

Edith Wharton:

An Inventory of Her Correspondence with Morton Fullerton at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Wharton, Edith, 1862-1937
Title:	Edith Wharton Correspondence with Morton Fullerton
Dates:	1907-1931
Extent:	1 box (.42 linear feet)
Abstract:	This collection of correspondence between American Pulitzer Prize winning writer Edith Wharton and her friend and lover, Morton Fullerton, documents their relationship, Wharton's marriage, and her writing and travels. The letters, mostly from Wharton to Fullerton, were collected by Fullerton. Also present are letters from Fullerton and other literary figures, and four manuscript poems by Wharton.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-04479>
Language:	English.
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchase, 1980
Processed by	Jeffrey B. Scott, 1994
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Edith Newbold Jones Wharton was born on January 24, 1862 into a distinguished New York family. Wharton was privately educated and began at an early age to write, a habit viewed by her family as unsuitable for a woman of her social class and as an eccentricity best ignored and left undiscussed. Her first published work consisted of a group of poems published anonymously in 1878 under the title *Verses*.

In 1885 the twenty-three year old Edith Jones married Edward Wharton, a wealthy Bostonian who was thirteen years her senior. They divided their year between New York and Newport and later Lenox, Massachusetts, where Edith Wharton had designed a home called "The Mount." In 1897 she co-authored a book with Ogden Codman, Jr., titled *The Decoration of Houses*. Two years later a collection of her short stories was published as *The Greater Inclination*. She produced her first novel, *The Valley of Decision*, in 1902. It was followed in 1905 by *The House of Mirth*, which established Wharton's reputation as a skilled novelist. During her lifetime she published over forty books. Her most well known works include *Ethan Frome* (1911), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), for which Wharton received the Pulitzer Prize.

In 1907 the Whartons moved to Paris. It was while living there that she met William Morton Fullerton, who was to become her close friend and lover. Fullerton was born in 1865 and was a graduate of Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and received his Bachelor of Arts from Harvard in 1886. He is said to have been involved in the founding of the *Harvard Monthly*. In 1890 he began working in the Paris office of the *London Times* after having worked as a journalist in Boston for several years. Soon after their initial introduction in the spring of 1907, Fullerton, drawing upon his extensive knowledge of the Paris literary scene, helped Wharton to secure magazine publication of the French translation of her novel *The House of Mirth*. Their affair lasted from 1908 to 1910. Fullerton continued to work for the *London Times* until 1911. He authored several books and numerous periodical articles. During World War I he served as an officer. He later joined the staff of *Le Figaro* in Paris. He died there in 1952.

Wharton divorced her husband in 1913 due to his mental condition, his carelessness with money, and his numerous extra-marital affairs. Wharton continued to live in France for the rest of her life. She died in 1937 after suffering a stroke.

In his 1975 work *Edith Wharton: A Biography*, R.W.B. Lewis suggested that Wharton and Fullerton had been lovers, but no evidence at the time was available to prove his suspicions. The correspondence described here came to light in 1980 and was purchased by the Ransom Center from a Parisian owner through Zeitlen and Ver Brugge Booksellers. The content of these letters confirmed Lewis's suspicions regarding the true nature of their relationship.

This collection has been the subject of much research. Many of the letters it contains have been reproduced in R.W.B. Lewis's *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (1988), which also offers a history of the collection and a useful chronology of Wharton's life. The collection was also the subject of three articles found in *The Library Chronicle* (New Series Number 31, September 1985). They are Alan Gribben's "*The Heart is Insatiable*":

A Selection from Edith Wharton's Letters to Morton Fullerton, 1907-1915; Edith Wharton Letters Selected, Transcribed, and Annotated, also by Gribben; and Clare Colquitt's *Unpacking Her Treasures: Edith Wharton's "Mysterious Correspondence" with Morton Fullerton*. The letters were also examined by Gloria C. Erlich in her book *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (1992).

Scope and Contents

This collection of letters of Edith Wharton, 1907-1931 (bulk 1907-1917) consists in the greatest part of letters which have been arranged in three series: I. Letters to Morton Fullerton; II. Letters to Edith Wharton; and III. Letters from Edith Wharton to others. This collection was assembled by Morton Fullerton, Wharton's friend and lover.

The great majority of items in this collection are letters written by Wharton to Fullerton, found in the first series. These letters range in date from 1907 to 1931, but the bulk are from the height of their affair during the period 1908 to 1910. They offer great insight into their little-known relationship, Wharton's marriage to Edward Wharton, and her literary activities and travels during the period.

