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Peck-Sisson-White Family Papers

1772-1975 (*Bulk:* 1830-1875)

2 boxes (0.75 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 933



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[Scope](#)

[Inventory](#)

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Perez Peck (1786-1876) and Asa Sisson (1815-1893) of the village of Anthony (Coventry), R.I., were innovative machinists and manufacturers of cotton looms. Active members of the Society of Friends, they were supporters of the antislavery struggle and sent their children to the Friends Boarding School in Providence, R.I.

Although the Peck-Sisson-White family collection spans three families and three generations, the bulk of material is concentrated on the lives of Asa Sisson and his wife Mary Ann (Peck) and their daughter Emily, who married Willis H. White, with an emphasis on their poetry and their time at the Friends Boarding School in Providence, R.I. The family also copied verse from other writers, including works from George Miller (not otherwise identified) extracting Anthony Benezet and "Remarks on encouraging slavery" and a "lamentation over New England" which touches on the execution of early Quakers in Massachusetts Bay.

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Background on White family

Perez Peck (1786-1876) and Asa Sisson (1815-1893) of the village of Anthony (Coventry), R.I., were innovative machinists and manufacturers of cotton looms. Shortly after Sisson married Peck's daughter Mary Ann in September 1839, the two formed the firm Perez Peck & Co., which became the purveyor of the Sisson loom, for several years a standard of the textile industry in Rhode Island.

Staunch Quakers, Peck and Sisson were supporters of the antislavery cause. Most famously, Peck's daughter Harriet became engaged in the local antislavery movement while teaching at the Friends' New Garden Boarding School in North Carolina in 1837-1839, pushing her fellow Quakers there toward an immediatist position. After her death in 1840, however, and with the impact of the Wilburite schism resonating in the New England Yearly Meeting, Perez Peck moderated his stance on antislavery for fear of fostering discord within the Meeting, although the Sissons stayed true to the more uncompromising line.

After the Civil War, Asa Sisson continued in the Rhode Island textile industry, later establishing a foundry and machine shop in Wickford with Ambrose E. Vaughn. His daughter Emily married Willis H. White, who was active in the peace movement early in the twentieth century.

Scope of collection

Although the Peck-Sisson-White family collection spans three families and three generations, the bulk of material is concentrated on the lives of Asa Sisson and his wife Mary Ann (Peck) and their daughter Emily, who married Willis H. White, with an emphasis on their poetry and their time at the Friends Boarding School in Providence, R.I. With a mixture of copied and original works, the poetry reflects typical Quaker themes, with an interesting (possibly not original) piece on the death of John Woolman (1:25), a laudatory poem for Joseph John Gurney (1:18), a poem on cats (1:39), and lamentations and memorials for deceased Friends (1:8, 1:9, 1:19, 1:21). Daniel Anthony wrote a number of adventurous works with a local flavor, including a long poem on a devastating gale in Rhode Island in September 1815 (1:41). The family also copied verse from other writers, including works from George Miller (not otherwise identified) extracting Anthony Benezet and "Remarks on encouraging slavery" and a "lamentation over New England" which touches on the execution of early Quakers in Massachusetts Bay, and there is a fine example of an 1830s-era recipe book (1:42).

Nine of the diaries and copy books (1:17-20, 37-28, 41-43) were originally identified as belonging to Emily Sisson White, but at least some appear instead be from a generation earlier. Although the author or authors are not explicitly identified, the diary for 1839 begins with a mention of the author being married on Sept. 11 followed by a visit to "Father Peck": Sept 11 was the date of Asa Sisson's marriage to Mary Ann Peck. It and the other diary have been tentatively attributed to Asa Sisson. These diaries and three notebooks are identical in format, having blue paper covers, but they are not (consistently) identical in handwriting, making authorship less certain. Nearly all date from the period 1835-1838 when neither Asa nor Mary Ann were students at the Boarding School and when none of their children would have been old enough to be either. As a result, these have been tentatively attributed to Mary Ann Sisson's sister Joanna Peck, who was recorded as a student at the Boarding School in 1836. One volume (1:43) has been assigned to Urania F. Southwick, a boarding school student whose name appears on the cover.

