Annotated Bibliography of Elsie Singmaster’s Gettysburg Writings

Susan Colestock Hill

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Abstract
Our fellow Adams Countian, Elsie Singmaster Lewars (1879-1958), was a well-known author of regional fiction during the first half of the twentieth century. She wrote about the people and places she knew first hand. She spent most of her first twenty years in an ethnic Pennsylvania German community, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Having descended on her father’s side from Pennsylvania Germans who settled in the eastern part of the state beginning in the eighteenth century, she understood “her people” because she lived among them. When she began to write for publication in 1905, her first characters and plots drew upon her heritage. The early twentieth century interest in local color literature contributed to the initial popularity of her stories then published in American literary journals. Known professionally as Elsie Singmaster, she established a reputation as a skilled and sympathetic portrayer of Pennsylvania German life in a developing and diverse American culture.

Keywords
Elsie Singmaster, Elsie Singmaster Lewars, Fiction, Author, Pennsylvania German, Gettysburg Author

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Hill: Annotated Bibliography of Elsie Singmaster’s Gettysburg Writings

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Introduction

Our fellow Adams Countian, Elsie Singmaster Lewars (1879-1958), was a well-known author of regional fiction during the first half of the twentieth century. She wrote about the people and places she knew first hand. She spent most of her first twenty years in an ethnic Pennsylvania German community, Macungie, Pennsylvania. Having descended on her father’s side from Pennsylvania Germans who settled in the eastern part of the state beginning in the eighteenth century, she understood “her people” because she lived among them. When she began to write for publication in 1905, her first characters and plots drew upon her heritage. The early twentieth century interest in local color literature contributed to the initial popularity of her stories then published in American literary journals. Known professionally as Elsie Singmaster, she established a reputation as a skilled and sympathetic portrayer of Pennsylvania German life in a developing and diverse American culture.

After 1900, when the Singmaster family moved to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, because Reverend Doctor John Alden Singmaster, Elsie’s father, became a professor of biblical studies and eventually president of Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary, Elsie Singmaster found another rich source of literary inspiration in the historical surroundings of her new home. She wrote fictional stories and books about characters based on Gettysburg’s townspeople and their legends. Her unique perspective as a local author who lived and worked on Seminary Ridge, site of the first day’s exchange of cannon shot and bullets on July 1, 1863 and then a hospital for the wounded of both armies intrigued the public readership as the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary approached in 1913. Already famous as a writer of Pennsylvania German fiction, her Civil War stories appeared in popular magazines as early as 1907. Her collected stories, Gettysburg, Stories of the Red
Harvest and Its Aftermath (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913) were reprinted as Gettysburg, Stories of Memory, Grief and Greatness (University of Alabama Press, 2003) in recognition of the abiding contribution of Singmaster’s timeless and human interpretations of the Battle of Gettysburg.
I offer the accompanying list of writings as an encouragement to Adams County Historical Society’s members and friends to read about the Battle of Gettysburg and its repercussions and about other aspects of the county’s past through the eyes of one of the area’s own daughters. She gave voice to stories, books, and articles about the days and years before, during, and after the battle. Male and female residents of the town, soldiers of the Union and Confederacy, veterans and their battle legacies, families divided by sectional loyalties, town guides and visitors to the memorialized battleground, heroes, heroines, and cowards of all ages, and slaves and free African Americans all populate Singmaster’s horizon. She was insightful, hopeful, and patriotic offering an uplifting voice in a country she believed was destined for greatness.

Singmaster’s body of work is available in many locations and formats. Local library collections offer limited access to books that may only be available to read on site. Stores offering used books both online and on the street include Singmaster volumes at varying prices. Free electronic versions of books are already online at guttenberg.com, goodreads.com, googlebooks.com, alibris.com, worldcat.org and others. Simply by entering a search for “Elsie Singmaster” in one’s browser, one can identify sites bearing Singmaster’s work.

Many original Singmaster magazine stories and articles are part of the Adams County Historical Society’s collection. They are available upon request for readers. It is also possible to request copies of old magazine stories from the Adams County Public Library. Gettysburg College shelves collected volumes of magazines where Singmaster stories and articles may be found. Consult their online catalogue to identify magazines that are included in their collection. Online magazine, newspaper, and library archives are also good sources for Singmaster’s writings.
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“Against Orders.”  Quest, June 18, 1941

This story is based in truth. It tells of a theft by Confederate troops of the Reed and Barton silver tea service belonging to the Krauth family of Gettysburg. General Robert E. Lee was instrumental in returning the stolen property to the Krauth home on Seminary Ridge, site of the first day’s fighting during the Battle of Gettysburg.

