

A Guide to the Additional Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill (1830)1840-1947

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(1830) 1840-1947

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This collection consists of ca.709 items

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There are no restrictions.

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Biographical/Historical Information

Francis Asbury Dickins, (1804-1879) was the son of Asbury Dickins (1780-1861), the first Secretary of the United States Senate from 1836 to 1861. He married Margaret Harvie Randolph (1815-1891) in 1839. She was the daughter of Thomas Mann Randolph (half-brother of Governor Thomas Mann Randolph) making them cousins of the Randolph family of Edgehill (descendants of Thomas Jefferson). Francis and Margaret Dickins had five children to live to adulthood: Francis Asbury Dickins, Jr. (Frank) (1841-1890), Frances Margaret Dickins (Fanny) (1842-1914), Harriot Wilson Dickins Wight (Dick, Hallie) (1844-1917), Randolph Dickins (Ran) (1853-1914), Albert Dickins (Bertie) (1855-1913). Francis Asbury Dickins was a claims agent against Mexico and a lawyer in Washington D.C. He ultimately left home to spend the final days of the Civil War behind confederate lines. The Dickins family were southern sympathizers. Dickins was imprisoned three times on suspicion of aiding the south. Frank Dickins, Jr. served in the Confederate army and both daughters, Harriot and Fanny moved to Richmond during the war. Fanny Dickins was employed by the Confederate Treasury Department. In 1863, she moved to Columbia, South Carolina to work with a branch of the Confederate Treasury there. After the Civil War, Francis Asbury Dickins re-opened his Washington D.C. law office. Frank Dickins, Jr. and Albert (Bertie) worked on the railroads. Bertie also bought interest in a restaurant in Billings, Montana. Randolph Dickins attended VMI and became a Colonel in the Marine Corps. He was stationed in China in 1880 and on the U.S.S. Oregon in the Spanish-American War. After Francis Dickin's death in 1879, Margaret Harvie Randolph Dickins, wife of Francis Asbury Dickins lived with relatives in Baltimore, Washington and New York for the rest of her life (1891). The collection of family letters spans from (1830) 1840 to 1947. The children grew up in Virginia (Fredericksburg-Ossian Hall and Richmond) during the height of the Civil War.

Scope and Content

This collection contains ca.709 items (five Hollinger boxes) 2.5 linear feet and consists of letters written by the Dickins family (of Ossian Hall) who were cousins of the Randolph family of Edgehill and direct descendants of Asbury Dickins, the first Secretary of the Senate of the United States from 1836 to 1861. Francis Asbury Dickins, (1804-1879) son of Asbury Dickins, married Margaret Harvie Randolph (1815- 1891) in 1839. Francis and Margaret Dickins had five children to live to adulthood: Francis Asbury Dickins, Jr. (Frank) (1841-1890), Frances Margaret Dickins (Fanny) (1842-1914), Harriot Wilson Dickins Wight (Dick, Hallie) (1844-1917), Randolph Dickins (Ran) (1853-1914), Albert Dickins (Bertie) (1855-1913). The collection of family letters spans from (1830) 1840 to 1947. The children grew up in Virginia (Fredericksburg-Ossian Hall and Richmond) during the height of the Civil War.

Through the letters, they discuss the war, the confederacy, their feelings about the Yankees and slavery, as well as world events in China, (Chinese coolies), Russia and Germany. The collection also reveals close personal relationships, such as the secret courtship between Harriot Wight's daughter Theodora Wight and John May Keim, a divorced man, before they were married. The letters tell the personal stories of each member of the Dickins family; describe daily fighting in the Civil War and the concerns of the women at home; the difficulties of finding permanent work after the war; and the changes in American society at the turn of the century.

Albert White Dickins (Bertie) (1855-1913) who was less than ten years old during the Civil War struggled off and on to find work when he was older and the war was over. He mostly worked on the railroads in Aurora, Indiana. He wrote his mother in 1879 to comfort her when his father died. In later years, he could not get railroad work (1908 and 1909) and he wrote letters to his sister Harriot asking for financial help while he tried to find any kind of work, even pressing bricks.

