

Austin & Austin business letters

Ms. Coll. 1308

Finding aid prepared by Shevi Epstein.

Last updated on May 26, 2017.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2017 May 19

Table of Contents

Summary Information.....	3
Biography/History.....	4
Scope and Contents.....	4
Administrative Information.....	5
Related Materials	5
Controlled Access Headings.....	5
Collection Inventory.....	7

Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Austin & Austin.
Title	Austin & Austin business letters
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1308
Date	1815-1817, 1860-1873
Extent	0.6 linear foot (2 boxes)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Austin & Austin Hope Mill on Catskill Creek, located in Catskill, New York, was operated by the Austin family from 1813 to 1872. Specializing in the production of rag paper, the mill was passed down through two generations of the family during the 19th century. The collection contains business letters sent to Austin & Austin. Researchers will find letters from two distinct periods of the company's history, from 1815 to 1817 and from 1860 to 1873.</p>

Cite as:

Austin & Austin business letters, 1815-1817, 1860-1873, Ms. Coll. 1308, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

The Austin & Austin Hope Mill on Catskill Creek, located in Catskill, New York, was operated by the Austin family from 1813 to 1872. Specializing in the production of rag paper, the mill was passed down through two generations of the family during the 19th century. Abner Austin (1771-1848) was the initial driving force behind the business, working with his brother Russell (1769-1829) to establish and grow their business. In 1813, the brothers had procured 90 acres of land from Nathan Benjamin, which included the paper mill along with its water rights on the Catskill Creek, which powered the mill. Initially, Russell ran the family farm, while Abner oversaw the paper mill and family store. However, in 1816 the brothers dissolved their partnership and Abner ran the farm and paper mill on his own. After Russell's death in 1829, Abner ran the family farm as well. The business would become moderately successful under the Abner's leadership, drawing customers primarily from New York State.

Later in life, Abner was joined in the family business by his sons Walter (1807-1872) and Charles (1805-1854) and the company's name was changed to Austin & Son. After Abner's death in 1848, his sons would continue to run the business until Walter's death in 1872. In the mid 1880s the mill would eventually go out of business due to both foreign paper imports and the growing popularity of paper made from wood pulp.

Scope and Contents

The collection contains business letters sent to the paper making company Austin & Austin, which was located in Catskill, NY from 1815 to 1817 and from 1860 to 1873. The collection is arranged chronologically. Researchers will find letters from two distinct periods of the company's history. The early letters were sent largely to Abner Austin (1771-1848) who oversaw the paper mill operations. All of the letters relate to business transactions and orders. In the early years of the company's history there did not appear to be many repeat customers. It appears that most of their business during this period came from the New York region. Of particular interest may be a series of letters from Ruth Benjamin (1770-1857), the widow of Nathan Benjamin (1764-1813) who sold the Austins the land and Mill, of Williamstown, New York in 1817, who regularly demanded money from Abner Austin and wrote of her disappointment in his monetary gifts. There are numerous letters to Abner from his brother Russell (1769-1829) and Jared, all relating to business matters. There are also ten letters sent to Russell and Abner Austin by Thomas Shrimpton, a paper mold maker in Watervliet, New York, dating from 1815 to 1816. His letters requested payments from the brothers.

The later letters, the bulk of which are from 1860 to 1863, are addressed to Austin & Austin and were likely received by Walter Austin (1807-1872), the son of Abner Austin, who was operating the paper mill at that time. Like the early letters, these focus on business order, and financial matters. However, in the later years of the company's history, there appear to be many repeat customers, including Thomas Alland, William Benedict, Frances B. O'Conner, E.B. Clayton and Sons, Bradley R. Hard, Vernon Brothers, A.

Van Winkle, L.T. Valentine & Co., A.J. Willams & Co., and S.S. Townsend. These businesses were largely paper merchants and wholesale paper warehouses and were, for the most part, New York based. Some of the letters include paper sample swatches, glued to the letter. These letters will be useful to researchers interested in the financial side and product demand of the paper making industry in New York in the 19th century.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

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Finding aid prepared by Shevi Epstein.

Access Restrictions

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Source of Acquisition

Sold by Nancy Howell, 2016.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

At Williams College: Abner Austin Business Records, 1813-1888.

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Business letters
- Correspondence

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Catskill (N.Y.)

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Austin, Abner, 1771-1848
- Austin, Jared, 1777-1854
- Austin, Russell, 1769-1829
- Austin, Walter, 1807-1872

SUBJECT(S)

- Business
- Industries--New York (State)
- Industries--United States--History--19th century
- Paper industry

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Business letters, 1815 April-August.	1	1
Business letters, 1815 August-November .	1	2
Business letters, 1816 February-May.	1	3
Business letters, 1817 January-May.	1	4
Business letters, 1817 June-December.	1	5
Business letters, 1860 January-April.	1	6
Business letters, 1860 May-August.	1	7

Business letters, 1860 September-November.	1	8
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Business letters, 1862 January-April.	1	9
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Business letters, 1862 May-November.	1	10
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Business letters, 1863 April-June.	1	11
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Business letters, 1863 June-December.	2	1
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Business letters, 1864 May-December.	2	2
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Business letters, 1866 May-October.	2	3
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Business letters, 1871,1873.	2	4
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Paper samples, undated.

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