“Aged One Hundred and Twenty.”  
Saturday Evening Post, March 12, 1927.

Flo Porterfield, an elderly black Gettysburgian, claims to be one hundred twenty years old. She impacts many of her Gettysburg townsfolk through her appearance, wit, work, and engaging presence including a young writer who benefits professionally from her story and feels beholden to her. I believe a real Gettysburg resident, Keziah Kuff (d. 1926), who claimed to be one hundred twenty years old, inspired Singmaster to create “Old Flo.”

“The Battle of Gettysburg.”  
Magazine World, November 1931.

Singmaster offers a verbal guide and a battlefield map in this article so that visitors to Gettysburg might appreciate more fully the history of its surroundings.


Just before the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, Singmaster wrote about the battle’s importance in a national magazine. She describes briefly but accurately the
town’s battle-friendly configuration, troop movement, battle sites, and the care of the dead and wounded after the battle.

*A Boy at Gettysburg.* **Boston and New York:**
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924.

Carl Mottern and his grandfather live at and work a saw mill along Marsh Creek where they also hide slaves on the Underground Railroad. The dramatic story is based on the history of McAllister’s Mill, owned and operated by James McAllister and his family during the Civil War.

*“By a Hairsbreadth.”* **Classmate, n.d.**

Gettysburg’s bus driver, Spangler, is on the Gettysburg-Harrisburg route just before Christmas. He befriends his passenger, Ellen Summerfield, who grieves over a lost love. There is a happy ending to this sweet romance.

*“The Case for Co-Education.”* **The Lutheran, February 17, 1930**

This Singmaster essay makes a passionate case for continuing co-education at Gettysburg College when the institution decides to discontinue its acceptance of women students after 1930.

*“A Clean Slate.”* **Outlook, December 8, 1920.**

A Union veteran, Simon Lee, now seventy three years old, repents his membership in the Sons of Liberty during the Civil War. He hopes for a year of jubilee at the time of the battle’s fiftieth anniversary so he can finally erase his name from the list of Sons of Liberty in the congressional record and live his remaining years in peace.
“The Connor Charge.” *Outlook, July 9, 1919.*

General Connor bears tremendous guilt for the harm that came to soldiers he sent into battle at Gettysburg. Just as World War I is beginning, he meets West Point seniors on the battleground at Gettysburg and must explain his decision to charge during the battle there.

“Introduction” to “Notes and Documents: The Diary of Josephine Forney Roedel, October 1863.” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 43* (October 1943).

Josephine Forney Roedel was a native of Gettysburg living in Virginia at the time of the Civil War because her husband served as president of the Wytheville, Virginia, Female Seminary. Roedel’s diary documents her trip to Gettysburg in October 1863 when she had to cross lines of both armies to reach her destination.


Fifteen year old Gettysburg resident, Emmeline, is trapped at her abandoned grandparent’s farm after the first day of battle at Gettysburg. After Confederates take over the farm, Emmeline cooks for them and helps care for their wounded. She learns that the “enemy” is human too.

“Emmeline.” *Youth’s Companion, June 24, 1915* (chapter 1); *July 1 (chapter 2); July 8 (chapter 3); July 15 (chapter 4); July 22 (chapter 5); July 29 (chapter 6).

This is a serialized magazine version of Singmaster’s book, *Emmeline.*

Black, wizened “Old Flo” makes her living by begging for food and money door to door in Gettysburg. In comic irony, she collects more from the Ku Klux Klan members visiting Gettysburg than she ever imagined possible. Their coins add up to a sum sufficient for her to get through the winter without the charity of the Red Cross.


Singmaster’s “Foreword” encourages readers to trust Storrick’s “account of the battle.” Storrick lived in Gettysburg at the time of the battle and remembered shaking hands with President Lincoln.

“Free As Air!” *The Boston Herald, “This Week Magazine,” September 1, 1935.*

This is a story based on Gettysburg’s one time resident and Pennsylvania statesman, Thaddeus Stevens, who fought for public education while serving in the country’s legislative branch of government.


Gettysburg presents nine fictional short stories related to the bloody Battle of Gettysburg and a variety of compelling characters deeply affected by it. Published at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, the stories take place over a lengthy period of years. While he was an editor at *Outlook* in 1913, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to thank Singmaster for her stories and to tell her that he bought this
volume for his wife to take along on a trip to Europe.


