the Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Company for a part in the Maxwell Estate. I regret you did not write me before consenting to bring this suit, because I don't think you should have sued the company after the close professional relations you have sustained in it particularly without giving them notice...

I beg to trouble you about the indebtedness of the Maxwell Company to me for professional services. The company owes me now about \$18000. Probably it will be well in submitting this matter for your consideration to place before you some pertinent facts. As long as I served the company as attorney there was never a judgment rendered against it in a contested case. 2nd During the time I was attorney I attended a judgment against Maxwell for \$100000 which was paid...

I prosecuted a number of ejectment suits against squatters always with success.. I have not failed to do all in my power to promote its success...

I fully thought this letter would convince you, you were mistaken and that you would be ready to go ahead, but up to this writing I have not heard a word from you and I take it that you want to break the agreement... I had begun to arrange a bondsman after you. I think I would not have had much trouble although the new regulation is quite severe...

As to Wheelock we have no redress except to hold his bonds and warrant... note should not be renewed within security, the times are too perilous and we have suffered too much to take any further risks we had better keep our money than take any such risks...

I am glad you have sold to Catron your interest in the Sierra ? If you remember you and Revent were to pay me for my opinion when you sold, please send me here a check for your portion if you have recd [received] your pay. You ask what I am doing in Washington. I am hard at work on matters of moment to myself in part to the Territory. I am a Mexican expect to remain so. I think there is a bright future for NM [New Mexico] just ahead of us...

JB Applegate is hereby authorized to settle upon and occupy a portion for the Merita Juana Lopes Grant when the road to Albuquerque crosses the Galistes River not to exceed one hundred sixty acres for five years from this date at an annual rent of one dollar... Signed by Catron and Elkins

I am in receipt of yours of the 29th in reply beg to say that Mr T.B. Catron and I are the owners of 20/21 of the Ortiz or Gallinious grant containing as I am informed about 160,000 acres situated in the county of San Miguel Territory New Mexico, the Northern boundary being about sixteen miles south of Las Vegas a flourishing town of about 4000 inhabitants... The Grant was made by the Mexican Governor to Antonio Ortiz... It is now about 125 miles distant from the Railroad and is near the arranged line of the Atlantic and Pacific Road...

We could calculate with certainty on the freight to and from Chihuahua Arizona and a port of Texas which would mirror the above estimates... the building of the railway taking all these matters into consideration... all of New Mexico, Arizona, part of Texas and Chihuahua in which must be included all supplies for all mileposts. I think a low estimate would be 100000 tons per annum for the first year...

Touching the extension of a line from Trinidad to Santa Fe or a point near there. I beg to say that in my opinion more assistance could be obtained if the train should go to Bernatelo and on the East side of the range. By this route it would first pass through the Maxwell Estate which I think would render some assistance possibly very valuable...

The next grant is the Las Vegas sand a of which the town of Las Vegas one of the most important towns in the territory is ? this is a large body of land. I am sure the overseers thereof would donate liberally and I think the town of Las Vegas would render some valuable assistance. The Tecolab grant is next and the owners would render a donation, then comes the grants in the Gallisteo River...

I have your last letter in reply beg to say that I think Waldo's chance for the chief justiceship are good

although there are very many applicants and much work. In respect to my recommendations touching the appointment of officers I see no change in them at all. I regard Mr Ortiz one of the ablest officers most intelligent and reputable citizens...

Alared is a good man and on can say ought against Eichen as to Col Breeden, I am confident he is not my personal friend but he openly has no better friend than he and a few as good...

As to the opposition you speak of to the Santa Fe Ring and ? something no one knows unless it be the Republican party and its friends. I have never attacked any importance to it. I have heard of this opposition for years and when you set it down it means a howl and cry against the part...

At the request of many of the holders of vouchers in New Mexico and Arizona, I have undertaken to secure an appropriation at the present session of Congress for their payment. I have been working in the matter for about three months and although the present Commissioner has rejected most of the vouchers yours among them, ranchers says they should not be...

The only trouble you will have will be the failure of San ? County in the last election to stand by the party as it should have done but for this I am ? could be elected without any kind of trouble...

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Politics and government.

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United States Congressmen - West Virginia.

Elkins (W. Va.)

Politicians -- United States

Politicians

Elkins, Stephen B. (Stephen Benton), 1841-1911

Republican Party (U.S. : 1854-)