

TITLE: Jessie Benton Fremont collection

DATE RANGE: 1871-1906

CALL NUMBER: MS 1024

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: .25 linear ft. (1 box)

PROVENANCE: These materials were acquired in three steps. The bulk of the material was loaned to the Arizona Historical Society by Mrs. Kelly Howie, the granddaughter of Mrs. Nathan Weston Blanchard (to whom many of the letters in this collection are written) in June 1977, and then donated in July 1987. One letter, written by Jessie Benton Fremont about her new house in Tucson, and thought to be written in 1881 was donated by Richard Reilly in February 1973. Another letter, which contains the autograph of John C. Fremont, was donated by Wilson D. Trueblood in March 1979.

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RESTRICTIONS: This collection is unrestricted.

CREDIT LINE: Jessie Benton Fremont collection, MS 1024, Arizona Historical Society-Tucson

PROCESSED BY: Rebecca Senf under the supervision of Adelaide Elm, June 1993.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Jessie Ann Benton was born in 1824, daughter of U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri and Elizabeth McDowell Benton, She was named for her paternal grandfather, Jesse Benton. As her mother was ill, Jessie spent a good deal of her childhood with her father who tutored her in academics, including French and Spanish. The family divided its time between homes in St. Louis, Missouri; Washington D.C.; and the Cherry Grove Plantation in Virginia. At age fifteen, Jessie Benton Fremont attended Miss English's Female Seminary, a girl's boarding school. It was at a concert there that John C. Fremont first saw Jessie Ann Benton. Two years later, in October of 1841, Jessie eloped with John Charles Fremont against her father's wishes. After their marriage, John C. Fremont led several expeditions of the west, and Jessie helped secure his fame by co-authoring his accounts of the expeditions.

In 1849, Jessie and her first child, Elizabeth, traveled to San Francisco, via Panama so she could be with her husband after his failed fourth expedition. After Jessie's arrival, the Fremonts prospered in the California gold rush of 1849, extracting gold from their land at Las Mariposas.

In 1856 John C. Fremont ran for President, the first candidate of the newly-formed Republican party. While he lost the election, Jessie gained recognition by becoming the first candidate's wife to be involved with the campaign. Jessie was so involved that she was part of her husband's slogan, "Fremont and Our Jessie."

The Fremonts were quite wealthy until the railroad in which John Fremont invested went bankrupt in 1870. In 1873 Jessie began to support herself and her husband by writing articles and books. She was to continue this work for nearly twenty years, until John C. Fremont died in 1890. During this time she belittled the importance and value of her writing as she felt it was inappropriate for her to be the wage-earner. Toward the end of his life, John Fremont was appointed Territorial Governor of Arizona, which relieved their financial burden somewhat. However, his service as governor from 1878 to 1883 was

more in name than in fact, as his secretary, J.J. Gosper performed many his governing duties. John C. Fremont moved to Prescott when he received his appointment, but spent much of his time away from the territory. The high altitude in Prescott was bad for Jessie's health, so she moved to Tucson. John C. Fremont and Elizabeth later joined Jessie in Tucson, where John finished out his service as governor.

The couple lived in California on and off throughout their lives and after her husband's death, Jessie lived in Los Angeles with her daughter Elizabeth (Lily). Jessie Benton Fremont died in December of 1902, leaving behind her daughter Elizabeth and two sons: John Charles (Charley) and Francis (Frank).

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: This collection consists of letters written by Jessie Benton Fremont, her daughter Elizabeth Benton Fremont, and others. Also included is a page from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 31, 1901 and three photographs, one known to be Jessie Benton Fremont and the other two unidentified.

CONTAINER LIST:

Box	Folder	Description	Dates
1	1	Correspondence written by Jessie Benton Fremont (to Mrs. Townsend and Mrs. Blanchard)	1881-1902
	2	Correspondence written and photographs sent by Elizabeth Benton Fremont (to Mr. & Mrs. Blanchard and Eunice Weston Kelsey)	1902-1906
	3	Correspondence and reminiscences written by various people: -J.E. Benton to Mrs. Nathan Weston Blanchard -J.C. Fremont to Martin L. Anderson -Reminiscences of two events written by Mrs. Blanchard -Rebecca B. Spring to Mrs. Blanchard	1871-1896
	4	One page from the Sunday edition of the <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> about Jessie Benton Fremont and her husband John C. Fremont	1901
	5	Photocopy of John Fremont's oath of allegiance and railroad bond	1868; 1878