

2003

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Recommended Citation

Hennen, Michael (2003) "The Elms: Time Capsule of Natchez and Vicksburg Urban Life," *The Primary Source*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.18785/ps.2501.03

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource/vol25/iss1/3>

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The Elms:
Time Capsule of Natchez and Vicksburg Urban Life
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The Elms

The earliest portion of the town residence currently known as the Elms was built in Natchez, Mississippi, on an eleven-acre tract that John Henderson purchased from William Barland in 1804. A native of Scotland, Henderson had settled in the Natchez District in 1787, and he was the author of the first book to be published in Natchez. Henderson later advertised the Elms for sale in the *Natchez Chronicle* on April 30, 1810. It was purchased by Lewis Evans, first sheriff of the Mississippi Territory. After the death of his wife, Sarah, on May 13, 1815, Evans sold the property to Samuel Postlethwaite in 1818. A small tract of land adjoining the Elms and situated on the corner of Homochitto and Pine streets was later conveyed by Postlethwaite to the Female Charitable Society for use as an orphanage. Before moving

to Clifton, his newly constructed mansion near the Natchez bluffs, Postlethwaite deeded the Elms to his daughter, Matilda Rose Postlethwaite Potts, and his son-in-law, the Reverend George Potts. The Potts family lived at the Elms, which they called the Manse, for several years, but after being called to a Presbyterian church in New York, Dr. Potts sold the Elms to Joseph Sessions in 1835. Cornelia Sessions Baynton inherited the Elms after the death of her father. In 1849, she sold the Elms to David Stanton, who was a native of Ireland. David Stanton's wealthy brother, Frederick, built Belfast (Stanton Hall) in Natchez in 1857.

Constructed in the Federal style, the Elms was originally a two-and-a-half-story brick house with two rooms per floor. The first significant renovations at the Elms were completed around 1815. The rear two-story gallery was enclosed, and two-story galleries now encircled the front and sides of the newly enlarged house. The grounds of the Elms featured a brick conservatory that was built around 1830. However, it was destroyed by a severe tornado that ravaged much of Natchez in 1840, and its remaining three arches were planted with ivy to resemble ruins.

David Stanton completed the last significant renovations at the Elms in the 1850s. He added a two-story wing in the Greek Revival style, and the former front porch was enclosed to form an entrance hall with a curved, cast-iron staircase and doorways with colored-glass sidelights. Stanton also built a Greek Revival-style billiard hall on the grounds. After the renovations were completed, the Elms faced what was then Pine Street, rather than Washington Street.

Mosley John Posey Drake acquired the Elms in 1869, and his descendants, including members of the Drake, Cassell, Kellogg, and Carpenter families, have lived there ever since. Alma Cassell Kellogg Carpenter is the great-granddaughter of Drake. The Elms has often been featured on Pilgrimage Garden Club tours of historic antebellum homes in Natchez.

Residents of the Elms and Some of Their Papers

Originally from Missouri, Mosley John Posey Drake was married to Caroline Agee Drake of St. Louis. The Drakes had two daughters, Alma M. and Caroline Love. M. J. P. Drake was a close friend and business partner of Love S. Cornwell. They were engaged in a variety of business ventures and mercantile enterprises in Missouri prior to the Civil War and in Louisiana and Mississippi after the war. Drake died on July 19, 1899, and his wife died on March 17, 1901.

Mosley John Posey Drake's business correspondence concerns his varied commercial interests in Missouri before the Civil War and in Louisiana and Mississippi after the war. The personal papers of various male and female members of the Drake, Agee, Cornwell, and Campbell families also reflect the social life of Natchez and Vicksburg, Mississippi, and of cities and towns in Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, and Tennessee.

Caroline Love Drake married Albert Gallatin Cassell on July 17, 1886. Cassell was previously married to Sallie Sutherland in 1873, but she died without issue on December 13, 1883. Formerly of Lexington, Kentucky, Albert Gallatin Cassell was a Vicksburg, druggist and merchant. The Cassells had three daughters, Alma Stratton, Caroline Drake, and Lizzie Etheline. Following the death of their mother on December 21, 1894, the three Cassell girls were sent to live with their aunt, Alma M. Drake, at the Elms in Natchez. Lizzie Etheline Cassell died of diphtheria on November 4, 1896, and Caroline Drake Cassell died of pneumonia on February 28, 1902. Cassell married his third wife, Mammie Chapman, in 1901. She gave birth to a son, Duncan Gallatin Cassell, after the death of her husband on August 20, 1902. John Cassell, the brother of Albert Gallatin Cassell, became the legal guardian of Alma Stratton Cassell after her father's death in 1902.

Albert Gallatin Cassell's business correspondence reflects his career as a druggist and merchant in Vicksburg. The extensive correspondence of Alma M. Drake documents her important role as a caregiver for members of the Cassell and Drake families. This is especially true of her nieces, Alma Stratton, Caroline Drake, and Lizzie Etheline, whom she helped raise and educate after their mother died. In addition to managing the Elms, Alma Drake also found time to teach in the Natchez public schools.

