Finding Aid of the Dr. Washington Ayer Papers C057702

Finding aid prepared by P.Keats
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Title: Ayer, Dr. Washington Papers  
Identifier/Call Number: C057702  
Contributing Institution: Society of California Pioneers  
Language of Material: English  
Physical Description: 1.0 folder(1 obituary, 1 account, 1 letter, notes)  
Date (inclusive): 1853-1897  
Abstract: The Dr. Washington Ayer papers include two handwritten letters, one from 1853, the other undated. The first discusses his daily life, in very flowery language, and then goes on to talk about his spiritual life. The second letter seems to be notes for a eulogy at a banquet. There is a typescript of the Society of California Pioneers’ Record for Ayer, which gives biographical information on him, plus a handwritten Addendum to that typescript, by Ayer, adding information on his biography. There is also an undated, unidentified newspaper obituary of Ayer.  
creator: Ayer, Washington, Dr., 1823-1899  
Access  
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Preferred Citation note  
Donor  
Gift of Miss Mabel Adams Ayer, May 1, 1929.  
Biography  
Dr. Washington Ayer was born in 1823 in Haverhill, MA. He studied medicine at Harvard, and he was about to embark on a trip to Europe when the Gold Rush hit. Dr. Ayer traveled to California on the ship "Leonore" in July 1849. After arriving in California, he tried prospecting and hotel-keeping, but then settled down in the medicine field. Dr. Ayer spent two years at Mokelumne Hill and Volcano in Amador County. During the summer of 1852, Ayer was the appointed surgeon during the so-called “French War” of California, a land claim dispute between French and American miners on French Hill. American miners succeeded in driving the French from the coveted claim and “robbing them of $15,000 in one hour.” During Dr. Ayer's residence in Volcano, he organized a vigilante committee, which caught the murderer of an elderly man. He also helped to organize and was elected Master of the Volcano Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, and he was its first representative at the Grand Lodge at Sacramento. In 1856, Dr. Ayer settled permanently in San Francisco. In 1863, he was voted a Member of the Board of Education, and served until 1868, when he refused a re-election. From 1883 to 1891, Dr. Ayer filled the chair of Professor of Hygiene in the Medical Department of the University of California. In 1890, Dr. Ayer was elected a Member of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco and was made Chairman of the Hospital Committee. He made many reforms in the various institutions of public charity. He helped organize the Medico-Chirurgical Society and was its first president. He was the president of the Sloat Monument Association and presided at the Laying of the Corner Stone of the Monument at Monterey, July 7, 1896. Dr. Ayer was also the President of the Society of California Pioneers. Dr. Ayer, an accomplished writer, died in 1899 having published numerous essays in his field, as well as a small volume of poems and a romance entitled, "Might Have Been."  
Scope and Contents of the Collection  
This collection includes five items: undated notes for a eulogy at a banquet, which seem to refer to other fellow doctors in Dr. Ayer's profession; a letter written to his mother, begun on April 1, 1853, and completed on April 3, 1853; a typescript of the Society's Pioneer Record entry for Dr. Ayer (4 pages), which gives biographical information, plus information on his arrival in San Francisco, activities in the mines, and career as a doctor; a handwritten addendum of corrections (5 pages) to the above typescript, bringing his biographical information up to date, written in 1897; and finally, an undated, unidentified newspaper obituary on Ayer entitled: “Record of the Busy Life of a Pioneer.” The letter (12 handwritten pages) from 1853 is very long and rambling, full of flowery language and random thoughts on weather, life, God, and everyday matters. He mentioned gifts he had recently received, referred to his mother as a shopkeeper, and seemed well-educated, quoting Shakespeare. He seemed to be reluctant to tell his mother that he had or was thinking of changing his religious beliefs, and he mentioned he had spoken with a Mr. Colburn about the doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg. At the end, he made reference to a boat, "The Contra Costa," being blown up, killing four men and badly injuring several others.  
Repository
Related Archival Materials note

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Ayer, Mabel Adams
Swedenborg, Emanuel, 1688-1772
Gold mines and mining -- California -- History.
Pioneers--California
San Francisco (Calif.) - History - 19th century