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### 0655: Ensign Family Papers, 1804-1945

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**REGISTER  
OF THE  
ENSIGN FAMILY PAPERS**

Manuscript Collection (Ms 143)



Special Collections Department  
James E. Morrow Library  
Marshall University  
Huntington, West Virginia  
1998

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**ENSIGN FAMILY PAPERS, 1804-1945**

Accession Number: 655

Processed by: William E. Plants

Date completed: October 1998

Location: Special Collections Department

This collection was a gift of Lawrence E. Hite. Received May 27, 1997

Linear feet of shelf space: 1.33 linear ft.

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Explanatory notes:

Bx refers to “box” in which papers are filed.

Fd refers to “folder”.

## CONTENT AND SCOPE OF THE COLLECTION

The Ensign Family Papers (1804-1945) consist mostly of letters generated by Eli (1860's-1890's) or letters to him. The majority of letters written by Eli are to his wife (1870-1899) when he is on various trips or when she is visiting family in Connecticut.

Letters to Ely are mostly from his side of the family such as brothers Sidney (1859-1874) and Charles (1862-1871) or Ely's grandmother Clarinda(?) Prentice (1857-1868). Business correspondence (1867-1902) is heaviest during the 1870's. One common writer of business correspondence to Ely was W.A. Burke (1870).

The letters to Mary Catherine (Walton) Ensign (not including Ely's) are from her side of the family, mostly from her mother Abbie (Gay) Walton (1865-1891).

The personal papers of Mary (May) Prentice Ensign (1880) are many and include her school papers, calling cards and the sympathy cards generated by her death in 1889.

In addition to letters, the collection includes business papers and personal papers of Ely, Mary Catherine, John, Anna and other family related items and photographs.

## **Ensign Family**

In 1632, James and Sarah Ensign came to Massachusetts from Great Britain. A little over two centuries later, Ely Ensign (1840-1902) was born on December 19 in Litchfield, Connecticut to Theodore Ensign and his wife, whose maiden name was Prentice. Ely had three brothers, Charles, Sidney and Theodore and a half-brother named Henry. Ely's sister married M.E. Brown. Another sister married a Mr. Dean.

Eight years after the birth of Ely, Mary Catherine Walton (1848-1915) was born to William H. and Abbie (Gay) Walton. She had one sister named Sadie. Mary attended Hartford Female Seminary. In 1869, Ely and Mary were united in matrimony, a union that lasted until Ely's death in 1902.

The year 1871 proved to be a landmark year for the Ensigns. Ely was not only the father of an infant son named John Walton Ensign (1871-1932), but he also came to the infant city of Huntington, West Virginia to oversee construction of a plant between 23rd and 24th Streets, parallel to First and Oley Avenue. The Ensign Manufacturing Company was organized in May 1872 and employed 170 people.

The Ensign Manufacturing Company's purpose was to build both railroad car wheels and castings for use by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. With the 1882 addition of the Agrey Iron Foundry, the company then built freight and mine cars. In 1899, this company united with the American Car and Foundry Company (now known as the Amcar Division of ACF Industries, Inc.). Ely had been one of the original incorporators of the Ensign Manufacturing Company (along with Senator William Barnum, Collis P. Huntington and William A. Wheeler, future U.S. Vice-President under Rutherford B. Hayes). Ely functioned as plant manager and company secretary until the merger with the American Car and Foundry Company. After the merger, he was employed as a district manager.

As the company grew, so to did Eli's family, with the addition of daughters Mary (May) Prentice Ensign (1874-1889) and Anna Ensign (1880-1963).

Ely was quite a busy man outside of his work in the Ensign Manufacturing Company. In the 1880's, he was among the organizers of the Irving Club (later called the Guyandotte Club) and a member of the German Club. In 1881, Ely became a director of the Bank of Huntington and in 1894 he became a director and vice-president of the Huntington National Bank. On February 19, 1890 he became a member of the Board of Trade of Huntington. He also served on the city council. Also in 1890, Ely joined Edmond Sehon in the wholesale grocery business under the name of Sehon, Blake and Company (now called Sehon-Stevenson and Company). Ely acted as one of the incorporators of Huntington Hospital in 1892. In ecclesiastical matters,

Ely served as a vestryman for the Trinity Episcopal Church starting in 1873 (a position he held until his death), in addition to serving as a Senior warden and being a member of the Building Committee.

