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MF:5750, Series E, Reel 31

**Arthur P. Thrasher Correspondence**  
(Mss. 2247)  
Inventory

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections  
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library  
Louisiana State University Libraries  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

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**Summary**

<b>Size.</b>	51 items
<b>Geographic locations.</b>	New Orleans, La.; Algiers, La.; Jefferson Parish, La.; Shawneetown, Ky.; Caseyville, Ky.; St. Louis, Mo.; Cave in Rocks, Ill.; Holyoke, Mass.; Three Rivers, Mass.; Vicksburg, Miss.
<b>Inclusive dates.</b>	1895-1898
<b>Bulk dates.</b>	N/A
<b>Language.</b>	English
<b>Summary.</b>	Letters from a tinsmith and his wife to his brother, Arthur P. Thrasher, regarding conditions in their houseboat and in the areas they lived as they made their way to Massachusetts.
<b>Organization.</b>	Arranged chronologically
<b>Restrictions on access.</b>	If microfilm is available, photocopies must be made from microfilm.
<b>Related collections.</b>	N/A
<b>Copyright.</b>	Copyright of the original materials is retained by descendants of the creators in accordance with U.S. copyright law.
<b>Citation.</b>	Arthur P. Thrasher Correspondence, Mss. 2247, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
<b>Stack location(s).</b>	U:15
<b>Also available on:</b>	Microfilm: 5750, Series E, Reel 31

### **Biographical/Historical Note**

Arthur P. Thrasher of Massachusetts was the recipient of letters from his brother, Charles Frank Thrasher, and Frank's wife, Alice, who lived on a houseboat on the Mississippi River at New Orleans. Thrasher was married to Ella V. Burdick of East Hampton, Massachusetts.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Letters by Frank Thrasher are principally about his work as a tinsmith, wages, odd jobs, and membership in a labor union. Alice D. Thrasher's letters, on the other hand, detail life on the houseboat "Eureka," places and people observed during their journey up the Mississippi River from New Orleans, river traffic, politics, social conditions, and more. Some of the events mentioned include the destruction of Algiers by fire; festivities in New Orleans from Christmas through New Year's Eve; impressions of Mardi Gras parades; the devastating flood (1898) of Shawneetown, Kentucky; and living conditions at St. Louis, Missouri, and Caseyville, Kentucky. Attitudes toward and persecution of blacks are prevalent topics in Alice's correspondence. Letters from Glenn Denman, Arthur Thrasher's nephew, discuss work in a sugar refinery, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and his dislike of the South, among other things. Broadsides advertising Thrasher Brothers Tinshop on the sailboat "Ironsides" are included.

Collection Description

<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Contents</u>
U:15	1	1	1895	<p>18 items:</p> <p>4 printed items include 2 broadsides advertising Thrasher Brothers tinshop on sailboat <i>Ironsides</i>, and 2 deck passage tickets for steamer <i>St. Joseph</i>.</p> <p>7 letters to Arthur P. Thrasher, Holyoke, Massachusetts, from Alice D. Thrasher, sister-in-law, on houseboat <i>Eureka</i> at head of Soniat Street, New Orleans, comment on “style” of boat of African American neighbor, “mixed” swimming parties, and companionship with African American woman, Aug. 11, and Glenn Denman’s (Alice’s son?) proposed raft partnership with African American, Oct. 29; mention pleasure parties on Joe Schmidt’s boat, <i>Sport</i>, prior to August 11, on August 11, and September 9; describe in detail preparations for hurricane, Sept. 9; mention river boats including <i>Ouachita</i> tied up for repairs, Sept. 9 and Oct. 29, burning of <i>John Scully</i> at Carrollton, Oct. 29, and cotton loaded on <i>Natchez</i> to Texas, Dec. 18; tell of changes made to <i>Ironsides</i> by new owner, Oct. 29; describe interior of houseboat <i>Eureka</i>, Oct. 31; comment on economic conditions as to low pay and irregular employment in sugar refineries, Oct. 29, Nov. 18, and Dec. 18; comment on unfitness of river water for drinking and cooking, Nov. 18 and Dec. 18.</p> <p>6 letters to Arthur P. Thrasher, Belchertown and Holyoke, Mass. From C[harles] Frank Thrasher, brother, on <i>Eureka</i>, New Orleans (some contain a few lines by Frank’s wife, Alice), mention membership in labor union and attendance of meeting, June 25 and Aug. 15; comment on employment conditions--\$2.25 for a 9-hour day and irregular work, Aug. 15, Sept. 8, Oct. 27, and Dec. 15; state Algiers destroyed by fire, Oct. 27; mention unfitness of river water and use of rainwater for drinking and cooking, Sept. 8 and Nov. 17; mention high cost of living, Oct. 27; comment on size of <i>American</i>, the largest boat ever to dock in harbor, Nov. 17; and comment by Alice includes description of neighbor’s new houseboat, June 25, and reflect attitude to common laborers—nearly all workers common laborers, the greatest curse to the country, Nov. 17.</p>

