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Collection 100 Ellen Clementine Howarth Collection

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August 2019

Biography

Ellen Clementine Howarth (1827-1899) was born on May 17, 1827 in Cooperstown, N.Y., the daughter of a calico-printer (printer of multicolor designs on cotton fabric). In 1845 she married Joseph E. Howarth, an English calico-printer, and settled in Trenton. After her husband was blinded in an industrial accident, the family struggled to make a living and she helped support the family by caning chairs from their home.

Despite a life full of strife, Howarth was enamored with the written word. Her childhood love of reading blossomed into poetry writing as an adult. In “A Poet of the People,” Howarth wrote to a friend: “I have always been entirely alone...If I could write prose, I would like to write a history of my inner life. It would not be tame, insipid sentimentalism, but full of condensed fire and energy.” Howarth wrote her poems “around the edges of [her] hard-working life, keeping a pencil and paper nearby in case inspiration came while [she] was doing the laundry or other chores.”

Howarth’s poems served not only as a creative outlet, but helped to support the family. One landlord accepted the payment of rent in verses, one poem being regularly paid every month. She submitted her poems to various Trenton newspapers, including *The State Gazette* and *True American*, signing her name as simply “Clementine.” The public became infatuated with the anonymous poetess and her poems of a simple honesty, which also often featured local subject matter.

When the news broke that she was a poor, obscure woman from Trenton, people travelled from all over to meet and speak with her. During this time, Howarth attracted the admiration and friendship of numerous prominent literary figures. One of her poems, “Heart’s Treasures” was set to music by J.R. Thomas in a ballad titled with the first line of the poem: “’Tis but a Little Faded Flower.” After her death, “The Tress of Golden Hair” and other of her poems were set to music by contemporary New Jersey composer Godfrey Schroth (1927-2017).

Howarth’s first book of poetry, *The Wind Harp and Other Poems* was published in 1864. The volume included numerous poems of sentiment, as well as religious and patriotic poems. Published during the Civil War, many poems were about war and the death of loved ones.

Biography (cont.)

In the late 1860s, Howarth was stricken by a paralyzing illness but tried to continue her work. The people of Trenton rallied to find a publisher to print more of her poems as *Mrs. Howarth's Poems*, turning all profits over to her. Even during her illness, she strove quietly but effectively in her verses to awaken Trentonians to a fuller sense of their historic heritage. She also aided greatly in the long campaign to raise \$60,000 to build the Trenton Battle Monument.

In the early 1890s when action by Congress and an awakened civic interest assured the erection of the battle monument, "Clementine" penned one last poem. In a letter to William S. Yard, she expressed her excitement over having her name and two poems added to the cornerstone.

Howarth died in 1899 at the age of 72.

Scope and Content Notes

This collection consists of correspondence, handwritten poems, publications, and newspaper articles by and related to Ellen Clementine Howarth from the years 1860-1894, and is contained in seven folders and three bound volumes.

The collection is divided into three series: I. Handwritten Poetry, II. Correspondence, and III. Printed Poems.

The Ellen Clementine Howarth collection is significant in documenting the creative and interpersonal processes of Trenton's Poet Laureate. Subjects of interest to researchers include poetry, Trenton history, Civil War history, and the role of women in the arts and national identity.

Series Description

Series I. Handwritten Poetry

The first series consists of handwritten poetry, either original poems in Howarth's own hand (signed "Clementine") or copies of Howarth's poems written by her close friends, Mrs. William Yard and Mrs. Van Dyke. The original, signed poems include: "True to Thee," "Mighty to Prayer," "Communion with the Dead," "Mary," and "Caged."

Series II. Correspondence

The second series of this collection contains correspondence from Howarth to friend William S. Yard. Both personal in nature, Howarth writes about various family struggles Yard was facing at the time, exemplifying her care for others despite struggling herself. One letter, dated December 12, 1860, includes several of her poems along with suggestions as to which newspapers might be most likely to publish them.

In a letter to Yard, Howarth expresses her excitement over having her name and two poems added to the cornerstone of the Trenton Battle Monument. The unspecified poems might possibly have been ones published in one of the twelve newspapers that were inside the memorial box placed in

Series II. Correspondence (cont.)

the monument's cornerstone, as listed in the "Program of the Laying of the Corner-Stone of the Monument: The Exercises at the Dedication of the Monument" on December 26, 1891.

Included in this series are letters written after Howarth's death by C.L. Traver and William S. Yard to Richard Watson Gilder regarding the reprint of Howarth's poetry.

Series III. Printed Poems

The third series includes typed and printed poems by Howarth; both bound publications and typed manuscripts. Included are a typed manuscript of Howarth's poems, presumably intended to become published as a book by William S. Yard; and printed pages of "The Guerilla Chief," a drama in five acts dedicated to Howarth's daughter, Annie Howarth.

Also included are six bound books of published poetry, all with different covers. There are three copies of *Mrs. Howarth's Poems* (1868), one of which contains a preface by Richard Watson Gilder with handwritten notes. It appears to have belonged to R.W. Gilder and was a gift to the Trenton Library from the American Antiquarian Society. There are also three copies of *The Wind Harp*, published in 1864, one of which appears to be marked-up for a new edition. A fourth copy of *The Wind Harp* belonging to Lewis Parker, Jr., contains an insertion of a special 30-stanza poem entitled, "Work and Song," printed in 1866 by Murphy & Bechtel. It is considered to be Howarth's longest metrical composition, and is inscribed to Dr. John Woolverton, a prominent Trenton physician.

Restrictions: none.

Container List

Box / Folder/ Folder Title

Series I. Handwritten Poetry

- 1 / 1 / Handwritten, original poetry, sent to William Yard: "Love Unchanging" (January 27, 1860); "Evangeline," "The Photograph," "Ecce. Homo" (n.d.)
- 1 / 2 / Handwritten, original poetry: "True to Thee," "Sunshine" and "Mighty to Prayer," 1866
- 1 / 3 / Handwritten original poetry: "Communion with the Dead," "Mary" and "Caged," 1866-1894
- 1 / 4 / "Clementine" poetry copied by her friends, Mrs. William Yard and Mrs. Van Dyke: "To My Friends," "Pallas Athenae," and "One Day," c.1876

Series II. Correspondence

- 1 / 5 / December 12, 1860: Letter to her friend William S. Yard
- 1 / 6 / February 5, 1872: Letter to William Yard
- 1 / 7 / December 30, 190-: Letter to William S. Yard, mentions her name being included on the cornerstone of the Trenton Battle Monument*
- 1 / 8 / December 28, 1877: Letter to Mr. & Mrs. Gilder
- 1 / 8a / July 9, 1903: Letters to Richard Watson Gilder regarding the reprint of Clementine's poetry from C.L. Traver and Wm. S. Yard**

Series III. Printed Poems

- 1 / 9 / Four manuscript poems sent to William Yard – “Night Shade,” “For Thee,” “Album Dedication,” “Ode to a Brother Bard”
- 1 / 9a / Typed manuscript of Clementine’s poems, intended to become published as a book by William Yard, 1870
- 1 /10 / “The Guerilla Chief,” a drama in five acts dedicated to Howarth’s daughter, Annie Howarth, 1872
- 1 /11 / *The Wind Harp* (1864), with “Work and Song” (1866) insert, and letter to book’s owner, Lewis Parker (1893)
- 1 / *The Wind Harp* (1864) [3]; *Mrs. Howarth’s Poems* (1868) [3]

*see also: Monuments - Battle Monument vertical file

**see also: Collection 195 Clayton A. Traver Collection

Bibliography

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The Sunday Trentonian, November 25, 1979.

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