There are also letters from Francis Asbury Dickins to each of his daughters, Fanny Dickins and Harriot Dickins Wight. He wrote to Fanny about his dislike of his job where he was very busy and then had nothing to do. He also wrote about helping Fanny to get a job at the Commisionaries Ministry Department and mentioned the 6th Virginia Cavalry that was captured by the enemy. To Harriot he wrote that Ran was promoted to a higher class in the Marines; that he was trying to get a large crop of corn; he offered consolation on her grief after she lost her baby and then two months later when her husband died. He also advised her to ask John Harvie to be her legal guardian.

Some of the most interesting letters relating to the Civil War are from Frank Dickins, Jr. when he wrote to his

sister Harriot Dickins Wight on August 15, 1862: "have not had time until now to answer it as we were then away from camp and have only spent one night in camp since. On this day week we left Orange Co., [Va] and took up our line of march across the river towards Culpeper whilst our regiment was moving along were fired into by some yankey calvalry. We received the order to charge them which we did with a run for about six miles, killing fifteen and taking eighteen or twenty prisoners. I shot one of the scoundrels that I know of and probably one or two more. I had a very narrow escape as I was riding along at a full run holding my pistol up before me. I received a pistol shot on my pistol. If it had not struck the pistol I would not have been very good for putting my cheek out as it would have hit me full in the face. We lost but one horse he was run down and died in a few hours, it was very hard on all our horses. Our enemy proved to be a portion of the first Maryland Cavalry who were out on a scouting expedition. We saw them within two miles of Madison County where there were six regiments of them. We then turned back and took up our former course of march. That night we slept in the enemies campground eight miles this side of Culpeper Co.[Va]. The next morning we were drawn up in line of battle and remained so all day (called the day of the fight at Slaughter Mountain) [Cedar Mountain] waiting to be called upon which luckily we were not. About 12:00 the cannonading commenced and lasted all that day and until eleven o'clock at night at times it was terrific, the next morning a little before day we started across the battlefield to on picket and it was sickening to hear the groans of the wounded and dying and see the dark forms and pale faces of the dead as they faintly glittered in the moonshine. We often having to run up our horses to keep from riding over them, about sunrise we were taken from our posts and went on a scout with General J.E.B. Stuart who came up expressly for the fight. We did nothing however but capture stragglng yankeys at a house getting their dinners. We then came back and took our old posts where we remained for three days with nothing but roasting ears [corn on the cob] for ourselves and a little hay for our horses to eat. On the morning of the third day the enemies cavalry appeared in sight in large numbers, but 'Stonewall' had given them the slip and was with all his army, excepting our brigade of cavalry back again on his side of the river all we had to do was to fall back on regiment and then cross the river in a hurry, or in camp parlance 'skedaddle'. I did not leave my post more than five minutes before it was occupied by the advance of the enemys army I was very near being caught. We will have some stirring times in a few days as we have just received orders to draw and cook six days rations by tomorrow morning. Jackson, Lee and Longstreet are all here with a very large force I should think at least 100,000 men. The yankeys are in large force in the direction of Liberty Hills about eighteen miles from here. Now is the time for all to come up to the mark, it is our countrys hour of need we will either loose all that we have gained or gain as much more in the impending campaign, let every man face the music and stand up to his duty determined to do or die, may God in his wisdom protect and prosper [arms]. Dr. Plaster formerly our first Lieutenant and who was taken by the by the yankeys on the Manassas retreat, has just returned having been exchanged, he tells me that father was in jail in the old capitol when he went there but was released in a few days he was then quite well but very much worried"

He also wrote that when they were not in the heat of battle they would engage in horse racing: "Our regiment has turned into quite a jockey club". (December 14, 1862). Despite this levity, it was no doubt difficult. He also wrote: "man who is born of woman and enlisted in Jackson's army is few of days and short of rations".

