

AMOS BONSALL FAMILY PAPERS, 1846 – 1874

Manuscript Collection 132

Arranged and described by

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- One Letter from John G. Trautwine to Amos Bonsall

Collection Title: **Amos Bonsall Family Papers, 1846 – 1874**
Donor: The Misses Bonsall

General Description and Arrangement:

The following is a collection of letters and other materials relating to the family of Amos Bonsall (1830 – 1915) and his wife Anna W. Bonsall. Included in the collection is correspondence between Amos and Anna, as well as with their children, grandchildren, and various members of their family; and with various friends and colleagues. The letters reveal much of the life of Amos Bonsall as a soldier in the American Civil War, as an Arctic Explorer, and as a husband and father.

In organizing this collection, letters from selected single authors have been given their own folder. These include letters, 1861 – 1874, from Amos Bonsall, from Anna W. Bonsall, 1862 – 1868, and from Anna to her Mother, 1866 – 1873. Letters, 1853 – 1863, of two important colleagues of Amos Bonsall, Isaac I. Hayes and Elisha K. Kane, have also been arranged in this manner. The letters within these folders are arranged chronologically as best as possible.

Two folders contain letters from other authors and to other recipients. The first has been titled “Wagner Letters,” and includes correspondence, 1846 – 1867, between family members of Anna W. Bonsall. The second folder is titled “Miscellaneous Letters” and includes a variety of letters, 1856 – 1934, which could not be appropriately placed elsewhere. Both sets of letters within these folders have been arranged alphabetically by author.

Biographical Note:

“Amos Bonsall Dead, was Arctic Explorer.” *The Philadelphia Record*, February 2, 1915.
Courtesy of the Chester Country Historical Society clippings file.

“[Amos] Bonsall was born in Delaware County [1830]. He attended the Fels boarding school near West Chester and later prepared for college in Bolmer Academy. In 1847 he entered the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania for a two-year course and 13 years later he was graduated from Lafayette College.

“It was at the earnest solicitation of his friend Dr. Kane that Mr. Bonsall joined Kane’s famous Second Grinnell Expedition to the frozen North in search of the lost Franklin party. They set sail from Philadelphia in May, 1853. Mr. Bonsall was master’s mate on the little brig Advance... which was to lead the expedition up Smith’s Sound.”

“On the expedition the great Humboldt glacier, the largest then known, was discovered.... The Advance finally became frozen in an ice field. There the members of the expedition acquired much knowledge concerning the Esquimaux [sic.] and discovered some new lands.”

“In May, 1855, it was found impossible to remain aboard the brig any longer and she was abandoned. Through 1200 miles of frozen ice fields the members of the expedition, weak and emaciated, made their way on foot, dragging their sledges with them, until they reached the Danish settlement of Upernavik, South Greenland, in August, 1855. Three members of the expedition died from the exposure and lack of proper nourishment and were buried in the land of ice and snow.”

“At the outbreak of the Civil War, Mr. Bonsall organized a company of infantry and enlisted, but never got into action. Following the war he became a farmer on the old Bonsall homestead of Delaware County, and remained there until 1872 when he went abroad for two years. On his return he took up residence in this city [Philadelphia].”

“For more than 40 years he was a member of the board of managers of the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children [Elwyn Institute] and for more than 30 years a member of the board of managers of the Philadelphia House of Refuge, Glen Mills.”

“Amos Bonsall Dies; Arctic Explorer: Last Survivor of Famous Expedition led by Dr. Elisha Kent Kane Succumbs at Home Here.” *The Philadelphia Public Ledger*, February 1, 1915. Courtesy of the Chester Country Historical Society clippings file.

Amos Bonsall died January 31, 1915 after being ill for two weeks. “Mrs. Bonsall, who died some years ago, was Miss Anna W. Wagner. Four daughters survive Mr. Bonsall – the Misses Ethel, Sarah, Elizabeth F., and Mary E. Bonsall.”

Item Transferred to Curatorial:

[The following item was removed from Amos Bonsall Family Papers and transferred to curatorial – NCL, May 25, 2005]

Cloth bookmark bought from the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, London, England
– given to Anna W. Bonsall as a gift on Thursday, September 18, 1873

Folder 1: Letters, 1861 – 1874, from Amos Bonsall

Quantity: 16 Letters
Arrangement: Chronological

Content Description:

This folder is comprised mostly of letters from Amos Bonsall to wife Anna W. Bonsall. These letters date from Amos's time in the American Civil War where he informs his wife of the trouble in the Nation, and of the call for "defenders" against the invaders (Letter 1, Tuesday Afternoon). Also speaks of various wartime movements and lodgings. After the end of the War, Amos writes letters to Anna from his farm, informing her of daily activities and happenings. Also talks of a trip to visit his mother with daughter Sarah (Letter 5, Tuesday Evening). In letter six (Sunday Evening), Anna has apparently taken a trip in order to recover from either illness or anxiety.