Yet his life was not immune from tragedy. His eldest daughter May died in 1889 at the age of 15. In 1893-1894 in response to the Depression of 1893, the Ensign Manufacturing Company and many other businesses closed. However, Ely had a plan to keep his workers employed. Though some were employed by the city to help construct an underpass on 16th Street, the others built Ely a house.

The house that Ely had built, located at 1330 3rd Avenue was a three story house, a sovereign among the other homes in Huntington at that time. This house was the first Huntington home to have electricity. It was necessary to utilize an elevator to reach the third floor where the game room was located. In 1929, the structure sold and became a part of Huntington Orthopedic Hospital. Sadly, the Ensign home was demolished in 1961.

Even though Ely had done many things, some Democrats thought he should add one more item to his list of accomplishments: mayor of Huntington. In Spring 1896, Ely was elected such. Choosing not to run for re-election, he was succeeded by his future son-in-law, William F. Hite.

On January 27, 1902 Ely was engaged in playing chess with a friend in the game room. After complaining of a severe headache, he applied water to his temple. He returned to his seat, sat down and closed his eyes. Three minutes later, the man known as "Major" Ensign was dead from a cerebral hemorrhage. The Huntington Advertiser printed the following concerning Ely the next day: "Ely Ensign was one of the state's most prominent citizens and was practically the builder of Huntington. No man did more or worked zealously towards the upbuilding of Huntington than did Major Ensign". Ely was interred at Spring Hill Cemetery.

John followed in his father's footsteps in more ways than one. He succeeded Ely as the district manager of the Ensign Manufacturing Company and as vice president of the Huntington National Bank. He also served as a vestryman of the Trinity Episcopal Church and as mayor of Huntington from 1907 until his resignation on November 16, 1908. Unlike his father, he became president of the Sehon-Stevenson Company and served on the Board of Park Commissioners. He died in 1932, seventeen years after his mother's death.

Anna married William F. Hite, a C&O telegraph operator and freight agent turned lawyer and the 21st mayor of Huntington. Anna could make the claim that she had been the daughter, wife and sister to three mayors of Huntington. She is perhaps, the only person in the city's history that could make such a claim.

## SOURCES

Baumgartner, Rick. *First Families of Huntington*. Huntington: Huntington Advertiser, [1977].

Ely Ensign Papers.

*Huntington Advertiser* January 28 and 30, 1902.

Wallace, George Seldon. *Cabell County Annals and Families*. Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1935.



## ENSIGN FAMILY PAPERS 1804-1945

## I.

**Ely Ensign Papers**

<b>Bx 1</b>	<b>Ely Ensign Papers</b>	<b>20 Fds</b>
Fd 1	Letters From (Personal) 1862,1866  1862 April 7, 1862 June 5, 1866 June 2. In these letters Ely describes his life and experiences out West	5 items
Fd 2	Letters From (Personal) 1870-1879  1872 October 15-1872 November 17. Ely tells his wife of his efforts to establish a home for them all in Huntington.  1872 November 6. Ely mentions that Huntington went for Greeley in the election of 1872.  1876 July 2. The city of Huntington believes Tilden will win the Presidency. Also news of the murder of Mitchell.	25 items
Fd 3	Letters From (Personal) 1880-1889	11 items
Fd 4	Letters From (Personal) 1890-1899  1891 February 26. Ely will pay for whatever Mary Catherine purchases at Lord & Taylor's as well as Dennings.  1895 January 22. While at a convention, Ely was appointed vice president of an unspecified group.	27 items
Fd 5	Letters From (Personal) 1900-1901	4 items
Fd 6	Postcards From 1893,1898	2 items
Fd 7	Letters To (Personal) 1857-1859	8 items (cont'd)
Fd 8	Letters To (Personal) 1861-1869	35 items

1862 January 1. Unnamed brother gives his opinion of the Civil War.

1862 February 18, 1862 March 3. a small amount of Civil War news.

1864 February 22. More Civil War news in this letter written on U.S. Christian Commission stationery.

1865 April 17. Grandmother Prentice's reaction to Lincoln's assassination.

1867 December 11. From W.H. Barnum. Written on Congressional stationery.

Fd 9 Letters To (Personal) 1870-1875 9 items

Fd 10 Letters To (Personal) 1883,1889 2 items

1889 February 6. Ely made an honorary member of the German Club.

Fd 11 Letters To (Personal) 1894 1  
item

Fd 12 Letters To (Personal) Fragments or Yearless 9 items

Fd 13 Letters To (Business) 1861-1869 4 items

Fd 14 Letters To (Business) 1870-1877 18 items

1872 July 1. William A. Wheeler informs Ely that he has signed the Articles of Association. (Wheeler later became Vice-President under Rutherford B. Hayes).

