



Guide to the Lois Wright Richardson Davis family papers, 1851-1912 and undated.

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
Background	4
Arrangement	5
Administrative Information	5
Names and Subjects	6
Collection Inventory	7

Summary

Collection Title:

Lois Wright Richardson Davis family papers, 1851-1912 and undated

Creator:

Davis, Lois Wright Richardson, 1805-1889

Abstract:

Working-class New England family that was involved with both the Union and the Confederacy during the American Civil War. The mother, Lois Wright was born in Northfield, Massachusetts and died in Lowell, Massachusetts. She had at least seven children with her first husband Luther Richardson. The bulk of the collection is made up of letters between Davis and her children during the Civil War. In the late 1850s two of Lois Davis' daughters moved to Mobile, Alabama and their husbands served in the Confederate Army. Two of Lois Davis' sons fought with Massachusetts regiments, Charles Henry at first with the 6th Massachusetts Infantry, and then both Charles Henry and Luther with the 26th Massachusetts Infantry. Includes letters written from Ship Island, MS (1861-1862) and New Orleans, LA (1862-1864); and material on the riots in Baltimore, MD, and battles at Manassas, Malvern Hill, Petersburg, Winchester, VA, and the Shenandoah Valley, Baton Rouge and Port Hudson, LA, Sabine Pass, TX, and along the Mississippi and Red Rivers. The letters include descriptions of living and working conditions; illnesses; deaths; and thoughts on politics, race, and religion. Also includes letters about life after the Civil War. Daughter Eunice, whose husband died while serving the Confederacy, remarried to William Smiley Connolly, an Afro-Caribbean and mixed-race ship captain. They married in Dracut, Massachusetts, and she moved with him to Grand Cayman Island. Her letters, 1870-1875, describe their life in Grand Cayman. There are additional papers relating to Charles Henry Richardson's life in Lowell, Massachusetts where he worked in a textile mill and served as an Alderman.

Extent:

0.75 Linear Feet

Language:

Materials in English

Collection ID:

RL.11567

Permalink:

<https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/ldavis/>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], [Title of collection], David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Background

Scope and Content

The bulk of the collection consists of letters written between family members during the American Civil War. These letters discuss the family's concerns about being split by the war, illnesses, deaths, politics, race, religion, and employment. There are also letters after the Civil War up until 1912. Some of these letters relate to Davis' daughter, Eunice, who married an Afro-Caribbean sea merchant and moved with him to Grand Cayman Island. There are also papers relating to Charles Henry, the only son to survive the war. Several of these letters are letters of recommendation in support of specific veterans receiving their pensions, including a letter that describes a possibly gender-fluid, gender nonconforming, and/or transgender soldier nicknamed "Lucy."

Biographical/Historical

Working-class New England family that was involved with both the Union and the Confederacy during the American Civil War. The mother, Lois Wright was born in 1805 in Northfield, Massachusetts and died in 1889 in Lowell, Massachusetts. She had at least seven children with her first husband, Luther Richardson. Her children's names are: Ann Mary (born 1827), Harriet L. (born 1829), Eunice Louensa (1831-1877), Jane (1833-1856), Ellen A. (born 1835), Luther L. (1841-1864), and Charles Henry (1835-1913). In 1850 or 1851, Lois' first husband abandoned her and the family, and in 1855 Lois married a Massachusetts shoemaker, Bradley Davis. In the late 1850s two of Lois Davis' daughters moved to Mobile, Alabama and their husbands served in the Confederate Army. Two of Lois Davis' sons fought with Massachusetts regiments.

During the war, one of the Mobile daughters (Eunice) returned to New England. There she struggled to support herself and her children. She worked as a washer woman and also wove hats while surviving several serious illnesses. Eventually (it's unclear exactly when), she learned that her husband had died of cholera in the war. In 1869 in Dracut, Massachusetts, she married a sea captain and ship owner from Grand Cayman Island, William Smiley Connolly, who was

Afro-Caribbean and mixed race. She went to live with him on Grand Cayman Island during the 1870s. Letters during this time describe life in Grand Cayman as well the deaths of Eunice, William Connolly, and their daughters while sailing through a hurricane near Nicaragua.

