

Connecticut Historical Society
museum & library

Babcock Family papers

A Guide to the collection at the Connecticut Historical Society

Collection Overview

Repository:	Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut
Creator :	Babcock family.
Title :	Babcock Family Papers
Dates :	1788-1859
Extent :	1 linear foot (2 boxes)
Location:	Ms 14532
Language:	English

Biographical Sketch

Elisha Babcock (1753-1821), his brother John Babcock, Jr. (1764-1843), and John's son, Sidney Babcock (1797-1884) all worked in the printing and publishing business in Connecticut. In addition to printing books, the Babcocks worked as publishers and wholesalers to booksellers out of state including New York, South Carolina, Louisiana and the West Indies.

John Babcock, Sr. son of John and Sarah (Billings) Babcock, was born in Milton (now Quincy), Massachusetts on August 25, 1731. He married Rachel Adams in 1753. She was born on January 6, 1732 in Milton, and was a cousin to John Adams, the second President of the United States. They had ten children: Lucretia (August 13, 1755-September 25, 1824), who married William Brewer of Wilbraham, Massachusetts; Mary (born August 20, 1757), who married Zenas Bliss of Springfield, Massachusetts on September 25, 1824; Abigail (born February 11, 1762), who married Mr. Gardner of Massachusetts; Sarah (Sally), who married Ephraim Grant of Tolland, Connecticut; Rachel (born November 25, 1770), who married Dr. Nathaniel Hooker; Reuhama (or Ruhamah), who died unmarried; Samuel (born February 18, 1760), who married Miss Cone of Bolton, Connecticut; Andrew (April 19, 1773-March 29, 1789), who died unmarried at age seventeen; and two sons who joined him in the family business, John and Elisha. The Babcocks moved to Hartford soon after the Revolution, and John went into the printing business. John Babcock joined the second Church in Hartford in 1791 and became a Deacon. He died of cancer on January 4, 1796 at age 65, and he is buried in the Ancient Burying Ground in Hartford with his son

Andrew. His wife Rachel Babcock died in Springfield on April 17, 1813 at the age of 81.

John's eldest son, Elisha Babcock, was born in Milton, Massachusetts on August 10, 1753. As a young man Elisha settled in Springfield, Massachusetts where he published the *Hampshire Gazette* for several years. He served during the Revolution, earning the rank of Major. In 1787, Elisha left Springfield for Hartford, Connecticut to establish a weekly paper with Joel Barlow (1754-1812), *American Mercury*, that for many years was the leading Democratic paper in the state. The paper published both literary and political pieces, and was closely associated with the Hartford Wits (originally called the Connecticut Wits). The group had formed in the late eighteenth century as a literary society at Yale College. The members were conservative federalists who wrote in verse satirizing an outmoded curriculum, society and politics. Members included Joel Barlow and John Trumbull. The Wits advocated a strong central government and attacked such proponents of democratic liberalism as Thomas Jefferson. Elisha continued as the proprietor and publisher of the paper for 37 years until his death. Elisha Babcock and Joel Barlow were also partners in the one of the first paper mills in Connecticut. Elisha Babcock died on April 7, 1821 at age 68. He is buried in Hartford at the Old South Cemetery of the Second Congregational Church with his wife, Dolly Babcock, who died on June 6, 1832 at the age of 75.

Elisha's brother, John Babcock, was also born in Milton, Massachusetts in early 1764. He married Sidney Rogers (born 1752) of Philadelphia and he was connected to the Public Press of Philadelphia in the same year as the marriage. They had seven children, including Jane, the eldest who died unmarried in New Haven; Sidney the eldest son, who had six children of his own; William who married Elizabeth Jane Chisholm, a native of Virginia; Mary Ann, who married George Coxall of Island of Grenada, West Indies; and Richard Guyne, who died unmarried.

John Babcock, Jr. came to Hartford about 1793 and started working as a printer and publisher of educational and juvenile books under the name of John Babcock & Co. He moved his family and business to New Haven in 1803, where his firm continued to print and sell chapbooks, children's literature, hymnals and educational books, including several of Noah Webster's spellers. Babcock was in business with a New Haven bookseller known as Increase Cook & Co. for several years until Cook's death in 1814.

As his sons came of age, they joined the family business. At some point in the early 1800s the name of the firm changed to Babcock & Sons, when John formed a partnership with his sons Sidney Babcock and William R. Babcock. Younger sons Henry and Thomas also worked for the family business. Many of the daughters married men who did business with the Babcocks in one way or another. John's son-in-law, Zenas Bliss of Springfield, was in the paper business, and son-in-law George Coxall imported books to the West Indies.

The firm of John Babcock & Son was dissolved on April 2, 1825, although the name of the old firm was legally used until September of 1826. In 1825, John's sons Sidney, William R. and Henry L. Babcock formed a new firm, Babcock & Co., to continue the book publishing and stationary business. John Babcock left New Haven, living in Baltimore and Washington until he died. Sons Sidney and Henry Babcock remained in New Haven, while John's middle son, William R. Babcock, continued to operate from Charleston, South Carolina. Thomas Babcock stayed in Connecticut and took over the printing business.

John's eldest son Sidney Babcock was born in Hartford in 1797, and grew up in New Haven. He married Susan Thompson in Stratford, Connecticut, on February 7, 1820. Sidney lived in New Haven and managed the firm through trying economic times following the depression of 1837. Sidney Babcock died at his home on High Street in New Haven on July 29, 1884 at the age of 87.