The Gettysburg stories originally printed in 1913 are reprinted as classic literature with an insightful contemporary introduction.


The President of the United States is coming to Gettysburg to speak for “Decoration Day.” Billy Gude, the town’s oldest battlefield guide, believes he will have the honor of escorting the president because he is the most knowledgeable guide. He must compete for the job with Jakie Barsinge, and the competition gets ugly. This story appears in Singmaster’s Gettysburg volume.

“Gunner Criswell.” Harper’s, January 1912.

Gunner Criswell loses his sight at the Battle of Gettysburg. When he returns after fifty years, his name has been inadvertently omitted from the Pennsylvania Monument. This story is one of nine included in Singmaster’s Gettysburg.


Each year’s Memorial Day celebration renews Mrs. Dame’s deep sadness and resentment. Her son’s body lies unrecovered on a distant Civil War battlefield. A half acre lot of ground between her and her neighbor whose son died at Gettysburg but was sent home for burial becomes a source of revenge for Mrs. Dame.
“The Hero.” *Holland’s, November 1925.*

Henry Claibourne hides instead of fighting in the Civil War. He is afraid. After escaping from the South, he ends up in Gettysburg by chance at the time of the battle. Later, he becomes a battlefield guide and, ironically, is mistaken as a hero. This is one of the stories collected in Singmaster’s 1930 second edition of *Gettysburg.*

“High Finance.” *Saturday Evening Post,* April 24, 1926.

Tourguide Chester Cushion competes mightily with other guides for customers who visit Gettysburg and often loses out to them. He learns that he can make a lot more money selling antiques than leading tours.

“The Home-Coming.” *McClure’s, June 1909*

Parsons, a young Gettysburg-born soldier, cares little for the cause of war. Terrorized by the suffering of the battle wounded, he deserts his regiment when they reach the Gettysburg cemetery to join the fight, and he flees to his family home. Ironically, it’s there that he finds courage under fire. This is one of the stories selected for the 1913 *Gettysburg* volume.


Singmaster introduces the memoir of Liberty Augusta Hollinger Clutz whose vivid recollections of July 1-3, 1863 helped inform Singmaster’s fiction about the Battle of Gettysburg.

This is a powerful story in which a black man, Old Johnson, returns to Gettysburg during the fiftieth anniversary of the battle with unfulfilled hope. He had served a Northern officer there, suffered battle wounds, and later listened to Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.” Sadly, the promise of equality for which the North claimed to fight is never realized during Old Johnson’s lifetime.


Singmaster employed the genre of historical fiction to write this sympathetic portrayal of Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868) whom she admired as an unrelenting political advocate for public education and universal freedom. She seeks to balance Stevens’ overwhelmingly negative public reputation by describing his difficult childhood and his uncompromising moral strength. She follows him from early childhood years in Vermont to Gettysburg where he practiced law; then to Lancaster and Washington.


Singmaster writes about the unique renovation of the abandoned Adams County jail to become the Adams County Library. The author was one of the founders of the Adams County library.


Jan, a Civil War veteran, is the janitor at Wilbur College during the outbreak of the World War I. When a pacifist speaks at Wilbur urging the college students toward non-participation in the war, Jan’s war-mangled body speaks its own eloquence
in response.

*John Baring’s House.* **Boston and New York:**
**Houghton Mifflin Company,** 1920.

Young Elizabeth Scott and her brother, Herbert, inherit and move into their grandfather’s farm outside Gettysburg, near Cashtown. They are shunned by local folks who believe their grandfather was a Confederate sympathizer during the Civil War. Elizabeth leads a courageous search for the truth that would clear her grandfather’s name.

*John Baring’s House.* **Youth’s Companion,** July 8, 1920 (chapter 1); July 15 (chapter 2); July 22 (chapter 3); July 19 (chapter 4); August 5 (chapter 5); August 12 (chapter 6); August 19 (chapter 7); August 26 (chapter 8); (September 2 (chapter 9).

*Youth’s Companion* serialized *John Baring’s House.*

“Last Full Measure.” **The Boston Herald,** “This Week Magazine,” May 26, 1935.

Gettysburg’s old Miss Phoebe remembered Abraham Lincoln’s visit to Gettysburg throughout her lifetime and shared her memories generously until she became too old to recall them.

“A Late Confession.” **Outlook,** May 28, 1919.

Captain Hill, a Gettysburg battlefield guide, is a proud man whose unusual vanity may negatively affect his retirement pension.