Fd 15 Letters To (Business) 1891-1897 8 items

1891 May 10, 1892 February 20, 1897 November 3, 1897 November 13. Letters from S. Floyd Hoard, the architect for Ely's house at 1330 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, concerning the house.

1893 May 13. Thomas Thomas writes Ely to tell him that the stones will be there Monday morning

(cont'd)

Fd 16 Letter To (Business) 1902 1 item

Fd 17	Telegram From 1896	10 1 item
Fd 18	Telegram To 1870	3 items
Fd 19	Business Materials (10 duplicates)	15 items
Fd 20	Personal Papers	14 items

## **II. Ely Ensign Family Papers**

### **Bx 2 Ely Ensign Family Papers 20 Fds**

Fd 1	Mary Ensign Letters To (Personal) 1864-1865	6 items
Fd 2	Mary Ensign Letters To (Personal) 1871-1878	7 items
Fd 3	Mary Ensign Letters To (Personal) 1888-1889	5 items
	1889 February 6. Mary was made an honorary member of the German Club.	
Fd 4	Mary Ensign Letters To (Personal) 1890-1891	3 items
Fd 5	Mary Ensign Letters To (Personal) Fragments items	3
Fd 6	Mary Ensign Personal Papers	3 items
Fd 7	John Ensign Letters From (Personal) 1886, 1891	2 items
Fd 8	John Ensign Letters To (Personal) 1874, 1876-1877	6 items
Fd 9	Mary (May) Ensign Letters To (Personal) 1882-1889	20 items
Fd 10	Mary (May) Ensign Calling and Other Cards	12 items
Fd 11	Mary (May) Ensign Schoolwork 1880's items	26
		(cont'd)
Fd 12	Mary (May) Ensign Marshall Tuition Receipt 18??	1 item

Fd 13	Mary (May) Ensign Sympathy Letters to Parents 1889 items	20
Fd 14	John and Mary (May) Ensign Letter To (Personal) 1876	1 item
Fd 15	Anna Ensign (Hite) Letter From (Personal) 1893 item	1
Fd 16	Anna Ensign (Hite) Letter To (Business) 1931	1 item
Fd 17	Anna Ensign (Hite) Personal Papers 1889,1909	3 items
Fd 18	Calling and Other Cards	9 items
Fd 19	Drawings	2 items
Fd 20	Empty Envelopes	45 items

### **III. Ensign-Hite Families**

<b>Bx 3</b>	<b>Ensign-Hite Families</b>	<b>12 Fds</b>
Fd 1	Ensign, Claudia Letter To (Personal) 1852 item	1
Fd 2	Ensign, Sidney Letter From (Personal) 1894	1 item
Fd 3	Ensign, Sidney Letter To (Business) 1871-1872 items  1872 February 29. J.R. Johnson Ree(?) comments on Sidney's plan to build a car foundry in Huntington.	4
Fd 4	Hite, F. Ely Letters To (Personal) 1945  1945 July 23. Bill tells F. Ely Hite that he could set up an airfield as a post war business.	2 items
Fd 5	Flyer 1866	1 item
Fd 6	Monthly Statement 1870	1 item

12  
(cont'd)

Fd 7	Huntington Democratic Executive Committee Handbills 1894	2 items
Fd 8	Machine Order # 2	1 item
Fd 9	Photographs	2 items
Fd 10	Photo Postcards	2 items
Fd 11	Plant Material	2 items
Fd 12	Postcard	1 item

#### **IV. Prentice-Walton Families**

##### **Bx 4 Prentice-Walton Families 10 Fds**

Fd 1	Prentice, Charles Call to Pastorsip 1804	1 item
Fd 2	Prentice Family Letters To (Personal) 1854 items	3
Fd 3	Printed Material	4 items
Fd 4	Program/Invitation 1867,1886 items	2
Fd 5	Receipt Episcopal Church 1885	1 item
Fd 6	Receiver Unknown	2 items
Fd 7	Theobald, J.M. Letter to (Personal) 1883	1 item
Fd 8	Unidentified Religious Holograph 1848-1849 item	1
Fd 9	Walton Family Papers (Legal) 1870,1894 items	3
Fd 10	Wright Family General Notes	1 item

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