1 friendly letter from “Aunt Lil” to Arthur, Dec. 2.

U:15      1      2      1896      19 items:

8 letters to Arthur P. Thrasher, Three Rivers, Massachusetts, from Alice, on *Eureka*, New Orleans, describe city from Christmas Eve through New Year, “crazy,” fireworks nightly with greatest fuss on New Year’s Eve with bells and whistles increasing racket of cannons, guns and revolvers, Jan. 13; state “tearing time” for Mardi Gras has begun, but they shall see only parades not balls, Jan. 13; mention arrival on *Bolivia*, of 1,200 Italian immigrants—Americans in city already outnumbered by them, Nov. 14; mention river boats including large cotton loads carried by *Hallett* and *City of Camden*, the burning of the *J. P. Jackson* and *Arthur Lambert* at Gretna and towboat *Jim Watson*, Apr. 9, the sinking of *Paul Tulane* at Cora Plantation, Aug. 26, and the sinking of the *Harry Brown*, *Paul Tulane*, and *City of Hickman*, Sept. 28; comment on economic conditions including projected construction of largest cotton seed oil works by Refuge Oil Company of Vicksburg, Apr. 9 and May 3, poor reaching starvation point, run on banks with 4 breaking in month and Bank of Commerce showing misappropriation of funds, Sept. 28, influx of hobos causing 10 men to look for 1 job, Nov. 14, and closing of furniture factory, May 3; mention low cost of fruit—oranges 10¢ a dozen and bananas so cheap hardly worth carrying, Apr. 9; tell of slavish working conditions at sugar factory—12 hour working day, including Sunday, for \$10.90 a week, Jan. 13; state Cuban trouble and loss of sugar bounty diverted planters from sugar crops to rice raising and truck farming, May 3; mention Frank’s efforts to earn a living and state he is making brackets for cornices of new court house in Algiers, June 22; state use of medical drugs antifibrine, quinine, and Simmons for treatment of malaria, Sept. 28; describe burning of houseboat of occupants, Jan. 13, murder of Jack Britton by African Americans, Aug. 26, and comment on great antipathy of Jefferson Parish to African Americans, her personal fear of them, and the bringing of an African American boy murderer from northern Louisiana to city for safekeeping, Sept. 28; discuss politics including removal of corrupt “ringsters” by uniting of populist, Republicans and “sore headed Democrats” in April 21 election, May 3, and her staunch support of William J. McKinley for United States President though Republicans have declared for gold, Aug. 26; mention lynching of firebug at Gretna, Jan. 13; and relates plans to float

north after Christmas, Sept. 28 and Nov. 14.

undated 6 letters to Arthur P. Thrasher from Frank (*Eureka* docked at Head of Robert Street) give impressions of Mardi Gras—“grand carnival” but only military worth seeing twice, live people on floats, “monkey shines,” and gifts thrown to crowd, Feb. 27; comment on new location of houseboat on island—only skiffs go by, no “niggers,” dogs, cows, goat, nor wood hunters, Apr. 10; tell of hard times with steamboats being sunk, banks being “busted,” Aug. 2, Sept. 27, and Nov. 22; mention river trips on sailboat, June 24 and Sept. 27.

