

American Antiquarian Society

Manuscript Collections

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**NAME OF COLLECTION:**

Water Family, Papers, 1749-1873

**LOCATION:**

Mss. boxes "W"  
Octavo vols. "W"  
Folio vols. "W"  
Oversize mss. boxes "W"

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**SIZE OF COLLECTION:**

5 manuscript boxes; 9 octavo volumes; 3 folio volumes; 1 oversize folder (1 item)

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**SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON COLLECTION:**

See *Centennial History of Millbury, Mass.* (Worcester, Mass.: The Davis Press, 1915); Asa H. Waters, *A Genealogical Sketch of the Waters Family* (Worcester, Mass.: Goddard, 1878); Leonard Bacon, *A Discourse ... on Rev. Samuel W. S. Dutton ...* (New Haven: Franklin Press, 1866); and *Memorial [to] Colonel Asa Holman Waters* (n.p., n.p., 1887).

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**SOURCE OF COLLECTION:**

Gifts of Mrs. Edwin A. Grosvenor, 1929; Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor, 1937 and 1941. Genealogical material in box five transferred from Henry A. Phillips Genealogical Notes (MS 62-3169).

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**COLLECTION DESCRIPTION:**

Members of the Waters family were prominent manufacturers and civic leaders in Millbury, Mass. The first of three generations, Asa Waters (1742-1813) resided in Sutton, Mass., where he manufactured guns for the American army during the Revolution.

Asa Waters (1769-1841), son of the above, lived in Millbury, Mass., and, with a brother, built an armory in 1808 to supply firearms for the army under contract with the United States government. A large landowner, he expanded his business interests to banking and the manufacture of scythes, saws, and similar products. He also built in Millbury one of the finest residences of the area.

Asa Holman Waters (1808-1887) adopted his mother's maiden name as his middle name in order to distinguish himself from his father and grandfather. He graduated from Yale in 1829 and spent part of the year 1835 studying law at Harvard. In 1837 he became a partner with his father in the armory under the firm name Asa Waters & Son. After his father's death, he reorganized the armory business as Asa H. Waters & Company. In 1845 the government terminated the system of contracts with private armories (contracts were renewed at the outbreak of the Civil War) and Waters diversified his business interests to textile mills and railroads. He was active in Millbury civic affairs, served as the Millbury postmaster from 1836 to 1848, had interests in the Blackstone Canal, supported the abolitionist cause, and participated in state politics.

Most of the material in this collection pertains to Asa Holman Waters and his business and political interests. There is a folder of legal documents, for the period 1746 to the 1860s, for the Waters, Clough, and Goffe families; miscellaneous land surveys, for the period 1793 to 1852; and notes by Asa H. Waters, probably

for speeches. Much of the materials for the period 1801 to 1844 pertains to the armory business run by the two younger Waters and includes business letters between them, often written while one was in Washington, D.C., negotiating government contracts. There are petitions pertaining to ordnance where were submitted to the government by gun manufacturers, correspondence with the U.S. Ordnance Department, and correspondence with the U.S. Arsenal at Watertown, Mass.

Asa Holman Waters' manuscripts for this period, 1801 to 1844, include two 4<sup>th</sup> of July Orations, 1832 and 1836; letters from Yale friends; correspondence with the Reverend Leverett Griggs (1808-1883) and correspondence pertaining to the Second Congregational Church of Millbury and civic affairs; correspondence reflecting his commitment to abolitionism and temperance; and records from his tenure as postmaster for Millbury. There is correspondence with Abraham G. Randall ( - ), a business associate of Waters, and an interesting series of letters from Nathaniel Smith Richardson (1810-1883) arguing against the activities of abolitionists.

The family correspondence of Asa Holman Waters includes letters of his sister, Harriet Newell Waters Dutton (1814-1864), and her husband, Samuel William Southmayd Dutton (1814-1866), minister of the North Church in New Haven, Conn. Dutton's letters contain news about is family, his church, and activities in New Haven.

The materials for the period 1845 to 1885 reflect Waters' increasing involvement in Massachusetts politics. During the 1840s he was active in the Free Soil Party, he represented Millbury in the General Court, 1848-1849, and in 1853 he was a member of the state's constitutional convention. He married Mary Elizabeth Hovey (1829-1892) in 1849 and there are letters after this period from members of her family. There are letters to him written in 1862 by his wife while she was away from home for a rest cure. During this period there are also letters from his brother-in-law, Increase Niles Tarbox (1815-1888) and Alphonso Taft (1810-1891) who was related to the Waters family.

There are records, for the period 1837 to 1870, of the Providence and Worcester Railroad, and notes on the genealogy of the Waters family compiled by Henry Ayling Phillips (1852-1926), son-in-law of Asa Holman Waters. Some of this material appears to have been incorporated in the Centennial History of Millbury, Massachusetts.