Inventory

Anthony, Daniel

1859

Box 1: 1

Cartland, G. W.: Letter to Perez Peck (Amesbury, Mass.)

1876

Box 1: 2

Extracts from the history of the rise and progress of Friends in Ireland

ca.1835

Box 1: 3

The following account is taken from the Western Star [broadside]

ca.1804

Box 1: 4

Harvey, E.: Letter to Asa Sisson (Ogden, Ohio)

1867

Box 1: 5

Kenyon, Sarah Adams

ca.1913

Box 1: 6

Ladd, Nathaniel: This is the Truth [poetical broadside]

ca.1856

Box 1: 7

A lamentation over New England [copy, but apparently not of John Browne (1678)]

ca.1780

Box 1: 8

M.M.: Extract of letter to E. W. on the death of Sarah Coats

1817

Box 1: 9

Miller, George: Observations on government and Extracts from notes upon taxes by Anthony Benezet

ca.1820

Box 1: 10

Miller, George: Remarks on encouraging slavery

ca.1820

Box 1: 11

Miscellaneous and ephemera

ca.1835-1945

Box 1: 12

Newspaper clippings

ca.1880-1940

Box 1: 13

Newspaper clippings and ephemera on peace

ca.1947-1967

Box 1: 14

Peck, Harriet (?): Memory book

1821-1829

Box 1: 15

Peck, Isaac: Marriage certificate with Lucy C. Brayton

1849

Box 1: 16

Peck, Joanna (?): Notes on Smellie's Philosophy of Natural History

ca.1837

Box 1: 17

Peck, Joanna (?): Poetry copybook (includes a poem on Joseph John Gurney)

1837-1839

Box 1: 18

Peck, Joanna (?): Poetry copybook (includes works by Daniel Anthony, Louis Taber, B. Barton)

ca.1835-1838

Box 1: 19

Peck, Joanna (?): School notebook

ca.1835

Box 1: 20

Poem: I'll go tomorrow to the grave...

ca.1830

Box 1: 21

Poetry: by V. Meader, James Montgomery, Louis Taber, Pliny Early, and William Roscoe

ca.1832

Box 1: 22

All apparently student at Friends Boarding School

Poetry: miscellaneous

ca.1790-1850

Box 1: 23

Poetry notebook: mostly by E. Barton

ca.1832

Box 1: 24

Poetry: On the death of John Woolman

ca.1772

Box 1: 25

Poetry: Peck, Perez, copied at Coventry for Betsy Purington

1836

Box 1: 26

Poetry scrapbook (partially disbound)

ca.1800-1835

Box 1: 27

Poetry scrapbook (White family)

ca.1800-1836

Box 1: 28

Printed material: Arbor Day pamphlets

1893-1896

Box 1: 29

Printed material: Carrier Dove, vol. 16, no. 1 and 2

1868

Box 1: 30

Printed material: Child's World, vol. 21, no. 7

Box 1: 31

Printed material: Gleason's Pictorial, vol. 4, no. 26

1853

Box 1: 32

Printed material: Juvenile Instructor, vol. 9, no. 210

1853

Box 1: 33

Printed material: Youth's Temperance Advocate, vol. 15, no. 3

1854

Box 1: 34

Robinson, Abigail: Letter to dear friend (Newport, R.I.)

ca.1816

Box 1: 35

Signed A. Robinson, but probably Abigail Robinson. See a letter from her in the Willis H. White Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society.

