

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
RARE BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS DIVISION
ACCESSION SHEET

Accession # 41 M 166

Location Room ~~319/Top~~ Case 10

Title Van Lew, Elizabeth. Papers.

Approximate inclusive dates 1862-1901

Date of receipt 1941

Received from Mrs. John P. Reynolds
(wife of Van Lew's executor)

Volume on arrival

Number of boxes (after reboxing) 1 FB

Condition Good, but some manuscripts need to be pieced together

Restrictions ~~None~~ MICROFILM MUST BE USED

Description American abolitionist and federal agent during the Civil War. She was born on October 17, 1818 into a family of high social standing in Richmond, Virginia. For her education, she was sent to Philadelphia where her pro-Union leanings may have had their beginnings. When the war came, she was back in Richmond and was openly loyal to the Union which she relentlessly supplied with intelligence reports through relay stations run by her servants. She was reported to have freed her slaves and helped Union prisoners escape from their Southern captors. Van Lew was also involved in the "Underground railroad." After the war, Pres. Grant appointed her Postmaster of Richmond and remained in that capacity until 1877. She was then appointed to the Post Office Department in Washington, finally resigning her post during the Cleveland administration. She returned to Richmond where she spent the remaining years of her life working for women's rights. Van Lew died at the age of 82 on September 25, 1900 and was buried in Shockoe Hill Cemetery in Richmond.

The collection contains letters to and from Van Lew together with letters relating to her (1862-1901, n.d.). The more substantial portion of the collection is in the form of her personal narrative of the war in Richmond, touching on such issues as the treatment of federal prisoners, treachery and espionage among the citizenry, and the Southern attitude towards the war. There are notes on her ancestry and spying; photographs of herself and the Van Lew mansion; artifacts such as rings and studs carved out of animal bone by the federal prisoners in Libby Prison and presented to her in gratitude for the services she rendered in their aid. The cipher that she used to send coded messages to Union commanders is also present. Finally, there are newspaper clippings about her death (1900).

Special Formats Photographs Maps Audio Tapes Films Graphics
 Artifacts Machine-readable records
 Other (list) _____

Temporary catalog card added entries

United States-History--Civil War, 1861-1865---Personal Narratives

United States-History--Civil War, 1861-1865---Secret Service

United States-History--Civil War, 1861-1865---Richmond

Women Spies

Accessioned by A. N. Tisdell

Date Jan. 10, 1985

Elizabeth L. Van Lew Papers

1. Van Lew, E.L., ltr to U.S. Grant 1869, Apr. 6
" " ' ' ltr " " " 1869, Oct. 2
2. " " ' ' ltr " Mr. Rogers 1877, Apr. 10
" " ' ' ltr " Mr. Howland 1877, June 16
3. " " ' ' ltr " General--? 1881 [c. Feb.1]
" " ' ' ltr " Thurlow Weed 1881, Mar. 16
4. " " ' ' ltr " Editors, Wash. Evening Star 1881, Mar. 26
" " ' ' ltr " "Gentlemen" 1887, July 11
5. " " ' ' ltr " Mr. Howe 1887, July 13
" " ' ' ltr " Mr. Forbes 1891, Mar. 20
" " ' ' ltr " ? n.d.
6. HILL, Owen B. ltr " E.L. Van Lew 1862, Jan. 23
TURNER, Capt. Thomas P. ltr to E.L. Van Lew [1862?] Feb. 16
7. WHITE CAPS warning to E.L. Van Lew 186-?
8. WICKHAM, W.C. ltr to ' ' " " 1877, Feb. 24
9. BUTLER, Benjamin F. ltr to E.M. Stanton 1864, Feb. 5
10. " " ' ltr " Col. Hardie 1865, Apr. 6
CARPENTER, Edmund L. ltr to Elihu Root 1901, Mar. 16
11. Editors Youth's Companion ltr to Mrs. Noland 1900, Oct. 26
GRANT, U.S. statement re Miss Van Lew 1877, Feb. 26
12. MEADE, George C. ltr to Mr. Babcock 1864, Feb. 4
M.E.C. (Mrs. U.S. Grant's secy) to Edmund L. Carpenter 1901, Apr. 2
13. NEW, W.W. ltr to Miss King ? 1864, Sept. 27
REVERE, M.A. ltr to John P. Reynolds 1901, Feb. 10
REYNOLDS, John P. ltr to War Dept. 1901, Mar. 22
14. SHARPE, George Henry ltr to Gen. C.B. Comstock 1867, Jan. n.d.
15. Van Lew, E.L. - An account of her transfer to Dead Letter Office
of the Post Office Dept., ... 1887?
16. Van Lew, E.L. - Article in response to a newspaper article
entitled "Men & Monopolists" ... written after 1885.
17. REYNOLDS, John P. - Article of address on E.L. Van Lew n.d.
" " ' - Biographical sketch of E.L. Van Lew n.d.
18. Van Lew, E.L. - Cipher used by her ..., 186_?
19. " " ' ' - Notes on her ancestry n.d.
" " ' ' - Notes on her being called a spy [1887?]
20. " " ' ' - Note on reverse of card of Louis Grund ...1892
- 21-26. " " ' ' - Personal narrative of the Civil War
27. " " ' ' - A protest against taxation 1892, Nov. 28
Resolutions of the 79th Regt. of Highlanders, 4th Brigade, 1st Div/
N.Y. State Militia...1869, May 17
28. Photographs
29. Newspaper Clipping (mounted)
30. Newspaper Clipping (unmounted)