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Hallstead Family, Collection 1862, 1868-1910

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#34 Hallstead Family, Collection 1862, 1868-1910
11 folders

INTRODUCTION

The collection is comprised of letters which passed between members of the Hallstead family of Pennsylvania between the years of 1862 and 1910. The bulk of the collection is comprised of letters from Polly Ann (Pop) Hallstead to her brother Andrew, and letters to Polly Ann from her future husband, Nelson (Nels) Walker. In addition there are letters from Mr. Orrin Hallstead to his son Andrew, and a letter from Henry Hallstead (another of Orrin's sons) written from an Army camp during the Civil War.

DONOR INFORMATION

Donor unknown.

BIOLOGICAL SKETCH

Orrin Hallstead is first listed in the Pennsylvania census of 1850, where he gave his occupation as a farmer, and claimed a personal estate value totaling \$2000. He was married to Mary Hallstead. They would have at least eight children, but not all would survive to adulthood. In a decade Orrin would build his wealth into a total real estate value of \$12,000, and retain his personal property value of \$2000. By 1870 his property value would decrease by nearly one third (though he would remain comparatively wealthy), and he would list his occupation as a railroad investor.

Andrew Hallstead is listed in the 1860 census as a 12 year old. By the 1870 census he has left Pennsylvania for Wyoming territory where his father had secured him employment. Though the collection contains few letters from Andrew, he is the recipient of most of the letters in the collection from his father, sister, and his friend and future brother-in-law, Nelson Walker. Andrew would spend three years in Wyoming working, at first as a luggage manager for the railroad, and later striking out on his own to pursue business ventures. Though his initial interest was in the hotel business, the first pursuit mentioned in the letters is a general store. Andrew struggles to maintain his business, and is chided at one point by his sister for his decision to sell rum. (June 17th 1870) Andrew ultimately leaves Wyoming and works at least briefly as a hotel clerk in Reno, Nevada. In a letter of 1871 Andrew declares his intention to go with a wagon train to Salt Lake City. He then passes through Kansas before landing in Texas. Though his family entreats him often to return home, he never does so, and passes away of an undefined illness in Texas in early 1874.

Polly Ann (Pop) Hallstead was three years older than Andrew, and appears to have written him regularly, not hesitating to chide him for failing to write often enough to assure his family of his health. Overlapping her correspondence with Andrew is a series of letters written to her by Nelson Walker, who though away pursuing his own business ventures, finds time to carry on a long distance courtship which would culminate in the couple's marriage on October 5 of 1870. By the census of 1880 Polly Ann and Nelson Walker have two sons; Neal, age 6, and Andrew, age 4. The birth of Neal is documented in a letter from Orrin Hallstead to Andrew just months before Andrew's passing in 1874.

Henry Hallstead is listed in census records as two years older than Polly Ann, and five years older than Andrew. He served in the Union Army during the Civil War, and built a home in Nicholson, Pennsylvania a few years after the war. He married, and had at least one child who died in early childhood in 1870. Henry died in 1879.

Nelson (Nels) Walker was friend and neighbor to the Hallsteads and writes to both Andrew and Polly Ann regularly. After his 1870 marriage to Polly Ann he no longer writes to Andrew, but sends his regards through the letters of his wife. In 1880 he and Polly Ann are listed on the census as having two sons, ages 4 and 6, and a single servant living in the household.

Neal Walker is the son of Polly Ann and Nelson Walker. He was born in 1874, and he attended Princeton University in the early 1890's.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Hallstead Family Collection consists predominately of personal letters passing between three generations of an extended family during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The collection contains a pair of overlapping, but distinct, plots as the family writes to young Andrew Hallstead in Wyoming, and later, Texas, alternately encouraging Andrew to come home, and advising him in his business pursuits. Simultaneously, the correspondence between Nelson Walker and Polly Ann Hallstead illustrates their courtship and eventual marriage. Through his position with the railroad Orrin Hallstead facilitated his son Andrew's interest in business speculation, and he would place Andrew as a baggage handler in Wyoming, where at least two letters passed between Andrew's superior and Mr. Hallstead. As Andrew pursued one business venture and then another, Mr. Hallstead offered both fatherly and business advice admonishing Andrew to "be a good boy generally" (August 24, 1869) and recommends careful accounting to maintain inventory (November, 3, 1869). After three years in business Mr. Hallstead evaluates his son's progress, entreats him to come home, and offers to find him suitable work with the railroad.