Wharton's letters to Fullerton have been divided into two groups: the first arranged by date of the letter and the second arranged by type of stationery. The arrangement of these materials was complicated by the fact that Wharton did not date the vast majority of her letters. Some of them have been dated in another hand, possibly Fullerton's. In attempting to attribute dates to as many letters as possible to facilitate their arrangement, two sources proved very useful. The first was R.W.B. Lewis's book, *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (New York: Scribner, c. 1988). The second was the original sale listing from Zeitlin and Ver Brugge, which has been noted to contain a number of inaccuracies. The large number of Wharton's letters to Fullerton for which no date could be determined were arranged by the type of stationery on which they were written in the hope that a Wharton scholar familiar with her letter writing habits may be able to attribute possible dates for these items. Criteria for grouping the stationery types were presence of printed monograms or addresses, presence of watermarks, and color of paper.

In addition to the letters from Wharton to Fullerton, a few letters written to Fullerton by Walter Berry, Henry James and others are present in the collection. There are also a number of other items related to Edith Wharton, including letters written to her (from Henry James, William Osler, Theodore Roosevelt, Edward Wharton, and others) and letters written by her to Katherine Fullerton Gerould and others.

The collection also contains four manuscript poems, three written by Edith Wharton (among her letters to Morton Fullerton) and one by an unidentified author.

Related Material

Other materials relating to Wharton at the HRHRC can be found in the John Lane, Mary Augusta Ward, and Elizabeth Hardwick collections.

Index Terms

Correspondents

Berry, Walter van Rensselaer.
Fullerton, William Morton, b. 1865.
Gerould, Katharine Fullerton, 1879-1944.
James, Henry, 1843-1916.
Osler, William, Sir, 1849-1919.
Roosevelt, Theodore, 1858-1919.
Wharton, Edward Robbins.

Subjects

Wharton, Edith, 1862-1937--Correspondence.
Authors, American--20th century--Correspondence.

Document Types

Love letters.
Poems.

Series I. Letters to Morton Fullerton, 1907-1931

Unidentified authors: Included with these:	box 1 folder 1
Unidentified author. Manuscript poem, "For I have always hated to be sure...."	
Berry, I.	box 1 folder 2
Berry, Walter	
Friederich, J.	
James, G.	
James, Henry	
Wharton, Edith -- letters arranged chronologically	
1907	box 1 folder 3
1908: Included with these:	folder 4
Wharton, Edith. Manuscript poem, "Senlis, May 17" (with letter from dated 17 May 1908)	
Davray, Mr. and Mme. Card (with letter dated 19 December 1908)	
1909	box 1 folder 5
1910: Included with these:	folder 6
Wharton, Edith. Manuscript poem, "When you and I and all things kind or cruel...."(with letter dated, 14 April 1910)	
James, Henry, telegram (with letter dated 24 March 1910)	
Osler, William, letter (with letter dated 19 March 1910)	
1911	box 1 folder 7
1912	folder 8
1913	folder 9
1914	folder 10
1915	folder 11

1916	folder 12
1917	folder 13
1931	folder 14
Wharton, Edith -- letters arranged by type of stationery	
White: embossed '58 RUE DE VARENNE'	box 1 folder 15
Blue: embossed '53 RUE DE VARENNE, TEL. 706-13'	folder 16
Blue: embossed '53 RUE DE VARENNE, TEL. SAXE 06-13'	folder 17
Various white: embossed '53 RUE DE VARENNE'	folder 18
Cards embossed 'Mrs. Edward Wharton'	folder 19
Various monograms	folder 20
'EW' monogram embossed in blue and gold	folder 21
Assorted addresses and hotel letterheads	folder 22
White: watermark reading 'Imperial Treasury de la Rue' with a crown and DLR device	folder 23
White: watermark reading 'St. Chubert' with a shield and lion	folder 24
Assorted white stationeries: Included with these:	folder 25
Wharton, Edith. Manuscript poem, "A Picture by Sebastiani"	
Assorted blue stationeries	box 1 folder 26

Series II. Letters to Edith Wharton

French, Mary

box 1 folder 27

Fullerton, William Morton (an envelope)

Roosevelt, Theodore

Wharton, Edward

Series III. Letters from Edith Wharton to others

French, Mr.

box 1 folder 28

Fullerton, Miss (Katharine Fullerton Gerould)

Wickersham, Mr.