Of the two sons that fought for the Union, Luther died in battle in 1864 shortly after re-enlisting. After the war, Charles Henry returned to Massachusetts and worked his way up in a textile mill in Lowell and became involved in public life, eventually becoming an Alderman.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Arrangement

Organized into the following file structure: Correspondence, Clippings, Legal and Financial, Photographs, and Printed Materials.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

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URL: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of

the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The Lois Wright Richardson Davis family papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in 1974 and as a gift in 2007.

Processing Information

Processed by Laurin Penland, April 2018.

Accessions described in this collection guide: an accession received in 1974 and an accession in 2007 (2007-0013).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Names and Subjects

- American Civil War (1861-1865)
- Baltimore (Md.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Louisiana -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Maryland -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Mobile (Ala.) -- Social life and customs
- Ship Island (Miss.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- New Orleans (La.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Soldiers -- Correspondence
- Texas -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- West Indies, British -- Description and travel
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Virginia -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Interracial marriage -- Massachusetts -- History -- 19th century
- Grand Cayman Island (Cayman Islands)
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Pensions
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Women
- Working class -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Lowell (Mass.)
- Northfield (Mass.) -- History
- Working class women -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Working class whites -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Slavery -- United States
- Gender nonconformity -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Gender identity -- United States -- History -- 19th century

- Transgender military personnel
- Mothers and daughters -- Correspondence
- Parent and child -- Correspondence
- Mothers and sons -- Correspondence
- Davis, Lois Wright Richardson, 1805-1889
- Connolly, Eunice Richardson, 1831-1877
- Connolly, William Smiley, 1833-1877
- Richardson, Charles Henry, 1843-1913
- Richardson, Luther, 1841-1864
- United States. Army. Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (6th : 1861-1864)
- United States . Army. Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (26th : 1861-1865)

Collection Inventory

General correspondence, 1851-1857 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1851-1857](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters to and from various family members, including Lois Wright Richardson Davis, all of her children, a few of her siblings, and Luther Richardson's parents. Some letters address Luther Richardson's abandonment of the family, his whereabouts, and Lois Richardson's grief about the situation. They also document Lois's marriage to Bradley Davis in 1855, the death of her daughter Jane in 1856, illnesses, births of grandchildren, and plans for Ellen and Dudley Merrill to move south to Alabama.

General correspondence, 1857-1859 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1857-1859](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters to and from various family members. Some describe Ellen Merill's decision to move to Mobile, Alabama with her family and include descriptions of their journey on a steamship, her first impressions of life in Mobile, and descriptions of enslaved African Americans. There are letters to Charles Henry and Luther regarding the importance of moral character. A few of the letters describe the family's difficulty or success finding work. Letters in 1859 show that William Stone (Eunice Stone's husband) moved to Mobile, Alabama as well.

General correspondence, 1860-1861 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1860-1861](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters document Eunice Stone's plan to join her husband and sister in Mobile, Alabama, and some of her first impressions of Alabama after arriving. On January 6th, 1861, she writes her brother Charles Henry and asks him if he is "coming down here to fight us." On April 29th, 1861, she also writes about her thoughts upon the outbreak of the Civil War and what it is like to be a supporter of the Union in the South. On June 6th, 1861, Lois writes to her son Charles Henry, who joined the Union, telling him not to worry about their family in the South and describing the atmosphere in New England.

General correspondence, 1861 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1861](#)

Scope and Contents

Most of the letters in this folder are about Charles Henry's enlistment in the 6th Regiment of the Massachusetts Infantry. Some of the letters mention the tension and unhappiness in the family about "brother against brother in the fatal conflict." They also mention Charles Henry's enlistment with the 26th Regiment along with his brother Luther and stepbrother Osgood Davis. The letters describe the activities of the regiments and conditions on the ground. A letter from Eunice shows that she and her children have moved back to Massachusetts to wait out the war.

