Emma L. Ashford Papers

Scope and Content Note

The Emma L. Ashford collection is comprised mostly of music composed by Mrs. Ashford, as well as by others. Mrs. Ashford’s music is in both manuscript and printed form. Most of her works contained in this collection pertain to Vanderbilt University. All the printed works of other composers in the collection relate to Vanderbilt.

The collection consists of one box, covering approximately .92 linear feet. It is arranged in three series.

Series I is made up of Mrs. Ashford’s music. It includes many of the pieces she composed for occasions at Vanderbilt. In addition, there are some examples of her other work, such as children’s song cycles and piano voluntaries for church services.

In Series II, the work of Mabel Lee McFerrin is represented. Ms. McFerrin was a contemporary of Emma Ashford at Vanderbilt.

Series III is a collection of printed sheet music and song books pertaining to Vanderbilt University. There is also a 45 RPM phonograph recording.

Biographical Sketch

Emma Louise Hindle was born March 27, 1850 in Newark, Delaware to a musical family of English ancestry. She was musically precocious and by the age of twelve was organist at the Episcopal Church in Kewanee, Illinois. Her family moved frequently and at one of their musical evenings in Connecticut, when she was seventeen, she met John Ashford, a young engineer and amateur singer from Bath, England. They married in December 1867 and moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1868, where she became the solo alto at St. John’s Episcopal Church as well as a church organist and teacher of harmony.

In 1884, the couple moved to Nashville, where Mr. Ashford became an instructor in the department of Mechanical Engineering at Vanderbilt University. Mrs. Ashford began to compose and to immerse herself in the musical life of the university and the community. She soon became famous on campus for her compositions about Vanderbilt. Dean Herbert Tolman said of her, “Of the women of our city, some have distinguished themselves in literature and some in art, but in the realm of musical composition, there is one name that stands pre-eminent. It is the name of Mrs. Emma L. Ashford.”
Mrs. Ashford was a prolific composer, as well as a frequent conductor of her work. She composed over 600 pieces of music, including organ voluntaries, sacred cantatas, hymns, song cycles, anthems, and graded works for piano and organ instruction. She traveled throughout this country and abroad, performing or conducting her work. In addition to this recognition, she won numerous prizes in international song and anthem contests.

Among her works written for Vanderbilt, the most acclaimed was “Vanderbilt Ode”, written in 1900 for Vanderbilt’s 25th birthday celebration. A memorable performance of this work occurred in 1926 at the War Memorial Auditorium with the Nashville Symphony and a large chorus. The evening concluded with Chancellor Kirkland complimenting Mrs. Ashford publicly with the following remarks: “As long as men love the beautiful in music, so long will your name live and be cherished by Vanderbilt men and women.”

Mrs. Ashford died September 22, 1930 at her home in Nashville.

**Box Listing**

**Box 1**

**Series I  Compositions by Emma L. Ashford**

3. “Vanderbilt Hymn” ("Vanderbilt, Our Vanderbilt")---Words by Dean Herbert Tolman---Music by Emma L. Ashford. Manuscript copy; also notarized statement by Charles Washburn dated 8 Nov. 1946, affirming that the manuscript and signature are in Mrs. Ashford’s own hand.
4. “O Alma Mater” (An Ode to Vanderbilt University Written for the 25th Anniversary in 1900)---Words by Olin D. Wannamaker---Music by Emma L. Ashford. Eleven printed copies plus a letter from Browne Martin which accompanied his gift of one copy to the library.
6. “Ashford’s Piano Voluntaries” (For Use in Church Services)---Arranged and Edited by E.L. Ashford. Published by Lorenz Publishing Company, 1916.
Six copies, printed by Lorenz Publishing Company 1924. Octavo No. 4010 in Lorenz’s series, “Quartets and Choruses for Mixed Voices”.


**Series II  Compositions by Mabel Lee McFerrin**


**Series III  Compositions About Vanderbilt by Other Composers**


