

Harriet Mary Overton Stimson Papers

MsSC 143

Biography

Harriet Mary Overton (1862-1936), originally from Adams County, New York and educated to be a professional musician at Ann Arbor, Michigan, married Charles Douglas (C.D.) Stimson (1857-1929) at Big Rapids, Michigan in 1892. C.D.'s father, Thomas Douglas (T.D.) Stimson (1827-1896), founder of a vast timber and real estate empire, established a family business in Michigan and Minnesota, but eventually invested heavily in Pacific Northwest timber and real estate. As a part of the family's effort to expand its empire, C.D. and Harriet moved to the Puget Sound area in the fall of 1888. After much thought, C.D. purchased a dilapidated mill at Ballard, Washington in 1889. The Stimson Mill Company became a major part of the Stimson Land Company, which was founded in April of 1889 and eventually controlled tens of thousands of acres of valuable timber. These investments, among many others, enabled the Stimson family to ascend the Seattle social ladder and play a major role in the city's development during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Several historical events also contributed to the Stimson's wealth and social success. The 1889 Seattle fire, the Yukon Gold Rush, and Seattle's immense growth created a tremendous demand for lumber, which the Stimson's were able to provide, while making large profits. After living for approximately ten years in a fashionable residence on the south slope of Queen Anne Hill, C.D. built a larger house, now known as the Stimson-Green Mansion, on First Hill. From this residence, Harriet made the social rounds and advocated, both verbally and financially, for a variety of civic causes. Among these were the following: parks and boulevards, a symphony orchestra, the Cornish School of the Arts, the Visiting Nurse Service, and Children's Orthopedic Hospital. Until her death in 1936, Harriet devoted her time to her family and civic causes.

Scope and Content

The Harriet Stimson Papers are organized into four series: Correspondence, Miscellaneous Items, Proxies to Vote Stock, and Postcard Ballots.

The Stimson papers consist primarily of correspondence describing the management of the Seattle Symphony and the Seattle Symphony Society between 1907 and 1909. Although the Stimson Papers reflect the early history of the Seattle Symphony, they do not cover its earliest origins, the first performance having occurred on December 29, 1903, under the direction of Harry F. West.

There are many letters to Harriet Stimson from Michael Kegrize, the conductor, and James W. Sayre, the business manager, along with a handful of letters from other people associated with the symphony. Many of these letters provide a behind the scenes view of the symphony's personality politics, and in particular the conflict between Kegrize and Sayre. The letters also reveal the symphony's finances during its early years. Harriet Stimson's opinion of these political struggles is not known, since the papers contain only incoming correspondence.

Inclusive Dates: November, 1905 - September, 1909.

Restrictions : None.

Volume : .5 linear feet.

Accession Number: 1995.150.1

Box 1: Correspondence, 1905 - Postcard Ballots, 1909.

Folder:

1. **Correspondence, 1905:** A Philadelphia Symphony Program (11/17/05) and a newspaper clipping on same.
2. **Correspondence, 1907:** Unsigned notes on the number of musicians in the symphony and their cost to the society; unsigned notes on the business and procedural organization of the symphony; correspondence describing how the business-side of running the symphony was “worked-out” among Kegrize, Sayre, Mrs. E. C. Hughes (Treasurer), and Stimson; two Seattle Symphony Orchestra season (1907-1908) tickets; discussions covering the establishment of a series of “Popular Concerts” to supplement the more formal evening performances.
3. **Correspondence, 1908:** Four copies of the Seattle Symphony’s performance schedule for the 1908-1909 season; correspondence describing box office receipts, business expenses, and marketing efforts; letters of inquiry from musicians; letters describing events involving featured soloists; letters describing the negotiations with the Alaska-Yukon Exposition commissioners over performances by the symphony; letters from Kegrize, Sayre, and others reflecting the growing tension among the symphony’s administrators.
4. **Correspondence, 1909:** Newspaper clippings; correspondence describing box office receipts, business expenses, marketing efforts, and scheduling problems; letters describing events involving featured soloists; letters describing the negotiations with the Alaska-Yukon Exposition commissioners over performances by the symphony; letters of inquiry from musicians; several telegrams from persons associated with the symphony; Kegrize’s letter of resignation.
5. **Correspondence, 1910:** Newspaper clippings; one copy of the twenty page Seattle Symphony performance schedule/brochure for the 1910-1911 season, which was apparently the “fourth season.” After Kegrize departed Henry Hadley became the conductor.
6. **Correspondence, (Undated):** A post-1908 poster for the Dutch Contralto Tilly Koenen; a small selection of undated correspondence reflecting events between 1907 and 1910.
7. **Miscellaneous Items:** Several newspaper clippings on symphonies around the country, a postcard, and a business card.
8. **Proxies to Vote Stock, September, 1909:** Proxies for thirteen holders of stock in the Seattle Symphony Society.
9. **Postcard Ballots, September, 1909:** A selection of returned Postcard Ballots indicating what the respondent thought about “increasing the number of Trustees from 13 to 25.”
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