

LONGFELLOW NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
105 BRATTLE STREET
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

***FINDING AID FOR THE
MARY ALLEN (1779-1849) – ANDREW CRAIGIE (1754-1819)
CORRESPONDENCE, 1797-CA. 1941
(BULK DATES: 1797-1816)***

COLLECTION CATALOG NUMBER: LONG 35823

Accessions: LONG-1

PREPARED BY

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MUSEUM SERVICES CENTER
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Cover Illustration:
Detail of 22 November [1801] letter from Mary Allen to Andrew Craigie. Box 1, folder 1.
Courtesy, Longfellow National Historic Site.

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PREFACE

This document, the *Finding Aid for the Mary Allen (1779-1849) – Andrew Craigie (1754-1819) Correspondence, 1797-ca. 1941*, describes a collection of letters to Andrew Craigie, the first Apothecary General of the United States and an owner of the Vassall – Craigie – Longfellow House (now the Longfellow National Historic Site), from his daughter born out of wedlock, Mary Allen. Staff from the Northeast Museum Services Center catalogued the collection in late summer and fall 2007. The staff would like to thank James Shea, Site Manager, and Anita Israel, Archives Specialist, for their assistance and especially for their insights into the history of these papers.

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INTRODUCTION

The Mary Allen (1779-1849) – Andrew Craigie (1754-1819) Correspondence is comprised mainly of letters written in the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries from Mary Allen to her father Andrew Craigie. These letters lay hidden in the Vassall – Craigie – Longfellow House’s basement staircase until Henry Wadsworth Longfellow discovered them decades later. A small amount of research collected by Dr. Frederick Haven Pratt (1873-1958) and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana (1881-1950) relates mostly to Allen’s life in the Moravian community at Bethlehem and Nazareth, Pennsylvania. The collection was accessioned into the Longfellow National Historic Site museum collection as part of accession LONG-1 when the Longfellow House Trust, which was formed in 1913, donated the Longfellow house and its contents to the National Park Service in 1973.

The collection was processed in the late summer and fall of 2007 by Margaret Welch, Archivist, Northeast Museum Services Center as part of a cataloging project funded by Backlog Cataloging moneys. The papers were arranged into series and rehoused into acid-free folders and archival boxes. The collection was cataloged into the Automated National Catalog System.

This finding aid is divided into four sections:

Part 1: Collection Description:

- a scope and content note with descriptions of the various series into which the collection is organized.

Part 2: History

- brief biographies of Allen, Craigie, and a history of the letters’ discovery.

Part 3: Collection Listing

Bibliography

PART 1:

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Mary Allen (1779-1849) – Andrew Craigie (1754-1819) Correspondence, 1797-ca. 1941 (bulk dates 1797-1816)

Accession Number(s): LONG-1

Catalog Numbers: Collection: LONG 35823

Quantity: .5 linear feet.

Storage: 1 legal size archives box.

Location: Longfellow National Historic Site, 105 Brattle Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138-3407, (617) 876-4491.

Description: The Mary Allen (1779-1849) – Andrew Craigie (1754-1819) Correspondence is primarily composed of letters written by Allen, when a young woman, to her father Andrew Craigie, who owned the Vassall – Craigie – Longfellow House at the time. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow subsequently found the letters hidden in the cellar staircase of the House.

The collection is organized into two series: I. Correspondence and II. Research Materials.

Cross-references: *Frederick Haven Pratt & Stephen D. Pratt Research Papers, 1783-1996 (LONG 21809)* contain extensive research on Andrew Craigie and Mary (Polly) Allen.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana (1881-1950) Papers, 1744-1972 (bulk dates 1850-1950) (LONG 17314) has a small amount of material on Andrew Craigie.

“Esther Wynn’s Love Letters,” original manuscript of Helen Hunt Jackson. (LONG uncatalogued).

The American Antiquarian Society holds the Andrew Craigie Papers.

The Cambridge Historical Society holds materials related to Andrew Craigie and his wife Elizabeth.

Organization:

*The Mary Allen (1779-1849) – Andrew Craigie (1754-1819)
Correspondence, 1797-ca. 1941 (bulk dates 1797-1816)*

I. Correspondence

- A. Allen to Craigie
- B. Others to Craigie

II. Research Materials

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I. Correspondence

A. Allen to Craigie, 1791-1816¹

This sub-series comprises the bulk of the collection. Allen's letters, written as a young woman finished with her education, initially reflect concern about her future. She explains to Craigie her growing religiosity and eventual contentment as a Moravian sister. She relates her reading of liberal philosophy including Thomas Paine and Emmanuel Swedenborg. The most frequent topic is the paucity of Craigie's letters to her: "It has been 10 months since you favored me with a few lines ..."²

B. Others to Craigie, 1797-1802

Craigie must have kept these letters by friends involved with Mary Allen's care with those from Allen. Correspondents include members of the Colt family of Rome, New York and Jacob Van Vleck, one of the directors of the Moravian female academy.

Series II. Research Materials

This series contains notes and photostats collected by Dr. Pratt and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana that Dana and his research associates included with the letters. Most of Dr. Pratt's research is in the Frederick Haven Pratt & Stephen D. Pratt Research Papers, 1783-1996, donated after his death.