After the war Frank got a job working on the railroad. (1872-1882). In a letter to his sister Harriot, he mentions that ladies visited the railroad camps with thirty pies and lemonade and humorously he added "Lemons were not the only thing squeezed." In 1882, Frank wrote that he could not tolerate the cold winter months working outside: "I have been sick every day this winter". By 1887 he was staying in a church home suffering so badly he could only sit up for fifteen minutes at a time. He died in 1890.

Margaret Harvie Dickins wrote many letters to her daughter Harriot Wight, and one of them was about negroes in Aurora, Indiana: "They talk here of the dreadful sufferings of the negroes at the South and are, (it is supposed only for political purposes) enticing large numbers to emigrate to this state, holding out promises of plenty of work and high wages, and even take up collections for them in their churches and yet in this town they will not allow a black person to stay an hour. I have never seen one in this place" On the subject of politics she wrote: "What do you think of General Hancock. If it does not affect my three boys I don't care which is President". (Bayard, Hancock or Scott).

There are also letters from Randolph Dickins who after the Civil war, became a Colonel in the Marine Corps and was stationed in Shanghai, China. He wrote to his mother (January 26, 1880) that he "can appreciate your description of the equality of all classes for you know I have lived up in New England and know what Maine and New Hampshire Yankees are and understand their customs though I suppose it is worse out there than it is up north and I don't quite fancy that sort of life and think when I get back I shall make Norfolk my home".

He also wrote a lot about the Chinese coolies: [people] "talk about slavery but this is the worst country in the world for it and there was never anything in the U.S. to equal the Coolie system out here. They work in a way that I did not think it possible for any human being to work; are always forced to their [] by the drivers and there they are naked with the exception of one [] cotton garment which only covers [half] of their bodies and their []food is such that even a dog at home [] would not eat it. They eat all sorts of offal putrid meat, fish and their food really smells so offensively that it is sickening to go near it and as for dirt they never dare so much

as wash their hands and their skin is caked and scaly from dirt and often covered with []. They are certainly the worst dysentery lurking people in the world. I met a coolie the other day with a dead snake and out of curiosity I asked him what he was going to do with it and he replied 'make chow chow' which means he was going to eat it. They don't waste anything and all sorts of vermin beings, rats or anything goes for food. You can see them outside of town with a reel and pole catching grasshoppers which they think make capital chow chow". He also wrote that "the English people make a great deal about the poor suffering slaves in America but they don't seem to notice the misery of this overcrowded overworked uncivilized community out here and only go in for getting as much of their land away from there as they can and yet I would a thousand times rather be a slave under the masters than a Chinese coolie".

Randolph Dickins also wrote to his mother (January 26, 1880) about the Margaret (Peggy) O'Neill Timberlake Eaton affair (1831) when he saw her death notice in the paper: "I saw by one of the papers that had an account in it of Mrs. Eaton's death that Lieut. Randolph succeeded purser Timberlake and that he was dismissed by President Jackson where upon he pulled President Jackson's nose at Alexandria. Was that Uncle John or who was it." [It was John Brockenbrough Randolph, brother of Margaret Harvie Dickins Randolph] Dickins was probably interested in Lieutenant Randolph since he was mentioned in the newspaper and he was his Uncle. After being dismissed from his new role as purser (replacing poor John Bowie Timberlake) the Lieutenant must have retaliated by insulting President Jackson

On April 21, 1880 Randolph Dickins wrote to his mother about China and Russia: "some excitement out here over the trouble between China and Russia and it is confidently expected that there will be a war and if so that it will go hard with China unless England comes to the rescue. The Chinese are making it very interesting for Chung Hai the ex-minister who made the treaty with Russia. They have taken away all of his fortune which was very great and now have him shut up in a cage, which they say he will never leave alive. The Chinese are collecting quite a fleet down at Woo Sung just below here. They have some very fine ships in their navy but they don't know how to handle them and they put most of their faith in their war juiucks which are hard looking old tubs and are about as effective in a naval war as Noah's Ark call it 'the terror of the Western Nations' to try to scare Russians which it doesn't, but they don't seem to realize that". Randolph returned to the United States and lived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He was stationed on the U.S.S. Oregon during the Spanish-American War. He died in 1914.

