

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Newly Available and Processed Collections at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A LIST OF SOME OF THE COLLECTIONS at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania that are either now available to researchers for the first time or that have been recently reprocessed to make them more accessible than they have been in the past. In an effort to keep readers informed of the many wonderful collections held by the Historical Society, the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* plans to make this update an annual feature.

Newly Available Collections

Catharine Franklin Sharples Family Papers, 1709–1866 (bulk 1790–1840)

3 boxes, 3 vols.
HSP Collection 3062

Catharine Franklin Wistar was born in 1768 to Caspar and Mary Franklin Wistar. In 1804 Catharine married Abraham Sharples of Aston (now Thornbury), Chester County. The Wistar and Sharples families were active in the founding and early years of the Westtown School, a Quaker school founded in 1799 near West Chester, Pennsylvania. While this collection contains papers from four generations of Wistars (who include Dr. Caspar Wistar, namesake of the Wistar Institute), the central figure is Catharine Franklin (Wistar) Sharples. Her papers include correspondence with fellow Quakers, commonplace books, assorted writings, and financial records for the Westtown School. Both Catharine and Abraham served on the school's committee, and Abraham oversaw the school's operation beginning in 1796.

Emilie Davis Dairies, 1863–1865

3 vols.

HSP Collection 3030

Emilie Davis was a young African American woman who lived in Philadelphia during the Civil War. Although the year of her birth is unknown, she was most likely in her teens or early twenties when she wrote these dairies, which detail her day-to-day activities as well as wartime news and events. She appears to have lived alone, but frequently visited her father in Harrisburg. Davis wrote regularly about her employment situation and appears to have been a skilled seamstress. Entries indicate that she traveled to Germantown to work for a Mrs. Powell and that she also worked for a Mrs. Wister. Davis had two brothers in the military and was particularly concerned about her brother Alfred, who died shortly before Christmas 1865. Her wartime entries contain passages about colored troops, the draft, parades, and units marching off to war. In 1865, Davis wrote about attending a lecture by Frederick Douglass and witnessing Lincoln's funeral procession through Philadelphia.

Margaret B. Howell Diaries, 1865

3 vols.

HSP Collection 3065

Born in 1849, Margaret (Margie) B. Howell kept a diary from January 1 through August 22, 1865. Howell's diary provides a vivid and sensitive portrayal of the life of a teenage girl growing up in comfortable, but not lavish, circumstances in Philadelphia during the last throes of the Civil War. She recounts daily activities such as household chores, family gatherings, music lessons, and Sunday church, but also reflects upon the tumultuous events of the wider world. Howell's ruminations about life, death, scripture, and her ongoing battles with poor health paint a rich portrait of her inner life. She avidly followed and commented upon the last days of the Civil War, Lincoln's assassination, and the capture of Jefferson Davis. Her April 9 entry describes the uproarious celebrations that erupted in Philadelphia upon news of Lee's surrender; on April 23 she records her reflections upon Lincoln after attending his funeral procession and viewing in the Pennsylvania State House.

Samuel S. Kapp Family Papers, 1861–1862

33 items

HSP Collection 3066

Samuel Selen Kapp left Fryburg, Pennsylvania, at the age of eighteen to join Company E of Pennsylvania's Tenth Reserve, Thirty-ninth Regiment. He served in the Army of the Potomac from about 1861 until his death at the Battle of Bull Run in 1862. Although of limited education, Kapp wrote detailed and lively letters to his family that captured the excitement, horror, and boredom of his army experience. Fryburg was a small town about ninety miles north of Pittsburgh, and Kapp grew up speaking both English and Pennsylvania Dutch. His letters from the front reflect his exuberance at seeing the wider world beyond Fryburg. Despite Kapp's enthusiasm for new landscapes and adventures, he despaired of the effect of war on men: "A man in battle is worse than a brute. He loses all feeling and cares for nothing at all." Kapp's final letter to his parents in September 1862 describes his regiment's movements toward Manassas, his wounding in battle, and his ten days of capture before being taken to the hospital. Kapp died on September 22, 1862.