“A Late Transplanting.” **The Youth’s Companion,** May 25, 1916.

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Grandfather Ware is an old Civil War veteran forced to move to the mid-west to be near his family. Bereft, he wonders if he will ever be happy in this location which he believes is too new to have a history of its own.


Raised by a loving grandmother, young Berry Pontifrac matures during the uncertain Civil War years. She lives and works in Gettysburg where the town’s residents face grave issues leading to significant social and personal changes. Berry is a heroine who maintains her loving nature throughout adverse times.


Singmaster gives a brief factual accounting and a personal interpretation of what happened on the Gettysburg College and Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary campuses both in 1863 during and after the battle and in 1913 when the nation commemorated its fiftieth anniversary. She describes the battle in religious terms as a “baptism of fire and blood” but emphasizes the necessity of regional reconciliation.


John Mehring returns the Gettysburg Seminary, site of the first day’s action at the Battle of Gettysburg, after fifty years. Reconciliation is the farthest thing from his mind when he first arrives in Gettysburg, but he meets someone there who teaches him forgiveness. This story is included in the 1930 reprinting of _Gettysburg_, a volume of twelve Singmaster stories.
“Maria Rapallo” in *Stories to Read at Christmas*. 

Bus driver, Spangler, exhibits bravery and character as well as a Christmas spirit when he protects the endangered child Esther Filson, born Maria Rapallo, while driving her on his regular route between Gettysburg and Caledonia.

“Mary Bowman of Gettysburg.”
*Harper’s, October 1912.*

Mary Bowman loses her husband during the Civil War and pays the heavy price for the rest of her life. Even though her thriving hometown is restored from its post-war degredation, her sadness is never fully resolved. She looks forward to a reunion with her husband after death. After this story appeared in the 1913 *Gettysburg* volume, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to tell Singmaster that “Mary Bowman” was a character he would always remember. “Mary Bowman” continues to be republished in contemporary collections of Civil War stories.

“Miss Vilda.” *Scribner’s, July 1920.*

Miss Vilda is almost seventy at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. She recounts her experience of the battle to young Mary but fails to remember an old soldier who arrives at her door to renew her acquaintance. “Miss Vilda” was collected into the 1930 second edition of *Gettysburg*.

“My County.” *Scholastic, March 5, 1932.*

Singmaster encourages youth to learn their local histories. She gives a brief accounting of the history of Adams County, Pennsylvania.

“The Nineteenth of November.”

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Sixty years after the Battle of Gettysburg, Riley Tyler returns to the town in hope. He has carried a surprising guilt throughout his lifetime which he seeks to resolve.

“Nothing Else Counted.” Portal, February 8, 1941.

“The whole world was going to Gettysburg,” claimed fifteen year old Olive Wells as her family also prepared for the visit on November 18, 1863. Olive watched the parade of dignitaries in Gettysburg on Novemebr 19th. She heard Edward Everett’s speech, but “nothing else counted” to her except Abraham Lincoln and his “Gettysburg Address.”

“Old Flo.” Saturday Evening Post, January 9, 1926.

“Old Flo” goes to a public sale on the square of Gettysburg. The contents of Judge Wills house are being sold, and she hopes to buy a chair to replace a decrepit one in her home. In an ironic twist, she is given a chair of historic value by a New York antique buyer, but its traditional value is meaningless to her.


“Old Vanity” is a former slave whose loyalties were divided during the Civil War between his hope for freedom and his love of the white Southern family whom he believed had always cared for him. Now World War I is requiring similar difficult decisions of a new generation.


College freshman, Dan Arneson, is sweet on the daughter of the superintendent of the Gettysburg battlefield. When he
chisels his and Anne’s initials on the rock supporting General Warren’s statue, Dan risks his romance as well as his freedom.


As Gettysburg anticipates the arrival of veterans and visitors to the battlefield, its spirited one hundred twenty year old colored resident “Old Flo” resists Preacher Nestle’s admonitions to join the church. She is not ready to give up the “pomp and glory” of this life; a requirement for church membership according to the preacher. Will impending death change her mind?


Amelia Cadbury is destitute. Believing her family’s fortune was stolen by the Confederates, her only hope for the future regrettably lies with the local Relief Board. After eating her last morsel of bread and burning her last piece of coal, her dead father’s foresight becomes evident and restores her.


