One of the most famous men in Pennsylvania's political history, General Simon Cameron, was known as having been an United States Senator, Secretary of War for the Lincoln administration, and Minister to Russia, but is not usually known as having been father to ten children. What is not mentioned in most biographies of Simon Cameron is the fact that he had a daughter named Margareta “Maggie” Cameron who bore witness to the political events of her influential father in the shadows of a male dominated society which restricted its women to the backgrounds.
The Millersville University Archives and Special Collections came into possession of two diaries of Maggie Cameron’s through an auction; one written during the summer of 1857 and another written during the summer of 1862. The diary written during the summer of 1857 chronicles Maggie Cameron’s travels throughout Europe. Maggie and her traveling party traveled around England, Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, Ireland, and Scotland. Most of their time was spent either sight seeing, shopping, or visiting friends who were either living at the time in Europe or touring Europe like themselves. While sight seeing, Maggie would describe in her diary everything they saw that day in great detail whether is was a museum or castle or simply a carriage ride through a local park.
The first diary was written during the summer of 1857 in which she chronicles their travels throughout Europe. Maggie’s traveling companions included her sister-in-law Mary McCormick Cameron, Dr. and Mrs. McClintock, May Cummings, Mr. Cummings, and a series of friends and acquaintances that they encountered during the trip. Maggie and her party traveled throughout England, Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, Ireland, and Scotland. Most of their time was spent sight-seeing, shopping, and visiting friends living or traveling in Europe.
Observations of England: Left Liverpool Tuesday morning at half-past 9 o’clock for London. Passing over the London and Northwestern railway and arrived there after passing over 210 miles. We passed through Warrick, Stafford, Rugby, Stanford, Banberry, Harrow on the Hill, Camden, and others, and at half past four was at London. ... The country is a garden as it were from Liverpool to London and worth while to cross the ocean (though sick the whole way) to see. (May 27, 1857)
Ireland and Scotland
When Gen. Simon Cameron resigned as Secretary of War in January, 1862, President Lincoln appointed him to fill the post of Minister to Russia, which had been left vacant by Cassius M. Clay. It was an important diplomatic mission of handling the relations between the United States government and that of the Czar, Alexander II. This position in Russia required Gen. Simon Cameron move to Russia with his family. Gen. Simon Cameron left on the ship the “Persia” in early May of 1860, along with his wife, Mrs. Cameron, Maggie Cameron, Virginia “Jennie” Cameron, Simon Cameron Jr. and a man servant, Mr. S.C. Burnside, Bayard Taylor, Secretary of Legation, and family; and M. Louis Geoffrey, Secretary of the French Legation. The traveling party did not sail directly to Russia, but decided to travel to England, France, and then from Paris to St. Petersburg by rail.
Gen. Simon Cameron left on the ship the “Persia” in early May of 1860, along with his wife, Mrs. Cameron, Maggie Cameron, Virginia “Jennie” Cameron, Simon Cameron Jr., and a manservant, Mr. S.C. Burnside; Bayard Taylor, Secretary of the Legation, and family; and M. Louis Geoffrey, Secretary of the French Legation. The party sailed to England, then France, and then traveled from Paris to St. Petersburg by rail.
Central Europe in 1860
When the family traveled to Paris, Maggie found herself on a fast-paced tour of the city, visiting the Tuileries Gardens, Place de la Concorde, the Champs Elysees, and the Zoological Gardens. The family did a good amount of shopping while in Paris. It is believed that the mirrors that now hang in the John Harris/Simon Cameron House in Harrisburg were bought while the family toured Paris.
Germany
Maggie writes about the city of St. Petersburg and mentions the differences she noticed between the United States and the countries of Eastern Europe. One thing in particular she points out was the weather and culture of the different classes, especially when they arrived in Russia.
Maggie’s journal ends with the family setting up their home in St. Petersburg. Gen. Simon Cameron, while Minister to Russia, helped gain support from the Czar, Alexander II, for the Union, which would help in influencing Britain and France against supporting the Confederate government during the Civil War. In January, 1863, the Cameron family returned to America, so that Maggie’s father could seek election to the Senate from Pennsylvania, in which he failed.
Maggie’s writings offer glimpses into the family life of one of Pennsylvania’s most famous politicians, as well as fascinating impressions of European and Russian cultural heritage. The diaries of Maggie Cameron are an attractive feature of the Millersville University Archives and Special Collections; they bring to light the story of a daughter who lived in the shadow of her famous father.

Diaries of Maggie Cameron, 1857, 1862.

Cameron Family Records, Dauphin County Historical Society.