Anna Dorothy Mason Bronson Papers: Finding Aid

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Overview of the Collection

Title: Anna Dorothy Mason Bronson Papers
Dates (inclusive): 1848-1857
Collection Number: mssHM 50177-50216
Creator: Bronson, Anna Dorothy Mason, 1830-1910.
Extent: 40 pieces in 1 box
Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Manuscripts Department
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Abstract: This collection contains correspondence from Anna Mason Bronson (1830-1910) in the mid 1800s to her parents while she was a student at Thetford Academy in Vermont and a worker at a cotton mill in Manchester, New Hampshire. The letters discuss family affairs, including news of a brother in the California mines; evangelical religious beliefs; hours, wages, and working and living conditions in the mills; and social life in Manchester, including lyceum lectures, fairs, exhibits, etc.

Language: English.

Access
Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item]. Anna Dorothy Mason Bronson Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance
Purchased from Alta California Bookstore, June 12, 1984.

Biographical Note
Anna Dorothy Mason (1830-1910) was born in September 1830, in Grafton, New Hampshire. Of the five children of Jesse and Dorothy Mason, she was the only daughter. After completing public school, she studied the classics at the Thetford Academy in Vermont. In 1851, the family financial situation worsened and Anna felt compelled to leave the Academy and seek employment.

Like thousands of other young New England women of the time, Anna chose to work in some of the many cotton factories which had sprung up in the region since 1815. She spent almost six years in the mills in Manchester, New Hampshire. Working first at the Manchester Corporation as a weaver, Anna later worked in the drawing room of an Amoskeag Corporation factory. She labored twelve to thirteen hours Monday through Friday and also worked a shorter day on Saturday. After hours she lived in a factory owned and supervised boarding house. For all this her pay rarely exceeded $4.00 a week.

Her parents, who had moved to Greensboro, Vermont, repeatedly urged her to come home and teach, but Anna refused all offers. Most certainly, the money was better in the mill. However, sometime between August 1856 and March 1857, Anna did quit the factory and moved home. On March 23, 1857, she married William D. Bronson of Greensboro, Vermont. Residing on Brondale Farms until her death in 1910, Anna raised three children and apparently never again worked outside the home.

Scope and Content
The letters in the collection cover the period of Anna (Mason) Bronson's schooling at the Thetford Academy in Vermont and her employment in the cotton mills of Manchester. The letters from Thetford provide an interesting perspective on a situation that was probably not all that common in the 1840s - a young woman attending a college preparatory school and boarding away from home.

The majority of the letters were written by Anna to her parents during her six years in the mills. They are full of information on hours, wages, and working and living conditions. Because personal accounts of workers are not that common, the letters
should also be helpful in resolving questions about the adjustment of young farm women to the factory regimen and the impact of industrial work upon family life.

Also discussed are family affairs, including news of a brother in the California mines; evangelical religious belief; and events in and around Manchester, including fires, lyceum lectures, fairs, exhibits, etc.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library's Online Catalog.

Subjects
Bronson, Anna Dorothy Mason, 1830-1910 -- Correspondence.
Manchester Corporation -- History -- Sources.
Amoskeag Manufacturing Company -- History -- Sources.
Thetford Academy -- History -- Sources.
Textile factories -- New Hampshire -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Cotton manufacture -- New England -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Women textile workers -- New England -- Correspondence.
Manchester (N.H.) -- Social life and customs -- Sources.

Forms/Genres
Letters (correspondence) United States.

Alternate Authors
Mason, Jesse.
Mason, Dorothy.