Scope and Content

The Babcock papers include business and family correspondence covering the years 1788-1859 from several members of the family who lived in Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut. The Babcocks were printers, publishers and booksellers. The bulk of the collection consists of the mercantile business papers of publisher Elisha Babcock, his brother John Babcock, and John's son, Sidney Babcock. They are represented as individuals and in business relationships, including Babcock & Son, Cook & Babcock, and Babcock & Co. Each series includes Correspondence (primarily business, but with some personal content as well), Legal Records (including leases and deeds for property), and Financial Records. Represented in the Financial Records are both business and personal orders, bills and invoices, paid receipts, accounts, inventories, and promissory notes.

The correspondence files contain letters of the family members and their customers and suppliers, some of whom were related to the family. Within John Babcock's correspondence is a personal letter written to his daughter Rachel in 1832, one to his son William in 1831, and another to his son Henry in 1833.

Bills and receipts for items purchased by the Babcock family also appear in the papers. There are bills documenting the purchase of fabric such as Fustian, calico and mourning chintz, apron tapes and tamboring, and an 1803 bill from Elisha Faxon for silk, buttons and brown linen. A bill from "Mrs. Turner" for making a "cote" and a bill from Timothy Dodd for "Making a coat & 3 Vests" as well as bills for repairing shoes, for cutting girls' hair, for veterinarian Dr. Asa Allyn including fourteen gallons of molasses used for worming a horse are included. There are also bills for repairing a cradle and

an 1813 bill for the lease of a church pew at Trinity Episcopal Church in New Haven.

Accounts document grocery purchases including molasses, rum, flour, tamarinds and pineapples and Louchong tea. They purchased dry goods such as silk gloves, tin graters, a coffee pot, wineglasses and chamber pots. There are bills for shad and "Turkinsland salt," as well as bills from the cooper who made the barrels to hold them. Several paid bills for children's schooling and for dancing lessons are among the papers, including bills from Miss Sally Goodwin of Hartford, Polley Butler (for schooling Miss Jane and Miss Rachel (Babcock) in 1796 and 1798), as well as a 1798 bill to John Babcock from Mrs. Marsh for "Instructing your little daughter 12 wks." Also of note is a bill from Mr. John White, "Tuition, Miss Jane Babcock," and an invoice from Stephen Dodge for "schooling a boy".

The correspondence also documents the business partnership of John Babcock and Increase Cook, a bookseller in New Haven, Connecticut. The names of notable New Haven citizens, such as J. Barbour, [Timothy] Dwight, and "Morse's father, Mr. Burr," are all mentioned in an 1803 letter.

A series of letters written to Sidney Babcock from his brother-in-law and business partner, George Coxall, who lived in St. Bart's in the West Indies cover family, business, and local news and politics from 1829-1833, and 1837. An 1831 letter describes a revolt by slaves on Martinique where 300 were killed and plantations were burned. George Coxall was married to Sidney's sister, Mary Ann Babcock. Their two school-age daughters were living in New Haven under the guardianship of the Babcock family.

The correspondence and business records document the daily activities of the book printing and publishing business including orders for linen and marbled papers used in book binding, bills for folding and sewing of books. Books were ordered from various booksellers around the state of Connecticut as well as in New York, South Carolina, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Linen was ordered from Simeon Butler of Northampton, Massachusetts and marbled papers were ordered from the Norwich, Connecticut firm Sherry and Porter, manufacturers and importers of "Ream Marble Paper"; samples of their marbled paper from 1802 may be found in John Babcock's correspondence.

Restrictions

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

Use Restrictions

Use of the material requires compliance with the Connecticut Historical Society's Research Center regulations.

Subject Headings

Personal Names

Babcock, Charles.
Babcock, Elisha.
Babcock, James -- Childhood and youth.
Babcock, James.
Skinner, Whiting.

Subjects

Printers -- Connecticut -- Hartford.

Geographic Names

United States -- Politics and government.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Item, Collection Title, Collection number (Box #, Folder #). Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

Processing Details

Collection was processed by Elizabeth Blakelock in 2010.

EAD Finding Aid created March 2011.

Accruals

The collection is closed.

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I. Elijah Babcock

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1	3	Legal, Deed, 1788
1	4	Financial Accounts, 1795-1805
1	5	Financial, Bills and Receipts, 1795-1806
1	6	Financial Bills, Receipts and Orders, 1807-1820

II. John Babcock

Box Folder

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1	8	Correspondence, (Includes samples of marbled paper) 1802
1	9	Correspondence, 1803
1	10	Correspondence, 1804
1	11	Correspondence, 1805
1	12	Correspondence, 1807
1	13	Correspondence, 1809
1	14	Correspondence, 1813-1819
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1	16	Correspondence, 1831-1833
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1	18	Legal Agreement, 1803-1826
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1	20	Legal Deeds, 1808-1819
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2	59	Financial Accounts, 1826-1858
2	60	Financial Advertisement, 1858
2	61	Financial Bills, Receipts, Orders, Exchanges, 1827-1836
2	62	Financial Bills, Receipts, 1838
2	63	Financial Bills, Receipts, 1848-1859
2	64	Genealogy, printed