[Colonel ? E. J.] Harvie, a cousin of Fanny M. Dickins wrote to her about the Civil War on February 17, 1862: "We are not fighting the battles of Jeff Davis, Joe Johnston, or the State of Virginia- our independence hangs trembling in the balance Must we yield to every man's wishes to 'go home', and be utterly, hopelessly crushed? I am not arguing the question it is unnecessary but it is too ridiculous to think of opposing McClelland's trained band of regulars next spring, with raw levies from the South".

On January 22 [1863] a friend of Fanny's named Herbert [?] wrote to her : "We have again wars and rumors of wars. We have been under arms for the last week, and were again notified last evening to prepare for action. The enemy have been making demonstrations for some time past, but I do not think they will cross here again; They are painfully reminded of the past, and they shrink from meeting the tried heroes of the Army of Northern Virginia, they shrink with horrors at the thoughts. We have had horrible weather for the last day or two, and everything looks disagreeable around us. The roads are awful, so we cannot amuse ourselves with riding, but have to be contented with domestic sports, such as cards, chess. We have had any quantity of rumors here about foreign intervention, but I suppose it is all trash."

On January 29, 1863, Herbert wrote to Fanny again: "We have been on a terrible march and have just returned. We started day before yesterday in a heavy rain and after marching about 10 miles went into bivouac for the night. It seems that we anticipated the movements of the enemy and thought that they would cross above Fredericksburg but I suppose the weather prevented them, we were then ordered to put up some fortifications in order to prevent our left flank from being turned. So our men commenced to work, in the meantime it was snowing terribly, so we passed a day and two nights without tents, and I do assure you Fanny that I have never spent such a time since I have been in service. Early this morning we received order to come back to our present camps, the roads were horrible, snow and mud rising about knee deep. I have heard and read of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow but I really think that our sufferings could not have been increased possibly."

Theodora Wight Keim, the daughter of Harriot Dickins Wight, wrote many letters to her mother about people that they knew; parties that they attended; clothes that they wore; and memories of their home Ossian Hall. The letters reflect changes in society during the turn of the century from traveling by horse and carriage to train cars; the invention of the electric toaster; electric light treatment for hands and feet, and the popularity of backgammon parties. Also, in 1914, she wrote about her concern for Uncle Randolph Dickins being abroad while the Germans were only fifty miles outside of Paris.

Theodora Wight Keim also wrote many love letters to her husband John May Keim before and after they were married. John May Keim was recently divorced from his first wife when he met and fell in love with Theodora [1889?]. She insisted that they wait for several years before telling her mother of their engagement. They were finally married in November of 1905. Her letters stress the difficulty and longing they felt while they waited and were forced to be apart.

There is a letter to the Army from the women who lived at Fighting Creek requesting a prolonged stay for Private W. Keys Howard, noting that his presence was necessary in order to console them while so many men were away at war. Harriot Dickins Wight's name was the first signature on the letter.

Miscellaneous items include 25-trip family ticket for F.A. Dickins with the Alexandria & Washington R.R. Co; pamphlet on Why I Love The American Episcopal Church; receipt for grain from Francis A. Dickins Jr to Wm. W. Wight, Dr.; doctor's bill estate of of Mr. Frank Dickins to W.T. Walker for protracted attention to self \$38.00 November 1878 to February 1879; deed from Estate of Francis A. Dickins for two dollars and fifty cents to Margaret H. Dickins from clerks office, Dearborn County, Indiana ; bill from Brown, Brothers & Co New York for 20 pounds in favor of Harriot Wight. There are two miscellaneous poems as well as photographs of Harriot and Theodora Wight and an African American woman simply called Mammy.