At the same time Andrew is exploring his future on the frontier, Nelson Walker and Polly Ann pursue a deepening relationship that culminates in their marriage on October 5, 1870. Nelson's letters addressed at first to "Miss Pop", grow fonder as he moves to "Friend Pop" and, eventually, "Dearest Pop". Their letters dominate the collection for the year 1870 leading up to their marriage. In the early 1890s Nelson is the proprietor of the Keelersburg General Store in Keelersburg, Pennsylvania, but a letter from Polly indicates that the couple, though keeping at least one live-in servant according to census records, were not completely free of debt.

With the exception of the two letters Henry sent to his parents from the Army, there is little discussion of national events, but the letters do provide a look at the personal relationships between members of a gentleman farmer's family in the late 1800s as well as a look at the formalities of courtship via correspondence in that era. What one sees in this collection is that the contents of a letter were often not so important as the fact of the letter itself. Receiving a letter meant that people were still in functional health, and not taken with injury or illness; or in Andrew's case, killed by Indians (as Polly worries). Polly Ann scolds Andrew constantly for failing to write often, just as Nelson scolds Polly for the same offense, and letters nearly always begin with a note as to when the most recent correspondence was received and a statement of general health.

The **Correspondence Series** contains the letters of the family arranged by date with undated items at the beginning of the year of composition when known.

The **Miscellaneous Series** contains wedding invitations, a rough draft of a letter between unknown individuals, a poem likely written by Andrew Hallstead shortly before his passing, a doctor's bill for Andrew Hallstead issued around the time of his passing, and a bill for the funeral of Mary Hallstead, who was the mother of Henry, Polly Ann, and Andrew. There is also an invitation to the wedding of Mary Hallstead to Mr. Stanley Dolph, and an acknowledgement of sympathy expressed in the passing of William Finn Hallstead.

FOLDER LIST

Correspondence Series

- f. 1 Letters August 26, 1862 and September 11, 1862 (Both by Henry Hallstead)
- f. 2 Letters 1868 – 1869
- f. 3 Letters January through May 1870
- f. 4 Letters June through August 1870
- f. 5 Letters September through November 1870
- f. 6 Letters 1871 – 1872
- f. 7 Letters 1873 – 1874
- f. 8 Letters 1879, 1881 – 1882
- f. 9 Letters 1891 – 1892
- f. 10 Letters 1908 – 1910

Miscellaneous Series

- f. 11 Miscellaneous papers 1874 to 1911

INDEX ENTRIES

Brisbin, J.	f. 1
Dolph, Mary Hallstead	f. 10, 11
Dolph, Stanley Edward	f. 11
Easton, Mrs. F.C.	f. 6
Fillmore, L	f. 3, 4
Hallstead, Andrew	f. 2 – 7
Hallstead, Elizabeth	f. 9
Hallstead, Mrs. George	f. 11
Hallstead, Henry	f. 1, 8
Hallstead Mary	f. 7, 8, 11
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Hallstead Orrin	f. 1-4, 6-9
Hallstead Polly	f. 2-6, 9, 10
Hallstead, Mrs. William	f. 11

INDEX ENTRIES continued

Jacobs, M.E.	f. 9
Kelley, Ashford	f. 9
Landfield, Jerome B. Jr.	f. 9
Scott, Mrs. M.	f. 8, 9
See, Mrs. R.J.	f. 7
Van Ness, S.S.	f. 7
Walker, Neal	f. 7-9
Walker, Nelson	f. 2-6
Walker, Polly (see Hallstead, Polly)	
Williams, Elizabeth	f. 7