William Roberts Jr. Letters, 1831–1865 (bulk 1861–1864)

1 box

HSP Collection 3069

William J. Roberts Jr. (b. 1837) was the son of a Philadelphia school teacher and historian. A graduate of Central High School, Roberts left Philadelphia in 1861 at age twenty-four to serve as company clerk of the Twenty-eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers. The Twenty-eighth saw action in the Shenandoah Valley and at Cumberland and participated in the battles at Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg, among others. The bulk of Roberts's letters date from July 1861 to August 1864 and contain colorful descriptions of camp life, conditions in the South, skirmishes and battles, homesickness, and boredom. Most are addressed to Roberts's parents or sister, with a smaller number addressed to his fiancée, Mary Greble. The vivid and often humorous letters are written with the insight of a man who felt history happening all around him, and Roberts writes as eloquently about the beauty of a new landscape as he does about the horrors of battle.

Johnston-Harris Family Papers, 1776–1935 (bulk 1840–1890)

15 boxes, 15 vols.

HSP Collection 3037

In 1903, the marriage of Henry Frazer Harris and Virginia Blair Johnston brought together two well-established families, each with a rich history dating back to our nation's earliest days. While the collection does focus on the couple, its primary focus is Johnston's and Harris's parents, grandparents, and families' long ancestral lineages. The entire collection is rich in genealogy, with both families tracing their ancestry back to Ireland and to forefathers arriving as early as the late-seventeenth century. The papers of Henry Frazer Harris primarily concern the personal and professional achievements of his father, John Campbell Harris (1840–1916), and his maternal grandfather, Thomas H. Powers. John Campbell Harris was a lieutenant in the Marine Corps during the Civil War; Thomas H. Powers was a nationally known chemical manufacturer and partner in the drug firm Powers and Weightman. The Johnston papers are primarily genealogical and include a small collection of family photographs, certificates, and letters.

Frank Dumont Minstrelsy Scrapbook, 1850–1902

1 vol.

HSP Collection 3054

Frank Dumont (1848–1919) was a blackface minstrel performer, producer of minstrel shows, and theater manager in Philadelphia from 1895 through the 1910s. In 1911 he purchased the old Dime Museum in downtown Philadelphia and rechristened it Dumont's Theater, making it the home of his own troupe, "Dumont's Minstrels." Dumont was also a prolific writer of minstrel shows, authoring hundreds of skits and plays and a number of musical shows. In 1902, Dumont created an enormous scrapbook documenting the history of minstrelsy in America. Dumont assembled the scrapbook to prove "the undisputed fact that minstrelsy sprang from the circus." The fifty years' worth of material compiled in the book was expressly chosen to support his theory, and Dumont's handwritten introduction reveals his intent to share the book with a wider audience. The 190-page scrapbook collects programs and broadside

advertisements for popular minstrel troupes, including Christy's Minstrels; newspaper and magazine articles about minstrelsy, including an 1896 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article by Dumont entitled "The History of Minstrelsy"; photographs of popular minstrel performers; personal correspondence; and essays by Dumont about different aspects of staging and performing minstrel shows.

Dwyer Family Papers, 1854–1995 (bulk 1929–1985)

60 boxes, 42 vols.

HSP Collection 3029

Edward Dwyer (1906–99) and Elizabeth McLachlan (1909–91) were Connecticut natives who married and moved to suburban Philadelphia in 1933, where Edward began to work in the patent office of the Electric Storage Battery Company, eventually becoming company president. Over the years both Edward and Elizabeth were active in many professional and civic organizations and most of the Dwyer Family Papers relate to these activities, with some material about their children and other personal matters. Edward served on the boards of Quaker Chemical Company, Selas Corporation, the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, and the National Association of Manufacturers. He also belonged to the Union League of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Republican Party. Elizabeth served as board president for the local American Red Cross and the Philadelphia Orchestra and founded the Buck Hill Falls Art Association. She was also an avid genealogist, tracing the history of the McLachlan family back to Scotland. The Dwyers were active parishioners of the Grace Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

Nellie Rathbone Bright Family Papers, ca. 1866–1977

2 boxes, 1 vol.

