

American Antiquarian Society

Manuscript Collections

Name of collection:

Brooks Family Papers, 1778-1912

Location:

Stacks

Size of collection:

3 mss. boxes, 1 octavo folder

N.U.C.M.C. number:

RLIN id:

Sources of information on collection:

See accompanying sheet(s) for additional information.

Source of collection:

Gift of John Fiske, Jr. and Rosalie F. Johnson, 1992.
Photograph of J.W. Brooks and documents relating to Petersham Center School,
1905-1907 gift of Mrs. John Fiske, 1993.

Collection description:

Aaron Brooks (1794-1845), an attorney in Petersham, Massachusetts, married on 22 April 1822, Abby B. Morgan (1804-1831). They had three children: Francis Augustus (1824-1902), Frederick (1826-1828), and Sarah Chace (1829-1838). He married on 4 September 1831, Martha Amelia Willson (1807-1874), daughter of Rev. Luther Willson (1783-1864) and Sally (Bigelow) Willson (1783-1826), of Petersham. Aaron and Martha had four children: James Willson (1833-1912), John (1836-1920), Abby Morgan (1839-1925), and Martha Willson (1842-1924). All five children attended Leicester (Mass.) Academy.

James Willson Brooks was born in Petersham, Massachusetts on 7 August 1833. He graduated from Brown University in 1855 and received a law degree from Harvard in 1858. He was a lawyer in Boston until 1875, when he returned to Petersham.

He was Vice Consul for the United States in Paris from 1861 to 1865. After returning to America, he traveled to the west and was employed in mining activities in Arizona, but by 1868 he had returned to Massachusetts. He was employed as an attorney by Gordon McKay (1821-1903), a manufacturer of shoe making machinery, where he achieved considerable prosperity. He was involved in a number of philanthropic activities in his home town, giving land for a school and helping to build the Petersham Memorial Library. Brooks was a founder of the Petersham Historical Society, and was instrumental in locating the Harvard

Forest in the town. He also built the Nichewaug Inn, a summer hotel in Petersham. He was elected to the American Antiquarian Society in 1900. He died in Petersham on 20 September 1912. He never married.

Abby Morgan Brooks married, in 1864, the historian John Fiske (1842-1901). The Fiskes lived primarily in Cambridge, Mass. and had six children: Maud (1865-1952), Harold Brooks (1867-1927), Clarence Stoughton (1869-1910), Ralph Browning (1870-1893), Ethel (1872-1960), and Herbert Huxley (1877-).

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Collection description (continued):

Martha Willson Brooks lived throughout her life in Petersham and was involved in many local activities. She was another founder of the Petersham Historical Society.

This collection consists mainly of correspondence between Martha Amelia (Willson) Brooks and three of her children: James Willson, Abby Morgan, and Martha Willson (also referred to as "Mattie" and "Pat" in the letters). James's many letters are literate and often humorous, and describe his life, work, and travels in detail. There are descriptions of his tour of Europe after his graduation, including a number of letters from Tübingen. Many letters give detailed accounts of his life and activities as Vice Consul in Paris during the Civil War. Brooks also wrote to his family about his travels to the West. There are numerous letters home to Petersham describing life in the Fiske household in Cambridge. Other letters describe visits to Europe, notably during a lengthy recuperation in London in 1890 following an accident, and during a trip to Paris after his niece Maud Fiske became ill there.

A large portion of the letters of Martha Willson Brooks deal with family news and affairs in Petersham. There is considerable discussion of Abby's courtship with John Fiske and preparations for their wedding in 1864.

Box 1 contains miscellaneous material including background information on the collection, and correspondence, 1839 to 1 February 1864. Box 2 contains correspondence, 25 February 1864 to 1893. Box 3 contains correspondence, 1894 to 1912, and notes about the letters made during processing. The octavo folder contains empty envelopes.

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Sources of information on collection:

Clark, John Spencer. The Life and Letters of John Fiske. 2 vols.
Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917.

Clark, Lyman. Historical Article Concerning the Town of Petersham.
Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1889.

Coolidge, Mabel Cook. History of Petersham Massachusetts ... Hudson:
The Powell Press, 1948.

Durfee, Calvin. Williams Biographical Annals. ... Boston: Lee and Shepard,
1871.

Historical Catalogue of Brown University 1764-1904. Providence: Brown
University, 1905.

Howe, Gilman Bigelow. Genealogy of the Bigelow Family of America ...
Worcester: Charles Hamilton, 1890.

Howe, Jonas Benjamin. Sketches of Petersham Natives and Adopted Citizens.
Athol: Athol Transcript Company, 1915.

Vital Records of Petersham, Massachusetts ... Worcester: Franklin P. Rice,
1904.

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
MANUSCRIPTS DEPARTMENT

Brooks Family Papers, 1778 - 1912
CONTENTS LIST

Manuscript Box	Folder	Contents
1		
	1	Genealogical material
	2	Genealogical material
	3	Miscellaneous photographs (James Wilson Brooks & Martha Amelia Brooks)
	4	Printed biographical material
	5	Printed material re: Petersham, Unitarian Church
	6	J. Partridge, Leicester Academy (printed)
	7	List of expenses incurred by Daniel Bigelow on behalf of town of Petersham; record of payment, 1788 – 1796; promissory note, 1796
	8	Miscellaneous documents: copy of the Trinitarian charge vs. Lutha Wilson, 1816; letter re: patent on “wooden can”, 1854
	9	2 receipted bills, 1877; printed will of Edwin Stoughton, 1881
		Correspondence
	10	n.d.
	11	Abby Morgan Brooks Fiske., n.d.
	12	Abby Morgan Brooks Fiske, n.d.
	13	Martha Wilson Brooks, n.d.
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	20	June 1857 – December 1857
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	32	July, 1860 – October, 1860

	33	November, 1860 – December, 1860
	34	February, 1861 – May, 1861
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	45	October 26, 1862 – November 13, 1862
	46	November 20, 1862 – December 9, 1862
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	4	July 14, 1864 – August [?], 1864
	5	August 15, 1864 – October 21, 1864
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	25	September 27, 1872 – October 27, 1872
	26	November 15, 1872 – November 25, 1872
	27	December 2, 1872 – December 26, 1872
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	30	February 18, 1873 – February 28, 1873
	31	March 14, 1873 – March 16, 1873
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	46	June 9, 1887 – October 23, 1889
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	2	May 3, 1894 – June 29, 1894
	3	July 26, 1894 – August 23, 1894
	4	August 29, 1894 – September 6, 1894
	5	September 24, 1894 – December 13, 1894
	6	January 24, 1895 – March 28, 1895
	7	April 22, 1895 – October 19, 1895

	8	October 24, 1895 – December 3, 1895
	9	December 13, 1895 – December 18, 1895
	10	January 1, 1896 – June 3, 1896
	11	July 15, 1896 – November 5, 1896
	12	February 3, 1897 – February 28, 1898
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	15	May 24, 1899 – October 26, 1899
	16	April 10, 1900 – February 17, 1902
	17	March 28, 1902 – October 12, 1903
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