General correspondence, 1862 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1862](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters from Eunice upon giving birth to a daughter (Clara) in Claremont, New Hampshire, and from Luther and Charles Henry, who are encamped at Ship Island, Mississippi. Eunice writes about sending her son away to work and about taking up housework to earn her board. Charles Henry and Luther leave Ship Island for Louisiana. Charles Henry tells of recovering from several illnesses, searching for guerilla fighters, a shipwreck, and other incidents in the field. He also tells of attending a prayer meeting of formerly enslaved African Americans and writes about abolitionists and politics. Eunice continues to write about her living and work conditions and about her children.

General correspondence, 1863 January-June (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1863 January-June](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters from Charles Henry continue to report on his health and to describe his time in New Orleans. He writes to his mother asking advice on whether he should join an African American regiment which could result in advancement. He mentions the African American regiment in several subsequent letters. In writing he shares his racist views. Lois writes to Charles Henry about news of the war, her worries for her sons, and how things are at home. Eunice's son Clarence writes letters to his grandmother Lois. Lois explains to Charles Henry how she has needed to spend the money he earns from the war to help herself and other family members. A few of the letters mention the Emancipation Proclamation. Eunice writes about working as a washer woman and about making palm leaf hats to sell. Luther writes that he heard from prisoners of war that his brothers-in-law Dudley Merrill and William Stone might be with 18th Alabama Regiment in East Tennessee. Eunice writes back with instructions to Luther to write to their sister Ellen in Alabama; she urges him to be careful in what he says for fear of spys. Luther reports that he has been working in the cookhouse. Other letters from Charles Henry mention battles going on at Vicksburg and Port Hudson.

General correspondence, 1863 July-December
(online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1863 July-December](#)

Scope and Contents

Luther and Charles Henry write of leaving New Orleans for Baton Rouge, Algiers, and New Iberia. They describe what it is like to leave a city they have been in for so long and about their interactions with the new regiment that is taking their place. Luther writes that many of the soldiers had a hard time leaving the wives, lovers, and friends that they had in New Orleans. They both report that Osgood Davis has died. Charles Henry describes the Battle of Sabine Pass in September, 1863. Luther writes from Brashear City about tearing down buildings and stables for the Union encampment. He also mentions that he has a special friend in New Orleans named Emily Hall. Luther and Charles Henry's regiment is marched to Camp Bisland and then to Carrion Crow in Louisiana. Charles Henry copies an excerpt from his diary that describes their marches and skirmishes. Eunice writes of changing living situations and about her troubles dealing with a difficult neighbor or landlord. Lois's niece writes from Vermont about losing two children to dyptheria. Charles Henry writes that he got typhoid and was hospitalized. Several of the letters mention "copperheads" (anti-war democrats). On December 26th, Charles Henry writes about the copperheads and Lincoln's announcement to call for 300,000 more troops.

General correspondence, 1864 January-June
(online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1864 July-October](#)

Scope and Contents

Charles Henry writes that he and Luther have re-enlisted. At first they are stationed at New Iberia, then near Franklin, Louisiana, then in New Orleans, Carrollton, and Morganza. Various family members respond to Charles Henry and Luther's re-enlistment, as well as to the news that they will come home on furlough. Eunice writes of her long days working as a washer woman. On May 20th, Charles Henry describes their journey back to New Orleans after their furlough; he includes excerpts from a diary and describes his feelings about being a soldier. Eunice writes that she is ill and that her daughter Clara has scarlet fever. Eunice wonders how she will make a living and take care of her home and children as well. She thinks of making hats to sell but cannot afford a hat for herself. Charles Henry writes of a fire in New Orleans which destroyed steamers and schooners. He also writes that 29 men died of sunstroke during a military review that included 30,000 men. Charles Henry and Luther ask their mother to send photos of themselves so they can give them to their fellow soldiers. They also write of their support of Abraham Lincoln in the upcoming presidential election.

