



ArchivesSpace

## Harriet Elizabeth Prescott Spofford collection, 1860-2004

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

### Maine Women Writers Collection

Abplanalp Library  
University of New England  
716 Stevens Avenue  
Portland, Maine 04103  
[cmiller10@une.edu](mailto:cmiller10@une.edu)  
URL: <http://www.une.edu/mwwc>

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## Summary Information

<b>Repository:</b>	Maine Women Writers Collection
<b>Creator:</b>	Spofford, Harriet Elizabeth Prescott, 1835-1921
<b>Title:</b>	Harriet Elizabeth Prescott Spofford collection
<b>ID:</b>	0337
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1860-2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 folders
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English

### Preferred Citation

Harriet Elizabeth Prescott Spofford collection, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, Maine

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## Biographical/Historical Note

In Calais, Maine, on the Canadian border, Harriet Elizabeth Prescott was born on April 3, 1835, the seventh generation of the distinguished Prescott family of New England. An inquisitive child, "Hallie" received private schooling in the home of one Miss Porter. At fourteen, she entered the coeducational Putnam Free School and for four years, she followed a demanding curriculum where she read widely and won numerous prizes in composition. During the 1850s, at still a young age, Harriet Prescott had begun to contribute to family income by publishing anonymously; this earliest work, however, is lost. She often wrote for fifteen hours a day, the price for a story being as little as \$2.50. In 1858 she was emboldened to submit a detective story, "In a Cellar," to the two year-old Atlantic Monthly, where it appeared in February 1859. James Russell Lowell (1819-91), then editor of the Atlantic, doubted that an unknown young woman could have written so striking a tale, but Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911) vouched for its authenticity. Harriet Prescott joined the writers' circles of Boston, beginning with a birthday dinner to honor Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), where she met Lowell as well as poets Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) and John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892). She next wrote two romances, *Sir Rohan's Ghost* (1860) and *Azarian: An Episode* (1864). But the work that better augurs Spofford's future reputation is her second book, a critically acclaimed collection of seven short stories ranging between romanticism and realism, *The Amber Gods and Other Stories*

(1863). She wrote throughout her life, publishing 32 books and an unknown number of stories, essays, poems, and juvenilia never collected from magazines where they had appeared. Spofford's best stories appeared in the top magazines-Atlantic, Harper's Monthly, Galaxy, Lippincott's, Scribner's, and Century. Harriet placed some 74 stories in Harper's Bazar. Engaged about 1860, in 1865 Harriet married Richard Smith Spofford (1833-88), a lawyer (and poet), who practiced in Newburyport and Washington, D.C. In 1867 a son, Richard Spofford, was born in January and died in September. In 1874 Richard Smith Spofford bought Deer Island-in-the-Merrimack [River], which became a summer community of extended family. After the deaths of her husband Richard, her sister Mary, and other relatives, Harriet Prescott Spofford found emotional outlet in her own writing and collecting of past work. Seven strong stories were in *Old Madame and Other Tragedies* (1900). Next came a book of five local color stories, called *Old Washington* (1906). A final well-received collection, *The Elder's People* (1920), included fourteen regional, realistic stories. A circle of Boston women writers revolving around Annie Adams Fields (1834-1915) provided companionship. From this group, she socialized most closely with Rose Terry Cooke (1827-92), Gail Hamilton (Mary Abigail Dodge, 1833-1896), Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909), Celia Thaxter (1835-1894), and most especially Louise Chandler Moulton (1835-1908). Harriet Spofford died of arteriosclerosis on August 14, 1921, while at Deer Island-in-the-Merrimack.

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## Collection Scope and Content

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This collection consists of the author's pieces published in late 19th and early 20th centuries magazines. Approximately one dozen titles are represented containing over 40 of the author's works. These are housed in the periodical collection. Approximately two dozen books from the author's personal library are also available. A small amount of biographical information and copies of a pencil sketch of the author are also available.

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## Arrangement

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This collection is organized as a single series.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

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URL: <http://www.une.edu/mwwc>

### Access

Collection is open for research.

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## Related Materials

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### Related Materials

Harriet Elizabeth Prescott Spofford Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College,  
Northampton, Massachusetts

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Genealogy
- Calais (Me.)

- Correspondence
- Photographs
- Reproductions
- Clippings
- Spofford, Harriet Elizabeth Prescott, 1835-1921
- Spofford, Harriet Elizabeth Prescott, 1835-1921
- Moulton, Louise Chandler, 1835-1908

## Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Photographs (reproductions) of Spofford, undated	Box 21	Folder 002
Poem "The Christmas peal" from Harper's, 1891	Box 21	Folder 003
"Narrative revelations: Harriet Prescott Spofford's 'Amber Gods' revisited" by Rita Bode, 2004	Box 21	Folder 004
Genealogical research by C. Kessler on HPS, 2004	Box 21	Folder 005
	Box 21	Folder 006
	Box 21	Folder 007
Bibliography, undated	Box 21	Folder 008