The nine octavo volumes consist of account books, notebooks, diaries, and letterbooks. One account book, for the period c. 1794-c. 1802, which may have been kept by Asa Waters, Sr., or another member of the Waters family contains business entries that concern the manufacture of scythes, saws, and other metalwork, as well as brief diary entries of a business nature and several incomplete copies of letters. The remaining two account books are unidentified. One, for the period c. 1817-c. 1818, records payments for laborers. The other is an account for a trip from Millbury to Illinois, 1830.

The two notebooks were both kept by Asa Holman Waters. The first, for the period 1827 to 1830 while Waters was a student at Yale, contains primarily, notes of natural philosophy lectures given by Denison Olmstead (1791-1859). There are also a few notes on lectures by other persons including Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864) and a Mr. Evans in Millbury, May 1830. The other notebook includes brief entries on a variety of events: the 1853 Constitutional Convention, a party in 1860, the wedding of one of Waters' daughters in 1873, and a chart on taxation in Millbury, for the period 1860 to 1873.

The two diaries in the collection were also kept by Asa Holman Waters. The first is a diary and time book, for the period January 1833 to May 1837, with a few accounts dating to 1847. The business entries are records of time worked by laborers employed by Waters. The diary entries are brief, sporadic notations of his daily activities and travels. The other diary was kept by Waters while he was a student at Harvard Law School, for the period June to September 1835. It includes information on his efforts to be admitted to the bar and notations about his activities in Cambridge and Boston.

The letterbook, for the period 1837 to 1865, contains correspondence for Asa Waters & Son and Asa H. Waters & Company. It is partially indexed and includes copies of contracts. The other letterbook, for the period, March 1850 to November 1853, contains correspondence for Asa H. Waters & Company. Some of the letters are illegible.

Of the three folio volumes, one may have been kept by Asa Waters, Jr. It includes entries for armory business and metalwork, for the period c. 1815 to c. 1834, with most entries for period 1815 to the 1820s. The remaining two folio volumes include a daybook, for the period 1832 to 1836, that had been kept by Asa Holman Waters, and an indexed ledger, for the period c. 1830 to c. 1842, which was probably kept by Asa Holman Waters. The entries concern a variety of products and business activities but do not coincide with the daybook entries of the previous volume.

The oversize folder contains a drawing by Asa Waters of an "Improved Canal Steam Boat," [1838?].

See Contents List.

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Water Family, Papers, 1749-1873

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  - Folder 2 Notes for speeches by Asa H. Waters;  
Land surveys, 1793 - 1852;  
Legal documents, 1746 - 1860s  
  
Papers, n.d.; 1801 - 1836
  - Folder 3 n.d.; 1801 - 1834
  - Folder 4 1835
  - Folder 5 1836 January - March
  - Folder 6 1836 April - August
  - Folder 7 1836 September - December
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  - Papers, 1837 - 1838 June
  - Folder 1 1837 January - March
  - Folder 2 1837 April - June
  - Folder 3 1837 July - September
  - Folder 4 1837 October - December
  - Folder 5 1838 January - March
  - Folder 6 1838 April - June
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  - Papers, 1838 July - 1844
  - Folder 1 1838 July - September
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  - Folder 3 1839
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  - Folder 6 1842 - 1843
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  - Papers, 1845 - 1885
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  - Folder 3 1850 - 1859
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  - Folder 5 1854 - 1866
  - Folder 6 1867 - 1885
  - Folder 7 Providence and Worcester Railroad, Documents, 1837 - 1870
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  - Folder 1 Miscellaneous genealogical information (removed from boxes  
one through four)  
  
Notes on the Genealogy of the Waters Family, compiled by  
Henry Ayling Phillips (removed from the Henry A. Phillips,  
Collection of Genealogical Notes [MS 62-3169])
  - Folder 2 Notebook #1
  - Folder 3 Notebook #2
  - Folder 4 Notebook #3
  - Folder 5 Notebook #4
  - Folder 6 Notebook #5

Octavo Volume

- 1 Asa Waters, Sr.(?), Account Book, c. 1794 - c. 1802
- 2 unidentified, Account Book, c. 1817 - c. 1818
- 3 Asa H. Waters, Notebook, 1827 - 1830
- 4 unidentified, Account Book (of trip from Millbury to Illinois), 1830
- 5 Asa H. Waters, Diary and Time Book, 1833 January - 1837 May; 1847
- 6 Asa H. Waters, Diary, 1835 June - September
- 7 Asa Waters & Sons and Asa H. Waters & Company, Letterbook, 1837 - 1865
- 8 Asa H. Waters & Company, Letterbook, 1850 March - 1853 November
- 9 Asa H. Waters, Notebook (of a variety of events), 1853 - 1873

Folio Volume

- 1 Asa Waters, Jr.(?), Account Book, c. 1815 - c. 1834
- 2 Asa H. Waters, Daybook, 1832 - 1836
- 3 Asa H. Waters(?), Ledger (indexed), c. 1830 - c. 1842