Letter addressed to Bessie Bonsall from Amos checking on her well-being and asking her to behave for her mother (Letter 11, My Dear Little Daughter). Also, Amos writes a thank you letter to W. C. Cattell (President of Lafayette College) for being awarded an honorary degree (Letter 13, August 8, 1866).

Folder 2: Letters, 1862 – 1868, from Anna W. Bonsall

Quantity: 5 Letters
Arranged: Chronologically

Content Description:

This folder is comprised of two letters from Anna W. Bonsall to her husband, two letters to her children, and one letter to her mother. The first letter is addressed "Dear Child," and includes information on the family's wellbeing, as well as a word from Amos (Sunday Morning). The second letter appears to be incomplete, and talks mainly of a new baby (Bridget went in...).

Two letters are addressed to Amos, informing him of her improving mental/physical health. She talks of being careful not to overexert herself (Letter 3, July 1). In her letters to Amos, Anna also asks about the children. In her letter to her mother, she asks about and talks of the family.

Folder 3: Letters, 1866 – 1873, to Anna W. Bonsall from Mother

Quantity: 15 Letters
Arranged: Chronologically

Content Description:

This folder is comprised of letters to Anna W. Bonsall from her mother. They are mostly undated, and include information and requests for information regarding the

family. (A cloth bookmark bought from the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, London, England that was given to Anna as a gift on Thursday, September 18, 1873 removed to museum).

Folder 4: **Wagner Letters, 1846 – 1867, B – W**

Quantity: 15 Letters
Arranged: Alphabetically, Last Name

Content Description:

This folder is comprised of a variety of letters written/received by the Wagners. Writers include Laura E. Bonsall, Daniel Wagner, Sarah and Esther Wagner, Adrien Young, Annie Wagner, Sister M. R. Wagner, R. Wagner, and “Pop” Wagner. Letters include information and requests for information regarding the family and are listed alphabetically. Letter one contains some dated family history (My Dear Miss Mary from Laura E. Bonsall). Letters sent from various places including the United States and Europe.

Folder 5: **Letters, 1855 – 1860, to Amos Bonsall from Isaac I. Hayes**

Quantity: 9 Letters, 1 Pamphlet, 1 newspaper clipping
Arranged: Chronologically

Content Description:

This folder contains the correspondence between Amos Bonsall and Isaac I. Hayes (1832 – 1881). The letters include general conversation, requests for information, and financial matters. Letter one talks of the development of a bill for “double pay” (I enclose...). Also included in this folder is a pamphlet entitled *On the Passage to the North Pole* by I. I. Hayes, which appeared in *The American Journal of Science*, vol. xxv, May, 1858. Also a newspaper clipping on “Hans, the Greenlander and the Late Dr. Kane” (Letter 8, June 3, 1858).

Folder 6: **Letters, 1853 – 1863, to Amos Bonsall from Elisha K. Kane**

Quantity: 5 Letters
Arranged: Chronologically

Content Description:

This folder is comprised of correspondence between Amos Bonsall and E. K. Kane. The letters contain general conversation on travel, visiting, and financial matters.

Folder 7: **Miscellaneous Letters, 1856 – 1934, B – T**

Quantity: 23 Letters
Arranged: Alphabetically, Last Name

Content Description:

This folder is comprised of various letters from many different authors. Content includes personal matters, thank you letters, sympathy letters, business matters, reflections on the American Civil War, and financial matters. Also included is an excerpt from a poem about “Pretty B-n-s-ll,” which talks of the street scene and ladies at the Chestnut Street Theatre. A notation is included mentioning that the author is still unknown.

Authors include Martin W. Barr (2 letters), Jane Campbell (1 letter), A. L. Elwyn (3 letters), William B. Evans (1 letter), Harriet W. Fell (1 letter), John W. Frazir (1 letter), R. C. Hale (2 letters), Mary H. Harrison (1 letter), Joseph D. Heacock (2 letters), Isabella James (1 letter), Robert P. Kane (1 letter), Ella G. McIntire (1 letter), Edward Preston (1 letter), Mary Shee (1 letter), Aubrey A. Smith (1 letter), John G. Trautwine (1 letter), War Department (1 letter).