Among the myriad advertising materials in the collection are many types of late-nineteenth-century promotional items that were apparently displayed or distributed in the drug and mercantile businesses that were owned by Albert Gallatin Cassell. They are representative of patent medicine and popular culture, especially in the South. Of particular interest are the almanacs and calendars advertising various Natchez and Vicksburg firms. The residents of the Elms also saved many types of advertising materials. They provide examples of the array of goods, products, and services available to persons living in Natchez during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As one might expect, many of the advertising items are visually appealing artifacts. For example, there is a rare set of Duke's tobacco trading cards of Civil War generals and a set of three miniature shadowboxes, containing a cow, peacock, and rooster, respectively, which advertise Bailey's dry-goods store.

Alma Stratton Cassell, who attended Campbell-Hagerman College in Lexington, Kentucky, married Joseph Bentley Kellogg of Natchez in 1917. Kellogg served in the medical detachment of the Forty-seventh Engineers, United States Army, during World War I. He was later vice-president of the City Bank and Trust Company of Natchez. The Kelloggs lived at the Elms and had one daughter, Alma Cassell. Alma Stratton Cassell Kellogg was a longtime member of the Pilgrimage Garden Club, and her home was often on tour during the annual Natchez Pilgrimage. The personal correspondence of Alma Stratton Cassell Kellogg and Joseph B. Kellogg regards their college days, courtship, marriage, and social life in Natchez during the early twentieth century.

Alma Cassell Kellogg was born in Natchez on June 13, 1927. She attended Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia, and the University of Mississippi in Oxford, where she was a member of Chi Omega sorority. Kellogg was queen of the Natchez Pilgrimage in 1946. She married James M. Cain in Pontotoc County, Mississippi, on January 10, 1947, and they had a daughter, Cassell. After divorcing Cain, she married Nathaniel Leslie Carpenter of Natchez on February 10, 1951. The Carpenters lived at Dunleith in Natchez, and they had three children, Alma, Esther, and Leslie. The Carpenters divorced in the 1970s, and Alma Kellogg Carpenter returned to the Elms. She has been active in the Pilgrimage Garden Club and the Pilgrimage Historical Association, and she has been a supporter of the Historic Natchez Foundation. Carpenter has also been an advocate for historic preservation in Natchez and Adams County. The correspondence of Alma Cassell Kellogg Carpenter concerns her academic and social life at Hollins College or the University of Mississippi during and immediately after World War II.

Members of the Agee, Cassell, Cornwell, Drake, and Kellogg families, their classmates and friends, and historical figures are depicted in ambrotypes, daguerreotypes, tintypes, cabinet cards, cartes-de-visite, stereograph cards, and other photographic images. There are nineteenth-century photographs of lawn tennis and other outdoor activities at the Elms or of other homes and buildings in Natchez. There are also numerous postcards, some depicting early twentieth-century views of Jackson, Natchez, Vicksburg, and other Mississippi cities, as well as out-of-state and foreign locations.

Residents of the Elms also accumulated an extensive assortment of ephemera, memorabilia, and printed works. Examples include issues of *Agee's Bee*, a magazine of Agee family genealogy, news, and religious matters; a catalog from Stanton College in Natchez; newspapers from Jefferson Military College and Natchez High School; and clippings and programs from the premiere of the 1939 motion picture, *Gone with the Wind*. There are also issues of the *Master Detective* (1933), a magazine that contains articles on Glenwood (Goat Castle) residents Richard Dana and Octavia Dockery, who were initially implicated in and later cleared of the murder of Jennie Surget Merrill, who lived nearby at Glenburnie in Natchez.

We will probably never know what motivated those living at the Elms to preserve such an extraordinarily diverse collection of archival and ephemeral materials in their attic. Perhaps it was an aversion to throwing away anything of sentimental value, coupled with the availability of a finished attic room with ample storage space. Whatever the reason, the treasure-trove continued to accumulate for more than a century until the attic was *completely* filled. Although the residents of the Elms were probably not aware of it, their attic became a virtual time capsule of materials documenting nineteenth- and twentieth-century life in Natchez and Vicksburg.

The Elms Papers

The Elms Papers were donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History by the current owner of the Elms, Alma Cassell Kellogg Carpenter, between 1986 and 1989. The diverse array of archival materials, ephemera, and memorabilia reflect the business interests and personal activities of successive members of the Stanton, Drake, Cassell, Kellogg, and Carpenter families who have lived at the Elms since the 1850s. The fifty-cubic-foot collection includes business and personal correspondence; photographs and postcards; advertising materials; publications; and numerous other items. The Elms Papers (Z/1879.000/S) are now fully processed and available for research in the Department library. An extensive finding aid to the collection is also available in HTML through the Department web site.