¹ Three earlier letters are in the Andrew Craigie Papers at the American Antiquarian Society. Photostats in Folder 10.

² 24 April 1816. Box 1, Folder 1.

PART 2:

HISTORY

Mary (“Polly”) Allen (28 December 1779 – 27 December 1849)

Mary Allen was the daughter of Andrew Craigie, at the time a young officer in the Revolutionary Army, and a Philadelphia Quaker woman whose family forbade her to marry Craigie, a non-Quaker. Craigie evidently supported Allen without aid from the mother’s family, although Allen never lived in his household. Allen is known to have lived as a girl with the family of Joel Barlow, the poet and diplomat, and a friend of Craigie. Another friend of Craigie, Mrs. David Jackson of Philadelphia, told Allen about her parents’ relationship after both had died.

Craigie sent “Polly” to the female seminary run by the Moravians in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania at the end of 1788. She joined other daughters of men prominent in the American Revolution at this first private school for girls in the United States. She made close friends including Sally Colt of Rome, New York. She spent time with the Colts and other friends’ families after her schooling was finished; the friends and parents wrote to her father how pleased they were to have Polly live with them. As early as 1797, the principal of the Moravian school suggested that she remain at the Moravian community, and, by 1804 she had returned to Bethlehem. In 1807 she was received into the Church of the Brethren and became a sister in the community.³ Andrew Craigie continued to support her financially.⁴

Although she told Craigie about physical ailments she suffered, she lived a long life as beloved and respected “Sister Polly” in Bethlehem and was in charge of the Single Sisters’ House in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. She also taught embroidery and in 1816 opened one of the first Sunday schools in the nation. She died in Bethlehem and was buried in the Moravian churchyard.

Andrew Craigie (22 February 1754 – 19 September 1819)

Born and educated in Boston, Craigie played an active role in the Revolutionary War. On 30 April 1775, he was appointed by the Committee on Safety of the Congress of Massachusetts to “take care of the medical stores.” He is believed to have attended the wounded at Bunker Hill two months later. After he became the first apothecary general in the colonial army in 1777, he recommended the creation of a central supply for medications. Such a facility was established in Lititz, Pennsylvania in 1778. He was stationed around Philadelphia at this time when he presumably met Allen’s mother.

He was mustered out of the army in 1783. Craigie gave up his wholesale pharmacy business he had started during the war by 1789 but continued to buy real estate. He held substantial tracts in upstate New York, Oxford, Maine, and in East Cambridge. He speculated in domestic and foreign money markets.

In 1791 Craigie bought the John Vassall estate on Brattle Street in Cambridge where kept several servants and began to entertain in high style. He married Elizabeth Shaw of Nantucket in 1793. Craigie’s wealth began to diminish and he reportedly hid inside his home, fearful of being thrown

³ Letter fragment, [1 December 1807], Box 1, Folder 5.

⁴ Mrs. David Jackson helped to secure a bond for Allen’s support from the Craigie estate (Frederick Haven Pratt, *The Craigies: A Footnote to the Medical History of the Revolution* (The Cambridge Historical Society, 1942; reissued 1996), p. 42).

into debtors' prison. After his death from a stroke in 1819, his wife became so financially straightened that she took in boarders. One of these boarders, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, bought the house after her death and ushered in another era of hospitality.

The Story of the “Cellar-Stair” Letters

In a 1942 presentation to the Cambridge Historical Society, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana recounted the tale of how the Henry Longfellow family knew of these letters. After Longfellow purchased the house, he discovered several of these letters at different points in time lying on the stairs leading to the cellar. The letters, in Dr. Pratt's words, were of “mysterious origin, written in a cultivated feminine hand, of a date long in the past and addressed to Andrew Craigie, Esq.”⁵ They apparently were dislodged piecemeal from a tread in the staircase, by that time damaged by age and mice.

The entire family knew of the letters in the secret hiding place, for they told Charles Dickens about it on Thanksgiving Day 1867 at the Longfellows' house and showed him the cache in the staircase as well. Dickens must have shared the story with others because the novelist Helen Hunt Jackson recounted the incident about Dickens, Longfellow, and “a parcel of old letters” in a New York newspaper and wondered whether Dickens would cast the story in the form of a novel. After the death of Dickens, Jackson, under the pseudonym “Saxe Holm,” herself used the story in “Esther Wynn's Love Letters” first published in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1871. Jackson recasts the female letter writer as a young woman corresponding to her absent lover. As Dr. Pratt observed, certain characteristics in the Mary Allen letters relate to love letters as they are “letters of love held ever and again from overflowing” to an absent one.⁶

⁵ Pratt, p. 27.

⁶ Pratt, p. 42.

PART 3:

COLLECTION LISTING

Series I. Correspondence

A. Allen to Craigie

Box 1 (5" legal size)

1. 1797-1800
2. 1801
3. 1802
4. 1803-1804
5. 1805-1807
6. 1808-1811
7. 1812-1816

B. Others to Craigie

8. 1797-1802

Series II. Related Materials

9. Re: Moravian Community in Pennsylvania, 1939, n.d.
10. Copies of Related Correspondence (1788-1791), American Antiquarian Society, ca. 1941

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