

Shinn, Milicent Washburn, 1858-1940.

3 folders

Papers, 1880-1925.

Biography

Milicent Shinn, author, editor and psychologist, was born in Niles, California on her father's orchard-tree nursery ranch. Her father was James Shinn and her mother, Lucy Ellen Clark Shinn. As a student at the University of California, MWS was influenced by the poet Edward Rowland Sill. After her graduation in 1880, she joined the staff of the San Francisco Commercial Herald and began to contribute to The Californian, a magazine revived along the lines of the old Overland Monthly. In 1883, Anton Roman, the magazine's publisher, again changed the name to the Overland Monthly and installed MWS as editor, a post she retained until 1894.

From 1894 to 1898, Milicent Shinn pursued doctoral work at the University of California in psychology, specializing in the sensory development of infants. She was the first woman to receive the Ph.D. there. She often did research with her cousin Edmund Clark, a noted psychologist. Her brother Charles Howard Shinn was a leader in the early Western conservation movement, and she herself was a member of the Save-the-Redwoods League, the League of Nations and the American Eugenics Society.

References

Notable American Women
Woman's Who's Who in America

Scope and content

The Milicent Washburn Shinn collection consists of correspondence and miscellaneous personal papers. Although spanning the years 1880 to 1925 the bulk of the material is from the years 1883 to the turn of the century, a period in which Shinn edited the Overland Monthly and did graduate work in psychology.

The correspondence files consist primarily of literary and business letters written to MWS in her editorial capacity. The early letters are from such prominent literary figures as the novelist Helen Hunt Jackson and the poet Ina Coolbrith, and discuss literary matters as well as the Overland's financial and artistic problems. In 1875 the magazine had collapsed after Bret Harte and the other early editors resigned; its publisher, revived it in 1883 and made Shinn the editor. However, without adequate financial backing Shinn was unable to attract first-rate contributors and its reputation foundered. Ina Coolbrith commiserates with Shinn: "California does not deserve to have anything or anyone upon its shores whose object and aim is not solely money-gathering." The Jackson letter is full of snide references to her fellow authors, including Bret Harte.

Folder 2 contains 13 letters which are the raw material for an interesting bit of investigative reporting Shinn did on the operation of the Lick Observatory for the Overland Monthly. The letters span from 1892 to 1897 and deal with the political squabbles at the observatory under the directorship of Edward S. Holden. Shinn's article was later reprinted in William Wiggins Smith's Magnetic Astronomy of the Bible. (1893).

Folder 3 contains various personal papers of Shinn's cousin Edmund Clark Sanford and his family.

The latter part of Shinn's general correspondence (Folder 1) includes letters from several prominent Californians in reference to her child development studies and her small college plan. Among her correspondents were Daniel Coit Gilman, president of the University of California, David Starr Jordan, and the philanthropist Phoebe Hearst.

Added entries

Aiken, Charles J., 3/4/84
Coolbrith, Ina D., 12/21/84
Dodge, Mary Mapes, 12/15/80
Dwinell, T.E., 6/15/85
Fletcher, Alice C., 5/1/97, 10/2/02
Gilman, Daniel Coit, 8/19/08
Hallidie, Martha, 10/25/1900
Hearst, Phoebe, 8/10/12
Holden, Edward S., 8/1/92, 10/11/92, 11/7/92, 10/25/93
Jackson, Helen Hunt, 2/10/85
Jordan, David Starr, 8/3/13
Royce, Josiah, 8/12/14
Sanford, Eugene Clark
Weaver, P.L., 10/21/90
Whiting, Constance F. Gordon, 9/25/85
Willey, Samuel H., 9/20/90

Lick Observatory, 1892-93
Overland Monthly
Women in California
Women authors
1880-1925

Arrangement

Folder 1: Literary and business correspondence to MWS
Folder 2: Lick Observatory correspondence
Folder 3: Edmund Clark Sanford personal papers