John Bouvier Papers: Finding Aid

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Manuscripts Department
1151 Oxford Road
San Marino, California 91108
Phone: (626) 405-2129
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Overview of the Collection
Title: John Bouvier Papers
Dates (inclusive): 1714-1895
Collection Number: mssBO 1-149
Creator: Bouvier, John, 1787-1851.
Extent: 347 pieces + photographs and ephemera in 5 boxes
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Abstract: This collection contains the papers of French-American jurist John Bouvier (1787-1851) and his family in Pennsylvania, including Bouvier's daughter, science writer Hannah Mary Bouvier Peterson (1811-1870), his son-in-law Robert Evans Peterson (1812-1869) and the Petersons' son-in-law Philadelphia publisher George William Childs (1829-1894).
Language: English.
Access
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Preferred Citation
Provenance
114 pieces of addenda (Boxes 4-5 and Hannah Peterson scrapbook) were received as the gift of Maurice Wells, 1973
Biographical Note
John Bouvier (1787-1851) was born of Quaker parents in 1787 in the small French village of Codognan, department du Gard. Of his life before the age of fifteen little is known, except that he attended school in Nimes. His father, Jean (1760-1803) was a man of considerable means, having inherited property from his uncle and money from his grandfather. Bouvier's mother, Marie Benezet (1760-1823), also brought a respectable dowry into her marriage with Jean. Husband and wife farmed for a living, adding to this income money earned from a distillery and from a farm products and manufacturing exchange enterprise. As a result of his fortune, Jean Bouvier was one of the principal men of his village, occupying at one time or another almost all of the village offices. However, when he attempted to feed his friends and finance relief from the distress occasioned by the French Revolution (with which he sympathized), a series of misfortunes crushed the family. Thus circumstanced, Jean and Marie applied for passports to America in 1800, finally making the voyage in 1802 with their two sons, John and Daniel (c. 1795-1825). John's father died less than a year later, while his mother returned to France and died in 1823.
Soon after his arrival in Philadelphia, John Bouvier was apprenticed to Benjamin Johnson, printer and bookseller, until he was twenty-one. He seems to have read voraciously during this period. In 1808 friends helped him to establish his own business in Philadelphia. Two years later he married Elizabeth Middifield (1787?-1840?), daughter of James and Hannah Middifield, prominent Philadelphia Quakers. The union issued one child, Hannah Mary (1811-1870), who grew to become an accomplished astronomer and author of *Familiar Astrow: Or An Introduction to the Study of the Heavens*.
About 1814 Bouvier moved to Brownsville to publish the *American Telegraph*, moving again in 1818 to Uniontown, where he established the *Genius of American Liberty* with John M. Austin. That same year he was admitted to the bar, and four years later he was permitted to practice before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Returning to Philadelphia in 1823, Bouvier published an abridgement of Blackstone. Sometime later he became active with the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Capital Punishment, the Apprentices Library of Philadelphia, and the temperance movement. It seems

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that he was also interested, if not active, in Pennsylvania Democratic-Republican politics, for between 1820 and 1824 he received regular correspondence from James Todd, a member of the Pennsylvania legislature, about legislative proceedings and politics. A letter from former-governor Joseph Ritner is also suggestive.

But the highest offices which Bouvier himself attained were City Recorder and associate judge of the court of criminal sessions (1838). A year later his famous Law Dictionary appeared, going through numerous editions. Between 1841 and his death in November, 1851, he managed to publish two more works: a new edition of Matthew Bacon's Abridgement of the Law (1841-1845) and Institutes of American Law (1851).

Additional relatives of Bouvier include: Antoine Benezet, 1st cousin, son of François; Bellamy Benezet, son of Jean, Husband of Fanny Majolier (the daughter of Louis); François Benezet, uncle; Jean Benezet, uncle; Jeanne Benezet, 1st cousin, daughter of François, wife of Pierre Clavel; Etienne Bouvier, cousin (probable); Guillaume Bouvier, uncle; Jean Bouvier (a), father of John (John occasionally signed as "Jean"); Jean Bouvier (b), 1st cousin, son of Guillaume; Pierre Bouvier, uncle; Pierre Bouvier, Cousin, son of above; "Sanier" Andre Guillaume Bouvier, 1st cousin, son of Guillaume; Antoine Clavel, husband of Madame Bouvier (the daughter of Pierre Bouvier a); Etienne Clavel, cousin (probable); Pierre Clavel, cousin; Louis Antoine Majolier, 2nd cousin; Justin Paradon, cousin (probable); Emma Peterson, granddaughter, daughter of Louis Antoine Majolier, 2nd cousin; Justin Paradon, cousin (probable); Emma Peterson, granddaughter, daughter of Pierre Bouvier; George Peterson, father of Robert Evans Peterson Hannah Mary Peterson, daughter, wife of Robert Evans Peterson; Jane Evans Peterson, mother of Robert Evans Peterson; Robert Evans Peterson (a), son-in-law, born Nov. 12, 1812, brother of Henry Peterson, author and publisher; partner in law firm with John Bouvier; went into insurance after the Civil War; and Robert ("Rob") Evans Peterson (b), grandson; son of [unknown].

