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Dall Family Papers

1810-1843 (*Bulk:* 1810-1817)

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Chiefly correspondence from various Dall family members in Boston, Massachusetts, particularly father William Dall, Revolutionary War veteran, merchant, businessman and former Yale College writing master, to sons William and James Dall in Baltimore, Maryland. Letters of son James Dall, then a student at Harvard University, provide accounts of Boston political and cultural activities of the time.

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Background on Creator:

William Dall, 3rd, (1753-1829) - Father, husband, or uncle to the correspondents. During the American Revolution, just around the time of the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, he was sent through the lines with dispatches for Connecticut patriots and was wounded in the foot. During his convalescence, he became a writing master at Yale College. Later he became the executive head of a syndicate of about a dozen associates, which undertook for a grant of land on Boston Neck, to build a causeway, and fill in between the sea walls the tidal isthmus that connects Boston and the mainland. For this work, the syndicate was paid with a grant of land clean across the neck in the vicinity of Dover Street and southward toward Roxbury. The land was split among the members of the syndicate. This would account for Mr. Dall's various properties on Washington and Orange Streets. He appears to have been the manager or bookkeeper for a local merchant, and constantly reminds his children that a good education and hard work are the keys to success.

William Dall, 4th, (1794-1875), son of William Dall, 3rd, is the primary recipient of the correspondence. An apprentice to a Baltimore merchant, he suffered from rheumatism.

James Dall, 2nd, (1781-1863), son of William Dall, 3rd, lived in Baltimore with his wife Henrietta and their two children. It is unclear whether he was self-employed or worked for a firm, but he engaged in the same business as his father and brothers. His letters reflect a head for numbers and a keen business sense.

John Dall, (1791-1852), son of William Dall, 3rd, was a student at Harvard who was later apprenticed to a Boston merchant. John's letters are insightful and literary in tone, describing Boston and its culture.

Rebecca Keen Dall, second wife of William Dall, 3rd, and mother or aunt to the other correspondents sends motherly advice in her letters.

Sarah Keen Dall, (1798-1878) and Maria Dall, (1783-1836), daughters of William Dall, 3rd, write primarily about family matters.

Joseph Dall, (1801-1840), son of William Dall, 3rd, and youngest of the correspondents, writes well-wishes on rare occasions.

John Robert Dall, (1798-1851), nephew of William Dall, 3rd, stayed with his uncle on weekends while attending Harvard.

Scope of collection

The Dall Family Correspondence contains 86 letters documenting the daily changes in the family of William Dall, 3rd and his family. It is a good source of information on health, business, political, cultural, and family issues of the time.

The years bracketing the War of 1812 witnessed severe economic disruptions for American merchants, as trade restrictions and embargoes left only the astute businessmen intact. Based in Boston and Baltimore, the older male members of the Dall family engaged in merchant activities, and their correspondence reflects the personal consequences of the dire economic conditions.

William Dall, 3rd resided in Boston with his wife Rebecca, their two daughters Maria and Sarah, and one of their sons Joseph. Another son, John, attended college (probably at Harvard) before returning home, and a cousin John Robert Dall entered the same school in the year that John graduated, living with the family on weekends. William Dall, 4th and James Dall, the two remaining sons, lived and worked mainly out of Baltimore in the merchant trade. The father seems to have managed a store in Boston, dealing primarily in dry goods and foodstuffs. He coordinated trading activities with his sons mostly through the ports of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. William Dall 3rd stressed to his sons that they should improve their business acumen by maintaining a liberal education including strong reading, writing, and foreign language skills.

William (4th) suffered from severe attacks of Rheumatism, which was a constant concern to his family. Because of his consistent illness, health was a major issue in all of the correspondence. James Dall married Henrietta Austin in 1812, and remained the only one of his siblings to be married and have children (two of them). James' son, the Reverend Charles Henry Appleton Dall, was to become famous (for his missionary work) as was his wife for her writings and son for his accomplishments in science. Sarah was held in some regard within the family as an artist and was particularly adept at playing the piano. There is little to no information about Maria and Joseph. The Dalls seem to be religious although their religious denomination is not clearly defined.

Almost all of the correspondence was sent from Boston to William (4th) in Baltimore from various members of the immediate family. The most frequent correspondents were William (3rd), James, and John. William's (3rd) letters deal primarily with health and "fatherly advice". James' letters deal mostly with business and financial matters, while John's are most notable for their strong descriptive qualities of Boston and the political situations of the day.

Extended family mentioned in the letters include family in Baltimore. The Dalls in Baltimore include an aunt and cousins Eliza and Ellen. Also the Tildens, including Aunt Mary, Nathaniel, Harriet and Joseph. Other families and individuals mentioned often in correspondence are the Appletons', the Holleys', the Blairs', Mrs. Mitchell, Mr. Vose, Mr. Miller, and Mr. Heathcote.

There are some miscellaneous items at the end of the file that are unclear as to their nature and origin.

Please be sure to see the family trees available in the archives for further explanation as to where each member rightly belongs, their family connections, and also for dates of births, deaths, and marriages.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired 1989.

Processing Information

Processed by Ronna L. Sadow, Spring 1992.

Language:

English

Acknowledgments

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Search terms

Subjects

Baltimore (Md.)--Biography.
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Dall, James, 1781-1863--Correspondence.
Dall, John Robert, 1798-1851--Correspondence.
Dall, John, 1791-1852--Correspondence.
Dall, Joseph, 1801-1840--Correspondence.
Dall, Maria, 1783-1836--Correspondence.
Dall, Rebecca Keen--Correspondence.
Dall, Sarah Keen, 1798-1878--Correspondence.
Dall, William, 1753-1829--Correspondence.
Dall, William, 1794 or 5-1875--Correspondence.
Dall, William, 1794 or 5-1875--Health.
Family--United States--History--19th century.
Harvard University--Students--Correspondence.
Merchants--Maryland--Baltimore--Correspondence.
Merchants--Massachusetts--Boston--Correspondence.

Contributors

Dall family [**main entry**]
Dall, William, 1753-1829.
Dall, William, 1794 or 5-1875.
Dall, James, 1781-1863.
Dall, John, 1791-1852.
Dall, Rebecca Keen.
Dall, Sarah Keen, 1798-1878.
Dall, Maria, 1783-1836.
Dall, Joseph, 1801-1840.
Dall, John Robert, 1798-1851.

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