Mollie and Alice Garr Papers
(C3987)

Collection Number: C3987

Collection Title: Mollie and Alice Garr Papers


Creators: Garr, Alice Marion, 1866-1957
         Garr, Mary Elizabeth “Mollie” Slusher, 1844-1927

Abstract: The Mollie and Alice Garr Papers consist mostly of letters written from 1875 to 1896 by a mother and daughter from Lafayette County, Missouri, to relatives in Virginia, primarily to William Benjamin Plunkett of Greene County. Also included are photocopies of various explanatory materials, such as obituaries, death certificates, printed articles, and genealogical lists of the Garr and Slusher families, compiled by the donor of the papers in 1991.

Collection Size: 0.2 cubic feet
                  (7 folders)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia. If you would like more information, please contact us at columbia@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

Restrictions on Use: The donor has relinquished all their copyrights in the papers and authorized their release to the public domain.

Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] Mollie and Alice Garr Papers (C3987); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Columbia].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Martha Eheart King on October 22, 1991 (Accession No. CA2862).

Biographical Note:

Mary Elizabeth “Mollie” Slusher was born in Clinton, Missouri in 1844 and moved with her family to Lexington in 1856. In 1865, she married George Wilhoite Garr, who was born in Virginia in 1827 and migrated to Missouri with his brother, William Roebuck Garr, in 1850. After the Civil War, in which Garr fought on the side of the Confederacy, the couple settled near Dover in Lafayette County, Missouri. They built one of the first houses on the Petite Saw Plains, on a farm that eventually consisted of 600 acres. The Garrs had three children, Alice Marion, born in 1866, Edith Alberta “Birdie,” born in 1871, and William Willis, born in 1876.

The Garrs were a typical farm family, though perhaps more prosperous than many. George worked on the land and with the stock, while Mollie did the housekeeping and took care of the children. They raised wheat, corn, oats, apples, beef cattle and pigs for sale, as well as various vegetables, fruits, chickens and turkeys for their own use. In addition to her family, Mollie often had six to seven boarders for whom to cook and clean. She frequently spoke of being a “slave” and wished that her husband would allow her to have hired help, “but he is one of the kind that thinks a woman’s work is nothing more than play,” she wrote in an 1883 letter. George and Mollie sold the farm around 1892 and built an impressive home within the city limits of Lexington. Widowed in 1918, Mollie lived there until her death in 1927.

Their older daughter, Alice, attended Baptist Female College in Lexington from 1883 to 1885 and taught school in Lafayette County for a few years, a job for which she never felt suited. She married Lee Jackson Slusher in 1889 and lived near Lexington all her life. The couple were said to be very happily married and had six sons and one daughter. Alice was widowed in 1941 and died in 1957. Neither of George and Mollie’s other children, Birdie, who married Ben Eaton in 1896 and died in 1958, and Willis, who died in 1959, ever had any children.

William Benjamin “Bennie” Plunkett (1849-1905), the son of George’s sister, Frances Gaar Plunkett (the Missouri branch of the family changed the spelling of their name from Gaar to Garr), came from Virginia to visit his Uncle George’s family in the spring and summer of 1875. Only five years apart in age, Bennie and Mollie struck up a life-long friendship and corresponded frequently through the years. Although Alice was a child at the time of his visit, she also had fond memories of Bennie and beginning at age 16, she started corresponding with him. Bennie, who lived all his life in Greene County, Virginia had been a census taker, a sawmill owner, a farmer, and served the county as clerk of the school board for many years. He died a bachelor in 1905.

Bennie’s mother, Frances Plunkett, who outlived her son, was nursed in her declining years by her niece, Lizzie Dandridge Eheart, whom Frances had raised from childhood. Frances left the house to her niece and when Lizzie died in 1965, it was discovered that she had left the upstairs bedrooms where Frances and Bennie Plunkett had lived, locked and undisturbed for over 40 years. The letters that Mollie and Alice Garr had sent to Bennie were found there among other documents that were subsequently given to the family genealogist, Martha Eheart King. After publishing a book, Dear Bennie, in 1982, Ms. King decided to donate the Garr letters to a repository in Missouri, where the information about the crops, weather, social life, and families of Lafayette County in the late 19th century could be appreciated.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged chronologically.
The Mollie and Alice Garr Papers consist of original correspondence and photocopies of death certificates, obituaries, published articles, and genealogical lists that partially document the lives of a Lafayette County, Missouri, farm family in the late 19th century. The first six folders contain original correspondence, arranged chronologically from 1875 to 1896, and consist of letters from both M.E. “Mollie” Slusher Garr and her daughter, Alice.

Mollie’s first few letters, written between 1875 and 1877 to “Sister,” “Tabby” and “Lou,” are probably all written to Tabitha L. Gaar, sister of Mollie’s husband, George. They discuss crops, raising hogs and chickens, diphtheria, cholera, grasshoppers, religion, and family. Martha Eheart King, the donor of the papers, typed transcriptions of these letters and notes about the people mentioned in the letters. They are included in the first folder.

All the rest of the correspondence, from 1880 to 1896, is written to George Garr’s nephew, William Benjamin “Bennie” Plunkett of Greene County, Virginia. Mollie’s letters describe life as a farmer’s wife in the 1880s. They discuss prices and yields of crops and livestock, weather, religion, community events, politics, and information about family and friends in Missouri. It is also interesting to note that Mollie occasionally used her correspondence as a method of expressing some of her frustration with her life, complaining about the amount of work she was expected to do and her husband’s lack of understanding about it. She would then admonish her nephew not to tell anyone what she had said and to burn the letter after he read it. The letters average about one every month or two through 1887, a couple in 1889, and then one in 1896 talks about living “in town” (Lexington) and discusses family and local news.

Alice Garr began her correspondence with her cousin in 1882 when she was turning sixteen and continued through the 1880s, with one letter dated 1892, after she was married. Her letters deal much less with farm news and focus on the social and educational activities of a young woman in small town Missouri. She also often spoke longingly of visiting Virginia. Most of her letters are the self-involved missives of a normal teenager that discuss her time at school, her “young men,” social activities, and her frustration with teaching.

The final folder consists of photocopies of informational material compiled in 1991 by the donor of the Papers, Martha Eheart King. It consists of the death certificates and obituaries of Mollie and George Garr and W. Benjamin Plunkett, copies of photos of Mollie and George Garr, the introduction from King’s 1982 book, Dear Bennie, and several pages of genealogical charts and lists of the Gaar/Garr/Slusher families.

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f. 3  Correspondence, 1883
f. 4  Correspondence, 1884-1886 April
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