Sheldon & Mason, Boots, shows, leather, and findings [label]

ca.1830

Box 1: 36

Sisson, Asa (?): Diary and notes on natural philosophy

1837

Box 1: 37

Sisson, Asa: Diary

1839

Box 1: 38

Although the author of the diary is not recorded, the diary begins with an entry recording the author's marriage on Sept. 11, 1839: Asa Sisson married Mary Ann Peck on that date

Sisson, Isaac: A poem on cats

ca.1870

Box 1: 39

Sisson, Mary (?): Poetry

ca.1815

Box 1: 40

Poetry booklet signed on front Mary Sisson and internally Hannah Sisson: Mary (b.1799) and Hannah (b.1800) were sisters to Asa Sisson.

Sisson, Mary Ann (Peck): Notebook and poetry

ca.1838

Box 1: 41

Sisson, Mary Ann (Peck): Recipe book

ca.1839

Box 1: 42

Southwick, Urania F.: Notebook

1836

Box 1: 43

Southwick was listed as a student at the Friends' Boarding School in 1837, along with Isaac Peck and Joanna Peck.

White, Emily (Sisson): Commonplace book

1874

Box 2: 1

Kept while a student at the Friends' Boarding School.

White, Emily (Sisson): Composition book

1874

Box 2: 2

Kept while a student at the Friends' Boarding School.

White, Emily (Sisson): Composition book

ca.1874

Box : 3

Probably kept while a student at the Friends' Boarding School.

White, Emily (Sisson): Composition book, poetry

1875

Box 2: 4

Kept while a student at the Friends' Boarding School.

White, Emily (Sisson): Notebooks

1874

Box 2: 5

Kept while a student at the Friends' Boarding School.

White family correspondence

1946-1975

Box 2: 6

White family scrapbook

ca.1830-1862

Box 2: 7

William Hampton of Rahway, East New Jersey (memorial)

ca.1781

Box 2: 8

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Part of the New England Yearly Meeting Collection, April 2016.

Related Material

SCUA houses a collection of papers for the **Willis H. White** (MS 929) as part of the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends Records.

Bibliography

See Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of These Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network*. Amherst, Mass.: UMass Press, 2002.

Separated Material

A miniature book was transferred to Rare Books: Elizabeth Fry, *Texts for every day in the year, principally practical and devotional*. New York : Mahlon Day, 1839.

Peck-Sisson-White family

Perez Peck (1747-1825) m. Experience Smith (1747-1803)
Arnold Peck (1768-1784)
Isaac Peck (1773-1787)
Cromwell Peck (1774-1838)
Noah Peck (1776-1778)
Arnold Peck (1778-1784)
Noah Peck (1780-1781)
Anna Peck (1782-1852) m. Chaffee
Sabra Peck (1783-1803)
Perez Peck (1786-1876) m. Joanna Brown (1786-1867)
Harriet Peck (1815-1840)
Mary Ann Peck (1816-1882) m. 1839 to **Asa Sisson** (1815-1893)
Harriet P. Sisson (1845-1846)
Charles Sisson (1847-1910)
Emily A. Sisson (1856-1945) m. Willis H. White (1862-1946)
Mary H. White (b. 1884)
Charles Howard White (1885-1975)
Louisa White (b. 1894)
Edward A. White (b. 1897)
Lydia Wicks Peck (1817-1888)
Sarah Peck (1820-1821)
Joanna Peck (1821-1899)
Isaac Peck (1824-1875) m. **Lucy C. Brayton** (b. 1821)
Cynthia S. Peck (1789-1854)

Asa Sisson family

Asa Sisson (1770-1852) m. Mercy Mary Dennis (1772-1816)
Hannah Sisson (b. 1799)
Mary Sisson (1800-1821)
Isaac I. Sisson (1802-1803)
Joseph B. Sisson (1803-1884)
Robert Sisson (1805-1822)
Isaac Sisson (1807-1808)
Ruth Sisson (1808-1885)
Lydia Sisson (1813-1883)
Asa Sisson (1815-1893) m. Mary Ann Peck (1816-1882)

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Contributors

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Poetry

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