The collection also contains letters from their cousins, the Randolph family of Edgehill, specifically Maria Randolph Mason to Fanny M. Dickins (Oct 20, 1892); Alice Meikleham (daughter of Septimia Meikleham and granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson) to Fanny M. Dickins (Nov. 1892); Jane Randolph to Fanny M. Dickins and Harriot Dickins Wight (1862) (Box 4); and Ellen Ruffin to Margaret Harvie Dickins. (1860) (Box 4). There is also an obituary of Cary Ruffin Randolph, granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson. (Box 4)

The Randolphs are also mentioned in several letters: [J. T.] Burke (cousin) to Fanny Dickins on November 11, 1892 thanking her for her photographs and genealogies on the Randolph family. He wrote, "I am sure all the 'decendants' owe you a debt of gratitude for such a handsome restoration of the old family vault. Browse [Hore Browse Trist, son of Virginia and Phillip Trist, grandson of Thomas Jefferson] Trist brought me your letter and it is carefully preserved among family archives." There is also a letter from Margaret Harvie Dickins to her daughter Harriot Dickins Wight where she described a visit she had with her Randolph cousins, Virginia Trist, Mary Randolph and Patsy Trist Burke at Burke's station. The Trists and their children were boarding at Colonel Burke's old place for the summer. "We had a delightful ride [and] a very pleasant visit. They received us all most affly [affectionately] (July 11, 1873).

There are also letters from Louisa Randolph (Margaret Harvie Dickins' mother) to her granddaughter Harriot Dickins Wight.

There are letters from Harriot Dickins Wight to her sister Fanny Dickins between 1860 and 1865. She wrote that they were expecting the Yankees every day and soldiers were staying with them every night. She also showed concern for her father and his shortage of income. She also mentions that she received a letter from Frank about the battle of Charles City where Frank was very brave and the Captain and several men were taken prisoners. There are also letters from Harriot to her brother Frank Dickins Jr.; letters between Harriot Dickins Wight and her mother-in-law Grace M. Wight; letters from Harriot Dickins Wight to her husband Henry Theodore Wight; a letter to Harriot Dickins Wight from one of her sons; a letter to Harriot Dickins Wight from her father-in-law William W. Wight. There are also some papercuttings that were made by Harriot Dickins Wight.

Also in the collection is a large account book of Harriot Dickins Wight from 1882 to 1892; two photographs of Harriot and Theodora (and African Americans Mammy and Uncle Robert) at Elmgton mounted on an oversized board; an original Daily Dispatch (Richmond, Virginia) newspaper from October 27, 1875 and a Confederate Column in the same paper from 1896; an oversize letter from Henry Gardner to his brother Samuel Spring Gardner (preacher, lawyer, framer of Alabama Constitution) who was in the 73d, 96th and 83d of the U.S. Colored Infantry. (These items are in the oversize trays.)

Arrangement

The papers are organized alphabetically by topic or last name of the author of the letter and chronologically within each folder.

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Albert White Dickins (Bertie) to his mother Margaret Harvie Dickins 1879 November 5

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Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins to sister Harriot Dickins Wight 1870 January 12

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Francis Asbury Dickins to daughter Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins 1863-1865

Box-folder 1:5

Francis Asbury Dickins to daughter Harriot Wight 1869-1876

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Frank Dickins to sister Harriot 1887 April-November

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Margaret Harvie Dickins (death) [1891]

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Margaret Harvie Dickins to daughter Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins n.d.

