
Guide to the Farnham Lyon Collection, ca. 1885-1926

Collection number: Wyles Mss 28

Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Farnham Lyon Collection,

Date (inclusive): ca. 1885-1926

Collection Number: Wyles Mss 28

Collector: Lyon, Farnham

Extent: .2 linear feet (1 half-size box)

Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library. Department of Special Collections
Santa Barbara, California 93106-9010

Physical Location: Del Sur

Language: English

Access Restrictions

None.

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

Gift of Mrs. Ralph (Catherine) Maxwell, 1977.

Biography

Farnham Lyon was born on November 5, 1829 in New York, one of ten children of Truman and Lucinda Lyon. The family settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, when Farnham was 12 years old. His father was a prominent citizen, serving as a judge, postmaster, and hotel proprietor. When Farnham was 19 years old, he followed his father into the hotel business, where he would make his fortune. Within 10 years, he owned his first hotel.

Along with two of his brothers, Farnham Lyon joined the Union Army to fight in the Civil War. He enlisted in the Seventh Michigan Cavalry on October 7, 1862 as a first lieutenant and regimental quartermaster. He was promoted to captain in May 1864, and in November of that year, he joined General George Armstrong Custer's division to serve as one of his staff officers. As such, he was present at General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, and took charge of feeding rations to the Confederate troops afterwards. Attaining the rank of brevet major, Farnham Lyon and his wife Carrie became close friends with General Custer and his wife, Elizabeth "Libbie" Bacon Custer (1842-1933).

Major Lyon received an honorable discharge in April 1866 and returned to the hotel business. In 1876, he took over the Bancroft House Hotel in Saginaw, Michigan, and would remain its proprietor until his death in 1910. Over the years, Elizabeth Custer maintained a correspondence with the Lyons, and visited them in Saginaw on various occasions. After her husband was killed at the Little Big Horn, she became a tireless defender of General Custer's reputation, and sought to make him a hero and role model for young boys. She wrote three books, numerous magazine articles, and traveled the world giving lectures on her husband's career.

In 1885, Libbie Custer wrote to Farnham Lyon to solicit his help in lobbying for Margaret Custer Calhoun to receive a federal appointment as a Pension Agent. Margaret Calhoun was General Custer's sister, and her husband had also died at the Little Big Horn. This brought Lyon into correspondence with President Cleveland's personal secretary, Daniel S. Lamont (1851-1905), and David M. Benjamin (b.1834), a prominent businessman in Grand Rapids and staunch Grover Cleveland supporter. Although she did not receive the appointment, Margaret Custer Calhoun was made State Librarian at the Library of Michigan in 1891. In 1904, she married John H. Maugham of New York, but soon became an invalid and died of liver cancer in 1910. Elizabeth B. Custer never remarried, and it was only after her death at the age of 90 that a critical reevaluation of George Armstrong Custer began.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection contains correspondence to Farnham Lyon, prominent hotel proprietor, from late 1885, and an autograph book that he kept. Also, numerous newspaper clippings relating to Farnham Lyon, Elizabeth B. Custer, the death of Margaret Custer Calhoun Maugham, George Armstrong Custer's career, and the 1910 dedication of a Custer memorial in Monroe, Michigan.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Custer, Elizabeth Bacon, 1842-1933

Series 1. Correspondence

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| Box 1: 1 | E. B. Custer to Lyon, August 2 [1885] |
| Box 1: 2 | E. B. Custer to Lyon, October 15 [1885] |
| Box 1: 3 | E. B. Custer to Lyon, October 21 [1885] |
| Box 1: 4 | E. B. Custer to Lyon, [October 24, 1885] |
| Box 1: 5 | E. B. Custer to Lyon, October 31, [1885] |
| Box 1: 6 | E. B. Custer to Lyon, November 12 [1885] |
| Box 1: 7 | E. B. Custer to Lyon, November 18 [1885] |
| Box 1: 8 | D. S. Lamont to Lyon, October 26, 1885 |
| Box 1: 9 | D. M. Benjamin to Lyon, October 30, 1885 |

Series 2. **Miscellany**

Box 1: 10 **Autograph book, 1879-1883**
Box 1: 11 **E. B. Custer's notes re Stevensburg, Virginia, on Bancroft House stationery, ca. 1902**
Box 1: 12 **Clippings: Farnham Lyon obituaries, 1910**
Box 1: 13 **Clippings: Elizabeth B. Custer, ca. 1910-1917**
Box 1: 14 **Clippings: Margaret Custer Calhoun Maugham, 1910**
Box 1: 15 **Clippings: George A. Custer, ca. 1910-1926**