1 letter from Glenn tells of work at sugar refinery--13¢ an hour and \$1.50 a day, and dislike of boss, a “Dutchman,” Jan. 14.

1 personal letter to Ella V. Burdick, fiancée, East Hampton, Massachusetts, from Arthur P. Thrasher, Nov. 5.

3 newspaper clippings comment on suicide of Richard Dundas, Vicksburg; arrest of James Shea and James Dundas for operating an unlawful ferry; and news of river vessels and height of river [1896].

U:15	1	3	1897- 1898	18 items:
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7 letters to Arthur P. and Ella Thrasher (wife) from Alice relate plans to return north and mention burning of *Belle of the Coast* and replacement of *Lula Prince* by *Liberty*, Jan. 28; comment on hard times and generosity of Glenn who works 8 hours daily as pile driver for \$35 a month and board, [March], 1897 and July 11; state July 4<sup>th</sup> not enthusiastically celebrated, July 11, 1897; states hard times in St. Louis worse than New Orleans, only 40 days work out of 70 with pay from \$2 to \$2.50 per day, and all hands talk “dutch,” St. Louis, Missouri and East St. Louis, Illinois, Aug. 24 and Dec. 7, 1897; describes Glenn’s working conditions and life on board government dredge boat, St. Louis, Aug. 24, 1897; describes sailboat trip to Cave in Rocks, Illinois, via Cairo, Carrsville, and Hurricane Island, and mentions plan to stop at Caseyville, Kentucky for “a grub stake” on way to Mount Vernon, Mar. 17, 1898; describes conditions at Shawneetown, Kentucky, from high water with 2 to 3 hundred dead, and, and at Caseyville “disconsolate enough” but acts like it was “one big holiday,” Apr. 4, 1898;

7 letters to Arthur "Chip" from Frank, New Orleans, comment on preparations for move north, Jan. 26 and Mar. 5, 1897; relate failure to sell *Eureka* because of hard times, St. Louis, Missouri, July 12, Aug. 24, and Dec. 1, 1897; state July 4 more real than any experience in New Orleans, July 12, 1897; describe buildings, people, jobs, and general appearance of town, Caseyville, Kentucky, Mar. 22 and Apr. 5, 1898.

2 friendly letters from Glenn Denman, St. Louis, to "Uncle Art" mention return to *Eureka* because of appearance of "yellow jack" at Pt. Pleasant, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and dislike of South, Mar. 6 and Sept. 27, 1897; 1 newspaper clipping regarding sunken boat, *T. P. Leathers*, [Sept. 1897];

1 sketch by Glenn Denman.



**Cross References**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of relevant documents</b>
Advertising--Mississippi River.	1895	2 broadsides advertise shop of Thrasher Brothers.
Bank of Commerce (New Orleans, La.)	1896	comments on misappropriation of funds and possibility of President going to "Pen" for receiving money when bank was failing. Alice Thrasher, Sept. 28.
Banks and banking--Louisiana--New Orleans.	1896	comments on run on banks with 4 breaking in a month. Alice Thrasher, Sept. 28.
Carnival--Louisiana--New Orleans.	1896	Northerners' impressions of season include comments on "tearing time," parades, arrival of Rex, and failure to be admitted to the "holy of holies"—the balls. Jan. 13 and Feb. 27.
Christmas--Louisiana--New Orleans.	1896	Northerner's description of city—"crazy," fireworks nightly with culmination on New Year's Eve. Alice Thrasher, Jan. 13.
Clippings (Books, newspapers, etc.)	1896-1897	4 clippings comment on suicide of Richard Dundas, arrest for operating an unlawful ferry, river vessels and height of river.
Cottonseed oil mills--Louisiana--New Orleans.	1896	proposed construction of largest factory by Refuge Oil Co. Alice Thrasher, Apr. 9 and May 3.
Dredges--Missouri--Saint Louis.		working and living conditions on government dredge boat. St. Louis, Aug. 24, 1897.
Eureka (Houseboat)	1895-1898	description of interior, Oct. 31, 1895. New Orleans; comments concern life on board, travel experiences, and boats of neighbors, and conversion to sailboat. 1895-1898; preparations and plan to be towed north on Mississippi River by coal boat; experiences encountered en route; conversion of houseboat to sailboat; employment en route.
Fires--Louisiana--Algiers.	1895-1896	comments on severity of fire, Oct. 27, 1895; and construction of new courthouse, June 22, 1896.

