Blanding family papers
1801-1920
(bulk dates 1834-1858)

Abstract: The papers of the Blanding family of Rehoboth, Massachusetts, consist of one linear foot of diaries, family correspondence, and other papers spanning the years 1801-1920, with the majority of the material falling between 1834 and 1858.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 451
Creator: Blanding family.
Title: Blanding family papers
Inclusive Dates: 1801-1920
Bulk Dates: 1834-1858
Extent: 1 linear foot and oversize removals (1 folder) (1 box)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 451, Blanding family papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 1: Shelved in SPEC MSS record center cartons; Removal (F18): Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize boxes (32 inches)

Location: Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/

Source: Purchase, 1957.


Materials Available in Alternative Format: Access to digital copies of the original documents in the Blanding family papers are available by following PDF links in the finding aid below. These digitized files are housed in D-Space, the University of Delaware Institutional Repository, where readers may "browse this collection" by various fields or use advanced searches to query the documents. To find out more information about the digitized collection, please visit .

Access Restrictions: The collection is open for research.

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Physician and naturalist William Blanding was born on February 7, 1773, in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, where his family had lived for five generations. He was the eldest of nine children born to William and Lydia (Ormsbee) Blanding, and his siblings included James Blanding (1781-1870) and Lucy Blanding Carpenter (b. 1783). William attended Rhode Island College (later Brown University) and received his A.B. in 1801. Upon graduation, he returned to Massachusetts, where he briefly taught school in Somerset and practiced medicine for several years in Attleborough. William married Susanna Carpenter of Rehoboth in 1805, and the couple moved to Camden, South Carolina, in 1807. There, William established a medical practice and ran an apothecary.

Susannah Carpenter Blanding died in Camden in 1809 and two years later William married Rachel Willett of Philadelphia. The couple moved from South Carolina to Philadelphia circa 1835, where William practiced medicine and was an active resident member of the Academy of Natural Sciences. Elected to corresponding membership while living in South Carolina in 1825, William made frequent contributions to the Academy’s collection of specimens. He was a renowned naturalist, and is credited with the discovery of a species of turtle known as Blanding’s turtle (Emydoidea blandingii). William left Philadelphia circa 1846 and returned to Rehoboth, Massachusetts. He died there on 19 October 1857.

In his old age, William lived in Rehoboth with the family of his brother, James, who cared for him as his health deteriorated. James and his wife, Elizabeth Carpenter Blanding, the sister of William’s first wife, had eight children, including Susannah (Susan) Carpenter Blanding Arey (b. 1812), Elizabeth Parthenia Blanding Lyon Plimpton (1814-1871), Nancy Augusta Blanding Nattinger (b. 1816), Juliet Maria Blanding (1818-1853), William Willett Blanding (1820-circa 1920), Abram Ormsbee Blanding, M.D. (1823-1892), Lephe Hunt Blanding (1825-1864), and Sarah (Sally) M. Blanding Bowen (1827-1911). Of these children, Nancy, Juliet, and Sarah are the most prominent authors in this collection.

Little is known about the Blanding sisters besides their vital statistics and the information that can be gleaned from this collection. Nancy A. Blanding was born on 31 March 1816 in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. In October of 1840 she spent a year in Philadelphia teaching at the "Foster House" school and enjoying close contact with her aunt and uncle, Rachel and William Blanding. A year later, Nancy traveled from Philadelphia to Springfield, Ohio, to teach school. There she lived with family friends and relatives, among them the Nattinger family. By late 1847 she had returned to Rehoboth, Massachusetts, to live with her parents and siblings. There, she became the primary caregiver to her ailing uncle. On 25 September 1856, Nancy married John G. Nattinger and moved with him to Ottawa, Illinois. The couple had one daughter, Juliette Augusta, who was born on 27 March 1858. Nancy A. Bielding Nattinger died on 11 December 1887 at age 71.