HSP Collection 2057

Nellie Rathbone Bright was a prominent African American educator who served as a teacher and principal in the Philadelphia Public School District for over thirty years. A life-long children's advocate and writer, Bright also founded and contributed to black literary reviews and wrote

an American history book for children. Born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1898, the only daughter of prominent African American Episcopal priest Rev. Richard Bright and his wife Nellie (Jones) Bright, she moved with her family to Philadelphia when Rev. Bright was re-assigned to the Episcopal Diocese there, circa 1911. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1923. The Bright Family Papers collection consists primarily of two components, supplemented by a smaller assemblage of photographs and notes on family history. The first component is a biographical listing of major milestones and dates in Nellie Bright's life, compiled by her in 1973 for inclusion in *A Biographical Dictionary of Living Black American Writers*. The second component comprises a scrapbook documenting the work of her father, Rev. Bright, spanning his career as an Episcopal priest in both Savannah and Philadelphia. The supplementary photos and ephemera include some personal correspondence, family photographs, six lithographs, and a short genealogical survey of the Bright family.

Newly Processed Collections

Irvine-Newbold Family Papers, 1766–1955 (bulk 1775–1880)

77 boxes, 232 vols.

HSP Collection 1890

The Irvine-Newbold papers document nearly two hundred years of the personal and professional lives of an elite Pennsylvania family with correspondence, financial records, military records, scrapbooks, diplomas, and photographs. Patriarch General William Irvine, a notable Revolutionary War veteran, purchased land in an unsettled part of northwestern Pennsylvania that came to be known as "Brokenstraw" or "Irvine." Irvine's descendants lived and worked on the plantation for three generations, in the process establishing a general store, a saw mill, a woolen mill, an iron foundry, and eventually a few oil wells. The collection is rich in information on the military and political history of the United States from the Revolution through the War of 1812 and the business and social history of Pennsylvania in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Meredith Family Papers, 1756–1964 (bulk 1772–1873)

106 boxes, 148 vols.
HSP Collection 1509

Jonathan Meredith immigrated to Philadelphia in the 1750s from Leominster, Heresfordshire, England, and established a successful tannery. Materials in the collection highlight the various business ventures of the Meredith family, documenting Jonathan's tannery (1772–1811), the overseas mercantile business of David Meredith, and the legal practices and political affiliations of both William (1772–1844) and William Morris Meredith (1799–1873), including William's presidency of the Schuylkill Bank and William Morris's career as a Pennsylvania state representative, secretary of the treasury under President Zachary Taylor, and as Pennsylvania's attorney general. The Meredith women are also represented in the collection, most notably Gertrude Gouverneur Meredith (1777–1828), a respected writer whose correspondence underscores her literary talents.

Baldwin Locomotive Records, 1825–1869

59 boxes, 152 vols.
HSP Collection 1485

In 1832, The Philadelphia, Germantown and Norristown Railroad commissioned Matthias Baldwin (b. 1795), a former jeweler, tool manufacturer, and builder of miniature locomotive engines, to construct "Old Ironsides," his first full-size engine. M. W. Baldwin (incorporated 1831), manufactured locomotive engines at 400 North Broad Street in Philadelphia. During the Civil War, Baldwin built at least thirty engines for the federal government. After Baldwin died in 1866, the company was renamed Burnham, Parry, Williams, & Co., and later was known as Baldwin Locomotive Works. The materials in this collection span from 1825 to 1869, representing the earliest years of Baldwin Locomotive Works' existence, and deal mainly with the economic aspects of the company, its operations, and its numerous technological advances and include diagrams, illustrations, and specification charts. The volumes have been divided into three series: Correspondence, Orders, and Account Books. The bulk of the collection is the correspondence, which covers the longest

period of time and contains the richest information. Baldwin Locomotive Works stopped production in 1956.

Centennial Exhibition Records, 1870–1879 (bulk 1876)

31 boxes, 27 vols.

HSP Collection 1544

The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 took place in Philadelphia from May 10 through November 10, 1876, attracting over eight million visitors. The exhibition spread across 450 acres of Fairmount Park and consisted of two hundred buildings. The collection contains materials related to the planning and execution of the exhibition, drawn primarily from the United States Centennial Commission, established by Congress in 1871. The documents are mostly printed letters and announcements, but the collection also contains scrapbook collections of ephemera from the Centennial that include trade cards, advertisements, visitors' guides, maps, tickets, etc. There also over three thousand images from the Centennial Photographic Company collections, as well as additional boxes of images depicting the construction and final appearance of exhibits and buildings.

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