



## Symington Family Papers (S1211)

**Collection Number:** S1211

**Collection Title:** Symington Family Papers

**Dates:** 1775-2010

**Creator:** Symington Family

**Abstract:** 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.

**Collection Size:** 0.02 cubic foot  
(16 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-St. Louis](https://www.shsmo.org/research-center). If you would like more information, please contact us at [stlouis@shsmo.org](mailto:stlouis@shsmo.org). Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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

**Donor Information:** The papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Stuart Symington, Jr. on August 25, 2017 (Accession No. SA4309).

**Related Materials:** Additional materials related to the Symington Family Papers can be found in the following collections:

*James W. Symington Papers* (S0433)

*Symington, Stuart (1901-1988), Papers, 1953-1976* (C3562)

*Symington, Stuart (1901-1988), Scrapbooks, 1945-1976 (C3637)*

*Symington, W. Stuart (1901-1988), Papers, 1918-1995 (C3874)*

*Symington, Stuart, Jr., Interview, 1994 (C4159)*

**Processed by:** Processed by Claire Marks, September 2017; Revised by AJ Medlock, September 2019

### **Biographical Note:**

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.

### **Arrangement:**

The papers has been arranged into the following two series:

Genealogy

Correspondence

### **Scope and Content Note:**

## Genealogy

This series contains photocopied genealogical and research materials, including a handwritten Symington-Boggs family tree and a photocopy of an unpublished thesis: "Lincoln's Relationship with Four Quincy Republicans." Also included in this series is a handwritten book, "Narrative of the Descendants of Robert Johnston and Elizabeth McCaw," prepared by Edith Symington in 1884. The materials in this series date from 1860 to 1960.

## Correspondence

This series contains correspondence written to and from Symington family papers. Included in this series is 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." This series is arranged by individual and chronologically thereunder. The materials in this series date from 1817 to 1883

## Container List:

f. 1-4	Genealogy
Box 001 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. 5-16	Correspondence
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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