Bibliography
National Cyclopedia of American Biography. Vol. 8, 1. 99; Vol. 16, p. 34

Scope and Content
This collection contains the papers of French-American jurist John Bouvier (1787-1851) and his family in Pennsylvania, including Bouvier's daughter astronomy writer Hannah Mary Bouvier Peterson (1811-1870), his son-in-law Robert Evans Peterson (1812-1869) and the Petersons' son-in-law Philadelphia publisher George William Childs (1829-1894). The papers include letters, documents, and photographs document the family history; personal affairs of John Bouvier; political affairs, including charges of corruption against Pennsylvania Governor William Findlay (1817-1820); Democratic-Republican politics in Pennsylvania (1820-1824), correspondence and business papers Robert Evans Peterson and his wife Hannah Mary Bouvier Peterson (1811-1870), including correspondence concerning Hannah Peterson's astronomy works and her text on astronomy from people eminent in the field. Some of the letters contain corrections of information found in the book; there are also incoming correspondence and documents pertaining to the personal affairs of George William Childs. In addition, there is one box of photographs of military figures, primarily American, and Presidents. Correspondents include James Todd, Alexander James Dallas, Joseph Ritner, Samuel Austin Allibone, James Thomas Fields, Frederick Edwin Church, Charlotte Saunders Cushman, George William Curtis, Henry Martyn Hoyt, and others. There are 29 pieces of John Bouvier and 30 pieces of James Todd.

Some notable items include:

• Bouvier, John. Entry regarding the War of 1812 in his journal. June 1, 1813.
• Dallas, Alexander James. Letter to John Irvine giving professional opinion about a legal document.

Arrangement
Organized in the following series:

1) John Bouvier (1714-1843) (Boxes 1-2)
2) Robert Evans Peterson (1845-1895) and Ephemera (Box 3)
3) George William Childs (1822-1893) (Box 4)
4) Photographs (Box 5)

Arranged chronologically within each series.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library's Online Catalog.
Subjects
Bouvier, Hannah M. (Hannah Mary), 1811-1870 -- Correspondence.
Bouvier, John, 1787-1851 -- Archives.
Childs, George William, 1829-1894.
Findlay, William, 1768-1846.
Peterson, Robert E., 1812-1869 -- Correspondence.
Republican Party (U.S. : 1792-1828)
Astronomy -- Study and teaching -- United States.
Lawyers -- Pennsylvania -- Correspondence.
Insurance -- Pennsylvania -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Politicians -- Pennsylvania -- Archives.
Publishers and publishing -- Pennsylvania -- Correspondence.
Quakers -- Pennsylvania -- Correspondence.
Women astronomers -- United States -- Correspondence.
Philadelphia (Pa.) -- Social life and customs -- 19th century -- Sources.
Pennsylvania -- Politics and government -- 1775-1865 -- Sources.
United States -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.

Forms/Genres
Business records -- United States -- 19th century.
Family papers -- United States.
Letters (correspondence) -- United States.
Photographs -- United States -- 19th century.

Alternate Authors
Allibone, S. Austin (Samuel Austin), 1816-1889.
Childs, George William, 1829-1894, correspondent.
Church, Frederic Edwin, 1826-1900.
Curtis, George William, 1824-1892.
Cushman, Charlotte, 1816-1876.
Dallas, Alexander James, 1759-1817.
Hoyt, Henry M. (Henry Martyn), 1830-1892.
Ritner, Joseph, 1780-1869.
Todd, James.
Peterson, Robert E., 1812-1869.
Bouvier, Hannah M. (Hannah Mary), 1811-1870.

John Bouvier
Box 1 1714-1821
Box 2 1822-1843

Robert Evans Peterson
Box 3 1845-1895 and ephemera

George William Childs
Box 4 1822-1893 (BO 151-217)

Photographs
Box 5

Photographs