Juliet Maria Blanding was born in Rehoboth on 8 May 1818. In the early 1840s she attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (later Mount Holyoke College) in South Hadley, Massachusetts. In 1843 she traveled to Evansville, Indiana, and lived with the Barnes family while teaching school. By March of 1846 she had returned to Rehoboth, but in October of 1847 she journeyed to Camden, Mississippi, to teach. She took ill in the spring of 1851, and returned to New England that summer. Juliet lived for some time with her sister Susan C. Blanding Arey in New Hampshire, and died in Rehoboth on 7 May 1853.
The youngest of the Blanding children, Sarah M. Blanding, also known as Sally, was born on 21 June 1827. She attended the Seekonk Classical Seminary in the early 1840s, and in November of 1849 she joined her sister, Juliet, teaching school in Camden, Mississippi. Sarah returned to New England with Juliet in 1851, and by 1855 she was living with her parents and siblings in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. She assumed the primary care of her uncle upon Nancy’s departure from Rehoboth in 1856. On 23 February 1865, at age thirty-seven, Sarah married Reuben Bowen. The couple had five children. Sarah M. Blanding Bowen died on 31 December 1911.

**Sources:**

Biographical material was derived from the collection.


Finding Aid to the William Blanding Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. A copy of this finding aid is in the Blanding family papers collection folder.

Griffin, Kathy. Finding aid to the Blanding Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. A copy of this finding aid is in the Blanding family papers collection folder.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of the Blanding family of Rehoboth, Massachusetts, consist of one linear foot of diaries, family correspondence, and other papers spanning the years 1801-1920, with the majority of the material falling between 1834 and 1858. Included are diaries kept by sisters Juliet M. Blanding, Nancy A. Blanding, and Sarah M. Blanding, as well as a brief diary written by their uncle, the distinguished doctor and naturalist William Blanding. There are more than two hundred family letters and other papers, of which William Blanding, his nieces, and other family members are the primary authors. Much of this material, including the diaries of Juliet and Sarah and one hundred and twenty letters, was purchased by the University of Delaware Library in 1957. The provenance of the remainder of the collection is unclear. Unfortunately, the family correspondence and diaries were arranged in chronological order, taped to leaves of paper, and bound into volumes. Though the chronological order has been maintained, all of the manuscripts have been removed from the volumes and are arranged in folders.

The Blanding family papers offer an in-depth look at the life of a New England family in the late 1840s through the 1850s. The family’s correspondence, which constitutes most of Series I, together with the household diary kept by Nancy and Sarah Blanding from 1855-1858 and Nancy Blanding’s diary from 1848-1849, provide a detailed account of the Blanding family’s every day life. The diaries contain almost daily descriptions of the family’s health, chores, travels, correspondence, social activities, and church attendance. The family’s correspondence between 1847-1852 offers a more informal, expressive discussion of these topics. Of particular interest are letters sent from family at Elm Cottage, the Blanding home in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, to Juliet Blanding, who was living in Mississippi.

This collection is also useful to a scholar of nineteenth-century education. The Blanding family diaries and letters provide insight into the work of schoolteachers in various parts of the United States. William Blanding’s diary offers the earliest of such accounts. In the fall of 1801, after graduating from college, William took a job as a schoolmaster in Somerset, Massachusetts. The job was an unpleasant necessity; William had no other prospect of earning money to pay off a debt to a former schoolmate. His diary is often lighthearted and humorous, and it candidly reveals William’s many frustrations with the job and the challenges of teaching in a small town with limited resources. William’s teaching experiences in New England are complemented by the accounts of Nancy, Juliet, and Sarah Blanding, who taught in the Midwest and in Mississippi in the mid-nineteenth century. The women’s personal diaries and letters home discuss their day-to-day experiences as teachers, with details on the conditions of the schoolhouse, the number of students, and the lessons they taught.

Historians interested in the life of Dr. William Blanding will be particularly interested in his correspondence, especially letters he wrote between 1840 and 1846 while living in Philadelphia. His most frequent correspondent was his sister, Lucy Blanding Carpenter, a schoolteacher in Brooklyn, New York. Several of these letters pertain to his work as a naturalist and his interest in shell collecting. He also discussed financial matters, including his investment troubles after the failure of several state banks in the 1840s. Other topics in his letters to Lucy include family and friends, his health, politics and current events, and her work as a teacher.
Lastly, the collection is a valuable resource for historians interested in travel and tourism. The diary of Juliet Blanding provides particularly vivid accounts of her journeys from Rehoboth to Evansville, Indiana, in 1843, and to Camden, Mississippi, in 1847. Juliet traveled by train, coach, and boat, and was often unaccompanied. She passed through upstate New York, Ohio, the East Coast north of Baltimore, the Appalachian Mountains, and the Mississippi River valley. Juliet spent a week in Philadelphia at the outset of her trip to Mississippi, and describes in detail the city and the tourist attractions she visited. Further travel description can be found in the first entry in Nancy Blanding’s 1841 diary, which provides a brief account of her arrival in Ohio.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Blanding, William, 1773-1857.
Blanding, Nancy A., b. 1816.
Blanding, Juliet M., 1818-1853.
Blanding, Sarah M., 1827-1911.
Carpenter, Lucy, b. 1783.