- Floods--Mississippi River. 1898 description of flood damages, and attitudes of people. Shawneetown and Caseyville, Mar. 22, Apr. 4-5; comments on appearance of town, citizens, and available jobs. Caseyville.
- Fourth of July celebrations--Louisiana--New Orleans. 1897 no enthusiastic celebration, but more real than any experience in New Orleans. July 11-12.
- Hurricanes--Louisiana--New Orleans. 1895 detailed description of preparations by occupants of houseboat. Alice Thrasher, Sept. 9.
- Immigrants--Louisiana--New Orleans. 1896 Arrival of 1,200 on *Bolivia*; outnumbering Americans in city poses employment problem, Nov. 14.
- Ironsides (Ship) 1895 2 broadsides advertise Thrasher Brothers tinsmiths. 1895. remodeled by new owner. Oct. 29.
- Italians--Louisiana--New Orleans. 1896 Arrival of 1,200 on *Bolivia*; outnumbering Americans in city poses employment problem, Nov. 14.
- Jefferson Parish (La.)--History--19th century. 1895-1896 description of employment conditions in sugar refinery, near Westwego, Oct. 29 and Nov. 18; comments on murder of white man and African American woman for cohabitation, and lynching of firebug, near Westwego and Gretna, Jan. 13, 1896; prevalence of shooting and lynching without cause, Sept. 28, 1896.
- Labor--Kentucky--Caseyville. 1898 available odd jobs. Mar. 22 and Apr. 5, 1898. Caseyville, Kentucky.
- Labor--Louisiana. 1895-1896 working conditions at sugar refineries, Oct. 29, Nov. 18, Dec. 18, 1895; and Jan. 13-14, 1896; and at Crescent City Cornice Works, Aug. 15, Sept. 8, Oct. 27, Dec. 15, 1895; and June 22, 1896. New Orleans and Westwego; Unemployment from influx of hobos and Italian immigrants. Nov. 14, 1896. New Orleans.
- Labor--Missouri--Saint Louis. 1897 pile driver's wages, hours of work, living conditions on government dredge boat. [March],

Aug. 24, Dec. 7, 1897. St. Louis.