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Margaret Harvie Dickins to husband Francis A. Dickins 1865 June 22

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Margaret Harvie Dickins to daughter Harriot Wight 1868-1879

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Margaret Harvie Dickins to daughter Harriot Wight 1880-1882

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Margaret Harvie Dickins to daughter Harriot Wight 1883-1887

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Randolph Dickins to his sister Harriot 1865-1886

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Randolph Dickins to his mother Margaret Harvie Dickins 1864-1879

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Randolph Dickins to his mother Margaret Harvie Dickins 1880 January-May

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Randolph Dickins to his mother Margaret Harvie Dickins 1880 June-September; 1884

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Randolph Dickins to his niece Theodora Wight Keim 1885; 1893

Box-folder 1:23

E.J. Harvie to Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins 1862 February 17

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Sally Heath to Harriot Dickins Wight n.d.

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John O. Keim to Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins 1892 November 15

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Theodora Wight Keim to her mother Harriot Dickins Wight n.d.

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Theodora Wight Keim to her mother Harriot Dickins Wight 1888-1889

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Theodora Wight Keim to her mother Harriot Dickins Wight 1889

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**Theodora Wight Keim to her mother Harriot Dickins Wight
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**Theodora Wight Keim to her mother Harriot Dickins Wight 1914
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**Theodora Wight Keim to her mother Harriot Dickins Wight 1914
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**Theodora Wight Keim to her mother Harriot Dickins Wight 1914
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**Theodora Wight Keim to her husband John May Keim 1905;
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Box-folder 2:9

Theodora Wight Keim to her husband John May Keim n.d.

Box-folder 2:10

Theodora Wight Keim to her husband John May Keim n.d.

Box-folder 2:11

Theodora Wight Keim to her husband John May Keim n.d.

Box-folder 2:12

Theodora Wight Keim to her husband John May Keim n.d.

Box-folder 2:13

**Colonel J. B. Kershaw to Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins
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Letter to the Army from Ladies of Fighting Creek 1864 April 9

Box-folder 2:15

Letters to Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins 1859-1863

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**Maria Randolph Mason to Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins
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Miscellaneous items 1879; 1887

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Miscellaneous letters n.d.

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Poems n.d.

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Jane Randolph to cousin Harriot Dickins Wight n.d.

Box-folder 4:11

[Louisa Randolph] to Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins 1861-1864

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L. A. Randolph to her granddaughter Harriot Dickins Wight n.d.

Box-folder 4:13

Ellen Ruffin to Margaret Harvie Dickins 1861

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Alice L. Tapscote to Harriot Dickins Wight 1909

Box-folder 4:15

Grace M. Wight 1867

Box-folder 4:16

Grace M. Wight to daughter in-law Harriot Dickins Wight n.d.

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Harriot Dickins Wight to sister Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins 1887

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Harriot Dickins Wight to sister Frances Margaret (Fanny) Dickins 1887

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Harriot Dickins Wight to Frank Dickins Jr. 1869 December 10

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**Harriot Dickins Wight to her mother Margaret Harvie Dickins
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Box-folder 5:2

**Harriot Dickins Wight to her mother Margaret Harvie Dickins
1871-1872**

Box-folder 5:3

**Harriot Dickins Wight to her mother Margaret Harvie Dickins
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Box-folder 5:4

**Harriot Dickins Wight to her mother Margaret Harvie Dickins
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Harriot Dickins Wight to Grace M. Wight n.d.

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Harriot Dickins Wight to Henry Theodore Wight n.d.

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Harriot Dickins Wight from Theodora 1865 November

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Harriot Dickins Wight papercuttings n.d.

Box-folder 5:9

William W. Wight to Harriot Dickins Wight n.d.

Box-folder 5:10

Receipts and Expenditures of the United States 1826

Oversize 5:11 (volume)

Daily Dispatch Richmond Newspaper 1875 October 27

Account book of Harriot Dickins Wight 1882-1892

Harry gardner to Samuel Spring Gardner 1863 February 8

**Photograph of Theodora Keim, Harriot Dickins Wight and
African Americans Mammy and Uncle Robert 1886**

Confederate Column 1896