Topical Terms

Teachers--United States--19th century.
Travel--United States--19th century.
Naturalists--United States--19th century.

Geographic Names

Rehoboth (Mass.)--History--19th century--Sources.
Philadelphia (Pa.)--History--19th century--Sources.
Evansville (Ind.)--History--19th century--Sources.
Springfield (Ohio)--History--19th century--Sources.
Somerset (Mass.)--History--19th century--Sources.
Camden (Miss.)--History--19th century--Sources.

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.
Diaries

Occupation

Teachers.
Naturalists.
Personal Contributors

Blanding, William, 1773-1857.

Blanding, Nancy A., b. 1816.

Blanding, Juliet M., 1818-1853.

Blanding, Sarah M., 1827-1911.

Related Materials in other Repositories

There are significant collections of Blanding papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston and the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. Copies of the finding aids to these collections are in the Blanding family papers collection folder. (Please see the manuscript librarian.) There are smaller collections of Blanding papers at the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale (Western Americana Collection) and at Duke University Library. Brown University owns a portrait of Dr. William Blanding, painted circa 1810-1820.
Arrangement

I. Family correspondence, 1834-1920

II. Diaries, 1801-1858
   A. Dr. William Blanding, 1801-1802
   B. Nancy A. Blanding, 1841-1842, 1848-1849
   C. Juliet M. Blanding, 1843, 1847-1851
   D. Sarah M. Blanding, 1850-1851
   E. Household diary, 1855-1858
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Family correspondence, 1834-1920

Correspondence between members of the Blanding family, primarily Dr. William Blanding and the eight children of James Blanding. Also includes other letters received by the Blandings from friends, relatives, and business associates. Several miscellaneous items that are not letters are noted in folder descriptions.

1834-1840 [Box 1 F1]

Includes a brief profile of William Blanding, possibly published by Brown University. A manuscript list of marriages in Rehoboth, 1763-1764, including William Blanding’s paternal aunt, Lucy Blanding. Also includes several letters from William Blanding to his sister, Lucy Carpenter, one to Lucy Carpenter from Rachel Blanding, and other correspondence.

PDF

1841 [Box 1 F2]

Includes an essay written by Juliet Blanding while at Mount Holyoke. Also includes an invitation to a Wistar Party event from John P. Wetherill to William Blanding. (The Wistar Party was the exclusive social organization of the American Philosophical Society.) Also contains several letters from William Blanding to Lucy Carpenter, one to Lucy Carpenter from Rachel Blanding, and other correspondence.

PDF

1842-1843 June [Box 1 F3]

Includes letters from William Blanding to Lucy Carpenter, one letter from Rachel Blanding to Lucy Carpenter, and a letter to William Blanding from an African-American man named Fielding Smithea, who requests Blanding's assistance in conveying a letter to Miss Elizabeth Savage of Philadelphia.

PDF

1843 July-1844 [Box 1 F4]

Includes two brief essays by Sarah Blanding. Also includes letters to Lucy Carpenter from William and Rachel Blanding, a letter to Juliet Blanding in Indiana, and other correspondence.

PDF

1845-1846 June [Box 1 F5]

Includes seven essays by Sarah Blanding, Sarah's report card from Seekonk Classical Seminary, and a sketch, possibly of James Blanding, labeled "My Father." Also includes several letters to Juliet Blanding in Rehoboth.

PDF
1846 October-1847 [Box 1 F6]

[There were no letters for 1846 July-September] Includes a short essay by Sarah Blanding. Also includes several letters to Juliet Blanding from her family and from A. Purriance, the Post Master in Camden, Mississippi, regarding her arrangements to teach there. Also contains letters to Nancy Blanding, Lucy Carpenter, and other correspondence.

PDF

1848 January-1848 April [Box 1 F7]

Includes letters to Juliet Blanding in Mississippi from friends and family. Also includes a letter to Nancy Blanding from Juliet and two letters to William Blanding from his nephews.

