Guide to the Augusta Evans Wilson papers
MSS.1563

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists’ Toolkit
February 18, 2009
Describing Archives: A Content Standard
# Table of Contents

- **Summary Information** ................................................................. 3
- **Biographical/Historical note** .................................................. 4
- **Scope and Contents note** .......................................................... 5
- **Administrative Information** ..................................................... 5
- **Collection Inventory** ............................................................... 6
## Summary Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository</th>
<th>W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>Evans, Augusta J. (Augusta Jane), 1835-1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Augusta Evans Wilson papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1859-1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>0.4 Linear feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Correspondence, newspaper clippings, and a bound manuscript of the 19th century Alabama author, Augusta Evans Wilson of Mobile, Alabama.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Biographical/Historical note

Augusta Jane Evans was born 8 May 1835 in Columbus, Georgia, the daughter of Matt Ryon and Sarah Skrine (Howard) Evans. She was educated in her home under the supervision of her mother. In 1839, after the bankruptcy of her father’s business, the family plantation and possessions were sold at auction and the family moved into a modest plantation house at Oswitchee in Russell County, Alabama. By early 1845, Augusta’s parents made the decision to leave their troubles behind and move the family to Texas.

The large Evans family eventually settled in San Antonio in 1846. It was here, at the age of fifteen, that Augusta began her first novel, “Inez: A Tale of the Alamo.” In 1849, when thousands were rushing westward in search of gold, Matt Evans prepared to take his family east. The discomforts of frontier life and the numerous occasions of violence near San Antonio more than likely contributed significantly to his decision to leave Texas.

After the family moved back to Alabama they settled in Mobile where Augusta finished “Inez,” a sentimental, moralistic anti-Catholic love story, and presented it to her father as a Christmas present in 1854. It was published anonymously a short time later. Her second novel, “Beulah,” was published in 1859 and sold over 22,000 copies during its first year of publication. For an 18-year old female author, this was practically unheard of. The proceeds of the book allowed her family to purchase Georgia Cottage on Springhill Avenue in Mobile.

During the Civil War, Augusta was a staunch supporter of the Confederacy and was active in the service of the South as a propagandist. She had been engaged to a journalist from New York but broke off the engagement in 1860 because he supported Abraham Lincoln. She sewed sandbags for the defense of the community and established a hospital near her residence that was dubbed Camp Beulah in honor of her novel. She also carried on a correspondence with two noted Confederate leaders, General P.G.T. Beauregard and Alabama congressman, J.L.M. Curry.

During this time she published a pro-Confederate propaganda novel titled “Macaria; or Altars of Sacrifice.” It was extremely popular with both Southerners and Northerners alike and was circulated among the Northern troops to cause rancor in the ranks. General George Henry Thomas, commander of the Union Army in Tennessee, had all copies of the book among the troops under his command confiscated and burned. Unbeknownst to Augusta, “Macaria” was also published in the New York. The royalties from its sale were held in trust for her until after the Civil War. Augusta only learned of the royalties after the war when she accompanied her brother, Howard Evans, to New York to see a medical specialist to treat his paralyzed arm caused by a war injury. The funds allowed Augusta and her family to weather the years of Reconstruction without excessive want.

Augusta published her most popular novel, “St. Elmo,” in 1866. Within four months it sold over a million copies and was so popular that many towns, hotels, steamboats and even a cigar brand were named after it. Augusta Evans was the first American woman writer to make over $100,000, a record that would not be surpassed until Edith Wharton did it several years later.

On 3 December 1868 Augusta married Colonel Lorenzo Madison Wilson, a widowed Mobile businessman, 27 years her senior. She moved her favorite writing desk to Ashland, his home in Spring Hill,
Mobile County, Alabama, virtually next door to the Evans’ family home, Georgia Cottage. She continued writing though more sporadically, as she became the first lady of Mobile society. Augusta finished “Vashti,” “Infelice,” and a murder mystery (which she declared was her favorite) “At the Mercy of Tiberius” before her husband’s death in 1891. After his death, she left Ashland and moved into her brother Howard’s home in Mobile. In spite of deteriorating health and eyesight, August wrote two more romantic novels, “A Speckled Bird” and “Devota.” She died of a heart attack on May 9, 1909, one day after her 74th birthday.

Author of: Inez, A Tale of the Alamo (1855); Beulah (1859); Macaria, or Altars of Sacrifice (1864); St. Elmo, or Saved at Last (1866); Vashti, or Until Death Us Do Part (1869); Infelice (1875); At the Mercy of Tiberius (1887); A Speckled Bird (1902); Devota (1907).

---

**Scope and Contents note**

This collection contains correspondence, newspaper clippings and one manuscript of the 19th century Alabama author, Augusta Evans Wilson of Mobile, Alabama. Her personal correspondence contains original letters and photocopies, the majority written to Rachel Lyons Heustis and J. L. M. Curry, discussing life during the Civil War and Mrs. Wilson’s novels. Other prominent correspondants include Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, educator, Congressman and Baptist minister, J.L.M. Curry, and Congressman and U.S. Consul at Leeds, Norfleet Harris.

The newspaper clippings include requests by Mrs. Wilson for assistance in preserving graves and erecting monuments of the Confederate dead as well as an obituary essay she wrote at the death of her 22-month old niece and namesake, Augusta Vivian Evans. There are also several articles about her childhood home, Sherwood Hall (later renamed St. Elmo after her story) in Columbus, Georgia.

The manuscript is a bound, hand-written copy of "Vashti" with a note from the publisher, G.W. Carlton, written on the title page saying, "To the Printer. This Ms is to be Carefully handled & preserved. Every page of it. April 8, 1869 Carlton"

---

**Administrative Information**

**Provenance**

# Collection Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1563.0001</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1563.0001</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1563.0001</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1563.0001</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1563.0001</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scope and Contents note**

Correspondents include General P.G.T. Beauregard (1862), Colonel Seaver (1867 - Photocopy), and U.S. Consul, Leeds, England, Norfleet Harris (1894).
Newspaper Clippings

Scope and Contents note

Clippings include two appeals to build a monument to the Confederate dead at Mobile; the essay "The Mutilation of the Hermae," (9 November 1862); a eulogy on the death of her 22-month old niece and namesake, Augusta Vivian Evans; a several Sunday magazine spreads on the various homes she lived in (Atlanta Journal, 7 February 1926; Birmingham News, 7 February 1926; Birmingham News, 17 October 1937; (Mobile?) Ledger-Inquirer, 9 March 1941 and 16 March 1941; and Mobile Press 4 March 1966).

Miscellaneous Documents

"Vashti, of Until Death Do Us Part" Manuscript

Scope and Contents note

Bound, hand-written copy of "Vashti, or Until Death Do Us Part" with a note written by the New York publisher, G.W. Carlton, on the title page "To the Printer. This Ms is to be carefully handed & preserved. Every page of it. April 8, 1869 Carlton"