Grandfather had been wounded at Chancellorsville, but his daughter-in-law fails to appreciate the significance of his war participation in his elder years. His satisfaction comes during an encampment at Gettysburg that draws him back into meaningful memories. This story was one of nine stories collected in Singmaster’s *Gettysburg* in 1913.

“Riley Hears a Voice.” *Classmate*, February 8, 1941.

This is a variation of the earlier story, “November the Nineteenth.” Riley Tyler has hidden the truth about the inferior horse he provided for Abraham Lincoln when he
visited Gettysburg for the dedication of the National Cemetery on November 19, 1863.

“The Rose - Colored Acacia.”
*Youth’s Companion*, May 26, 1910.

Two brothers, Tom and Henry Cecil, have not spoken to one another for fifty years. They fought for different sides in the Civil War and still mourn the sons they each lost sons during its battles. The blossoms from the rose-colored acacia tree which adorn their sons’ graves becomes both a vehicle for and a symbol of new life.

“Sallie.” *Gettysburg Times*, n.d.

“Sallie” was the name of a dog gifted to 1st Lieutenant William R. Terry of the 11th Pennsylvania Infantry. She was a loyal Staffordshire Bull Terrier who stood with the Pennsylvania dead and wounded on Oak Ridge after the Battle of Gettysburg. She was memorialized along with the men of her unit in 1890 when a bronze of her was added to their monument. Singmaster wrote a fictional story based on “Sallie” and her service to the 11th Pennsylvania.

“Salvadora.” *Stratford Journal*, April 1920 (part 1), May 1920 (part 2), June 1920 (part 3).

The “Salvadora” character is reminiscent of Gettysburg’s legendary Mag Palm. Salvadora attends a Chautauqua meeting in her town where a speaker discusses, “The Plantation Before the War.” It’s her opportunity to “reconstruct her past.”

*Sewing Susie: A Story of Gettysburg.*
Ann Longport, a fourteen year old girl living in Gettysburg at the time of the battle, demonstrates courage and character during extreme duress. She and her friend, Bob McClure, nicknamed “Sewing Susie,” cleverly save the lives of Union soldiers trapped behind Confederate lines after the first day’s battle.

_Sewing Susie. Youth’s Companion, April 14, 1927 (chapter 1); April 21 (chapter 2); April 18 (chapter 3); May 5 (chapter 4); May 12 (chapter 5); May 19 (chapter 6); May 26 (chapter 7)._ 

This is a serialized magazine version of _Sewing Susie._

_“Shelved.” Youth’s Companion, September 11, 1919._

When Granny Howell’s granddaughter, Phyllis, loses her love during World War I, Granny, now ninety and feeling useless, finds a renewed purpose for her long life. Granny is the only person able to comfort Phyllis in her grief because she too had suffered a loss during the Civil War.

_“The Spirit of ’63.” Outlook, July 3, 1918._

Old Evans is the “guardian” of the Cyclorama at Gettysburg in the summer of 1916. Because he fought and was injured at the Angle, the Cyclorama painting seems alive to Old Evans. Three insensitive visitors to the town trivialize Gettysburg’s history and the sacrifices of men like Old Evans’. He takes his revenge.

_“The Survivors: A Memorial Day Story.” Outlook, May 26, 1915._

Adam Foust and his cousin, Henry, fought on opposite sides during the Civil War. Though they both have come home, each suffers from bitterness fifty years later. The story is set on
the first Memorial Day, 1868. This story was included in *The Best Short Stories of 1915 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story* (Edward Joseph Harrington O’Brien, ed., Small Maynard, and Company, Boston, 1915) and *50 Best American Short Stories* (Martha Foley, ed., Wing Books, New York, 1965)

*Swords of Steel: The Story of a Gettysburg Boy.* **Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933.**

The fictional Deane family is modeled after the McMillans, a real Gettysburg family living on Confederate Avenue during the battle. Young John Deane becomes a man during the war years. This book received a Newberry honor award in 1934

“Thousand Dollar Daggett.”
*Lippincott’s Monthly, May 1909.*

Frederick Daggett, a Gettysburg tour guide, had stood in for another man who did not want to serve as a soldier during the Civil War. Daggett became embittered because he never received the promised $1000 substitute fee due to him and because his fellow citizens and soldiers never believed his story. This story is entitled “The Substitute” in Singmaster’s 1913 *Gettysburg* volume.

“A Woman Decides.” *This Week, May 9, 1936.*

This is a fictional accounting of the romance between Confederate Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan and his second wife, Martha Ready, daughter of Tennessee congressman, Charles Ready.

*This list includes first publications only.