General correspondence, 1864 July-October
(online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1864 January-June](#)

Scope and Contents

Luther and Charles Henry write from Bermuda Hundred, Virginia, where they have been stationed. Charles Henry describes skirmishes and tough conditions as they move on the James River to Taneytown, MD, and then to Harper's Ferry and Berryville, VA. Eunice continues to write of hardship in Claremont. On September 21st, Charles Henry writes from Winchester, VA that Luther was killed in battle on the 19th. Charles was wounded and sent to the hospital before being sent on furlough. Several family members share the news and their feelings about Luther's death.

General correspondence, 1864 October-
December (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1864 October-December](#)

Scope and Contents

Eunice writes several letters inquiring whether or not she should live with her mother for the winter. Charles Henry writes from McClellan Hospital, PA where he waits until he can return to his regiment in Camp Russell, VA.

Upon his return to the regiment he finds that he has been demoted because of consolidation. He fights the demotion and is promoted to Sergeant.

General correspondence, 1865 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1865](#)

Scope and Contents

Charles Henry writes from Winchester, VA. He visits Luther's grave and asks his mother if he should send his body home to be buried there. He writes about the failing Confederacy and about matters back home. Lois writes that Eunice is gravely ill. Charles Henry writes about the war being over but then is dismayed to receive orders to go to Savannah, GA. Eunice writes of her illness and despair at learning that her husband died in the Confederate Army. Lois and Eunice write Charles Henry to see if he can find out anything about his sister Ellen in Alabama. Charles Henry writes that he will be mustered out of the army soon.

General correspondence, 1866-1870 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1866-1870](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters to Lois, Charles Henry and others from family members in Massachusetts and Vermont. Eunice's son Clarence writes to Eunice's new husband William S. Connolly. Connolly writes to Lois from Boston and then from Provincetown before he, Eunice, Clara, and Clarence set sail for Grand Cayman. Eunice writes to Lois about life in Grand Cayman.

General correspondence, 1870-1875 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1870-1875](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters to Lois from various family members. A letter from William S. Connolly says that Clarence has died and that Eunice is ill. Charles Henry writes a statement in defense of a fellow soldier who was severely punished for a "trivial offense." Eunice writes that she has not heard from her family in America in years.

General correspondence, 1875-1885 (online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1875-1885](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters to Lois, Charles Henry, and Ellen. One letter describes the death of Eunice, William, and their children aboard a ship in a hurricane on September 27th, 1877. Charles Henry writes letters on behalf of former soldiers so that they can receive their pensions. One letter from April 28th, 1884, describes a respected soldier nicknamed "Lucy," who was seen as "very feminine in his ways." A letter from a Confederate veteran responds to Charles Henry's inquiry in search of his regiment's flag.

General correspondence, 1885-1915 and undated
(online item available)

Box 1

Digital Object: [General correspondence, 1885-1915 and undated](#)

Scope and Contents

Letters to and from various government representatives and Charles Henry about the recognition of his status as an officer. Letters to Charles Henry's wife Clara. Other miscellaneous letters from family members.

Charles H. Richardson patent, 1897 January
(online item available)

Box 2

Digital Object: [Charles H. Richardson patent, 1897](#)

Scope and Contents

Patent for Doubling and Twisting Frame intended for textile manufacturing.

Clippings, 1861-1864 (online item available)

Box 2

Digital Object: [Clippings, 1861-1864](#)

Legal and financial, 1860-1912 and undated
(online item available)

Box 2

Oversize-folder 1

Oversize-folder 2

Digital Object: [Legal and financial, 1860-1912 and undated](#)

Digital Object: [Legal and financial, 1864-1881](#)

Scope and Contents

Mostly pertaining to Charles Henry's enlistment and re-enlistment in the Massachusetts' 26th Regiment during the Civil War.

Photographs, 1863-1864 and undated (online
item available)

Box 2

Digital Object: [Photographs, 1863-1864 and undated](#)

Scope and Contents

Four carte de visite.

Printed materials, ephemera, and copied poems,
1852-1896 and undated (online item available)

Box 2

Digital Object: [Printed materials, ephemera, and copied poems, 1852-1896 and undated](#)