Labor unions--Louisiana-- New Orleans.	1895	comments on membership dues of 50¢ a month, attendance at meeting, and referral to Crescent City Cornice Works for employment. Frank Thrasher, June 25 and Aug. 15.
Lynching--Louisiana.	1896	daily shooting and lynching without apparent cause in Jefferson Parish; removal of boy murderer from North Louisiana to New Orleans for safe keeping. Sept. 28; cohabitation of white man and African American woman results in burning of houseboat and murder of occupants. Jan. 13.
Malaria--Treatment.	1896	treatment for malaria consists of dosages of antifibrine, quinine, and "Simmons." Alice Thrasher, Sept. 28.
Miscegenation-- Louisiana--Westwego.	1896	cohabitation of white man and African American woman results in burning of houseboat and murder of occupants. Jan. 13.
New Orleans (La.)-- Description and travel.	1895-1897	comments concern batture living, change in attitude towards African Americans, Mississippi River traffic, social life, economic, labor, weather, politics, and Italian immigration.
New Orleans (La.)-- Economic conditions-- 19th century.	1895-1897	effect of sugar industry on economy, hard times—unemployment, low wages, long hours of work, high cost of living, river trade, industrial development, Italian immigration, lack of skilled workers.
New Orleans (La.)--Race relations.	1895-1896	Northerners' change in attitude from social acceptance to fear, and shift in terminology from "darky" to "nigger." Aug. 11, Oct. 29, 1895; Apr. 10, Aug. 26, and Sept. 28, 1896.
New Orleans (La.)--Social life and customs--19th century.	1895-1897	comments on holidays, Mardi Gras, sailing trips, rental of <i>Sport</i> for pleasure parties, "mixed" swimming parties.
New Orleans Batture (La.)	1895-1897	description of houseboats, neighbors, social life, and living conditions.

**THRASHER (ARTHUR P.) CORRESPONDENCE**  
1895-1898

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| New Year--Louisiana--<br>New Orleans.              | 1896      | comments on celebration—for 1 hour racket of bells and whistles; cannons, guns, and revolvers in every corner to welcome in New Year. Alice Thrasher, Jan. 13.  |
| Political campaigns--<br>Louisiana.                | 1896      | popularist, Republicans, and “sore-headed Democrats” unite to remove corrupt “ringsters.” May 3.  |
| Presidents--United States--<br>-Election--1896.    | 1896      | comments on issue of bimetallism and Republicans declaration for gold in election campaign of William J. McKinley. Aug. 26.   |
| Refuge Oil Company.                                | 1896      | comments on projected construction of largest factory, Alice Thrasher, Apr. 9 and May 3.  |
| River boats--Louisiana--<br>New Orleans.           | 1895-1897 | comments on traffic, shipments of cotton, and steamboat disasters; description of sailing trips, and pleasure parties on rented boat. New Orleans.  |
| Saint Louis (Mo.)--<br>History--19th century.      | 1897      | comments on hard times concern irregular employment, low pay, and failure to sell <i>Eureka</i> , July 12, Aug. 24, Dec. 1 and 7; observation of July 4, letters July 11-12; working conditions on government dredge boat and size of St. Louis, Aug. 24. |
| Sport (Ship)                                       | 1895      | comments on rental by Joe Schmidt for pleasure parties, Aug. 11 and Sept. 9.  |
| Sugar trade--Louisiana.                            | 1895-1896 | comments on wages and employment conditions at factories in Westwego and on Custom House Street. Oct. 29, 1895 and Jan. 13, 1896 (New Orleans) and explanation of planters’ shift from sugar to rice crops and truck farming, May 3, 1896                 |
| Thrasher, Alice D.--<br>Travel--Mississippi River. | 1895-1898 | description of houseboat life; comments on river traffic, social customs of communities visited, weather, politics, and job opportunities. 22 Alice D. Thrasher letters.  |
| Tinsmiths--Massachusetts.                          | 1895-1898 | correspondence principally from brother and   |

**THRASHER (ARTHUR P.) CORRESPONDENCE**  
1895-1898

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sister-in-law on houseboat on the Mississippi River describe life on board, impressions of cities visited, travels, and sailboat *Ironsides* at New Orleans and return trip to Massachusetts.

Tinsmiths--Mississippi  
River.

1895

2 broadsides advertise shop of Thrasher Brothers.

Water-supply--Louisiana--  
New Orleans.

1895

comments on gathering of rainwater, drought, and unfitness of river water for drinking and cooling. Alice thrasher, Sept. 8, Nov. 17-18, and Dec. 18.

Container List

<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder(s)</u>	<u>Contents (with dates)</u>
U:15	1	1	1895
		2	1896
		3	1897-1898
MF:5750, Series E		Reel 31	