

Robert Montgomery Bird family correspondence

Ms. Coll. 1074

Finding aid prepared by Kristine McGee.

Last updated on July 01, 2020.

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

2015 June 10

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Bird, Frederic Mayer, 1838-1908
Creator	Bird, Mary E.
Creator	Bird, Robert Montgomery, 1806-1854
Title	Robert Montgomery Bird family correspondence
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1074
Date [bulk]	1830-1908
Date [inclusive]	1820-1991
Extent	0.4 linear feet (1 box)
Language	English
Abstract	This collection contains correspondence between Robert Montgomery Bird, his wife Mary E. Bird, their son Frederic Mayer Bird, and other family members. It provides accounts of daily life in New Castle, Delaware and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania during the 19th century.

Cite as:

Robert Montgomer Bird family correspondence, Robert Montgomer Bird family correspondence,

1820-1991 (Bulk: 1831-1908), Ms. Coll. 1074, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Robert Montgomery Bird (1806-1854) was born in New Castle Delaware in 1806. The sixth of the seven children born to John and Elizabeth (Van Leuvenigh) Bird, he joined brothers John Dickinson, James Madison, Albert Gallatin, Thomas Jefferson, and sister Ann Van Leuvenigh. Younger brother Henry Dearborn was born two years later. Following the family's financial ruin and his father's subsequent death, Robert M. Bird was sent to live with his uncle and guardian, Nicholas Van Dyke. Having completed his secondary school education at Germantown Academy, Bird studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. It was during this period that he began to compose poetry and other works of fiction. Upon his graduation from Penn in 1827, he briefly set up a medical practice before leaving the field of medicine to pursue a literary career.

In 1837, Robert Montgomery Bird married Mary Elizabeth Mayer (1809-1868), daughter of Philip F. Mayer, a Lutheran clergyman of Philadelphia, and Lucy Woodbridge Mayer. Mary Bird was an accomplished painter who studied under portraitist Thomas Sully. Their son, Frederic Mayer Bird (1838-1908), was born the following year. Frederic graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and Union Theological Seminary. He was chaplain and professor at Lehigh University, editor of *Lippincott's Magazine* and the author of several books.

At the time of Robert Montgomery Bird's death on January 23, 1854, he was living in Philadelphia and working as the literary editor and part owner of the *Philadelphia North American*. Bird died of "effusion of the brain." Mary followed her husband in death on November 7, 1868.

Scope and Contents

The correspondence of Robert Montgomery Bird and his family provides details of their daily activities, travels, financial matters, the weather and their health. Notes and typed transcriptions of a majority of the letters were provided by the donor Robert Montgomery Bird (1917-2006), unless otherwise noted and are found preceding the original.

The bulk of Robert Montgomery Bird's letters are addressed to his mother and wife. Early on, he wrote to his mother of his journeys across the southern United States and his brief trip to England. Correspondence with his wife Mary primarily discusses their son Frederic, although there are brief notes they wrote to each other during their courtship. Letters from Mary's family, the Mayer's, touch on the anti-Catholic Philadelphia Nativist Riots that occurred in 1844. Also of note, are letters from Oliver Wendell Holmes to Frederic Bird discussing hymnals.

Administrative Information

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Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

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Source of Acquisition

Bequest of Robert Montgomery Bird, III, 2006.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

University of Pennsylvania: Robert Montgomery Bird papers, Ms. Coll. 108.

Virginia Historical Society: Henry Dearborn Bird family papers.

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence
- Family papers

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Philadelphia (Pa.)--History--19th century.

SUBJECT(S)

- Authors, American--19th century
- Families
- Voyages and travels

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Bird, Frederic Mayer, 1858-1908.	1	1
Bird, Henry Dearborn to Mary M. Fox: Transcription of letters, 1830-1853.	1	2
Bird, John Dickinson to Thomas Jefferson Bird, 1839-1840.	1	3
Bird, Mary E. to Frederic Mayer Bird, 1844-1854.	1	4
Bird, Robert Montgomery, 1831-1848.	1	5-7
Bird, Robert Montgomery: Financial material, 1840-1848.	1	8
Bird, Robert Montgomery to Mary E. Bird, 1835-1836.	1	9

Bird, Robert Montgomery: Miscellaneous ephemera, 1916, undated.	1	10
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Mayer family to Mary E. Bird, 1831-1844.	1	11
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University of Delaware, 1990-1991.	1	12
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University of Pennsylvania: Transcriptions of letters, 1837-1840.	1	13
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Van Dyke, Nicholas to James M. Bird, 1820.	1	14
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