PDF

1848 May-1848 December [Box 1 F8]

Contains a program of senior orations delivered at Nassau Hall, Princeton University, including that of E. B. Raffensperger, a friend of Juliet Blanding’s. Also contains a bill of lading for one box to be shipped from Philadelphia to William Blanding in Rehoboth. Also includes letters to Juliet, Elizabeth P., Nancy, and William Blanding.

PDF

1849 January-1849 February [Box 1 F9]

Includes letters written to Juliet, Nancy, William, and James Blanding, and one to Lucy Carpenter.

PDF

1849 March-1849 June [Box 1 F10]

Includes letters to William Blanding, Nancy Blanding, and several to Juliet Blanding from her siblings and others.

PDF

1849 July-1849 September [Box 1 F11]

Includes letters to William, Nancy, and Juliet Blanding. One letter from Lucy Carpenter to William Blanding. Also a receipt for Juliet Blanding’s subscription to the Puritan Recorder, 1849-1851.

PDF

1849 October-1849 December [Box 1 F12]

Includes letters to William, Nancy, James, Elizabeth P. and Juliet Blanding. Also letters to Sarah Blanding, who had moved to Mississippi to join Juliet, and two letters from Abram Blanding to his family.
1850 January-1850 April [Box 1 F13]
Includes family correspondence to Sarah, Nancy, and Juliet Blanding.

1850 May-1850 September [Box 1 F14]
Includes letters to Nancy Blanding from Abram Blanding and from Elizabeth P. Blanding, who was visiting Philadelphia. Also contains other letters to Nancy, Sarah, and Juliet from family members, including one long letter from an ailing William Blanding.

1850 September-1850 December [Box 1 F15]
Letters to Sarah and Juliet Blanding from their siblings and friends.

1851 January-1851 March [Box 1 F16]
Letters to Sarah and Juliet Blanding from their siblings.

1851 April-1851 July [Box 1 F17]
Letters between the Blanding siblings, mostly regarding Juliet's ill health and Abram's journey to Mississippi to accompany her and Sarah to New England.

1852-1920 [Box 1 F18]
[There were no letters for 1851 August-December.] This folder contains correspondence for 1852, including letters from Nancy and William Blanding to Sarah, Juliet, and Abram Blanding, who had returned from Mississippi and were living in New Hampshire. Also includes letters to Juliet from pupils in Mississippi. Contains three letters from 1855; a leaflet regarding Rehoboth High School, 1857; a table of aggregates for the town of Rehoboth, 1866 (removed to oversize); and a draft of the will of William Willett Blanding, 1920.

undated [Box 1 F19]
Includes a tax assessment form addressed to William Blanding and a knot of grass with a label in the hand of William Blanding. Also includes family correspondence between the Blanding siblings, several letters from Lucy Carpenter to William Blanding, and other miscellaneous correspondence and envelopes.
Series II. Diaries, 1801-1858

This series contains the diaries of William, Nancy, Juliet, and Sarah Blanding, as well as a household diary kept by Nancy and Sarah Blanding.

Subseries II.A. Dr. William Blanding, 1801-1802

The diary of William Blanding, chronicling his experience as a schoolmaster in Somerset, Massachusetts, soon after his graduation from Rhode Island College. Includes impressions of Somerset and commentary on his lodgings, his social life, the schoolhouse, teaching, discipline of students, and the local church services.

1801 November-1802 February [Box 1 F20]

Subseries II.B. Nancy A. Blanding, 1841-1842, 1848-1849

Two diaries covering Nancy's work as a schoolteacher in Ohio (1841-1842) and her life with her family in Rehoboth (1848-1849).

1841 October-1842 January [Box 1 F21]

Chronicles Nancy's arrival in Ohio and her adjustment to living with friends and family there. Discusses her daily life including school, chores, church, correspondence, weather, and social activities.

1848 January-1849 March [Box 1 F22]

Account of Nancy's life in Rehoboth with her parents, James and Elizabeth Blanding, her uncle, Dr. William Blanding, and several of her siblings, including Sarah (Sally), Lephe, and William Willett Blanding. Nancy writes about the health of her family, particularly her uncle, and the family's daily chores, activities, social calls, incoming and outgoing correspondence, and the weather. See also Household diary, 1855-1858, in folders 34-41.

Subseries II.C. Juliet M. Blanding, 1843, 1847-1851

Two diaries covering Juliet's work as a schoolteacher in Evansville, Indiana (1843), and in Camden, Mississippi (1847-1851). Also includes a brief teaching notebook, [2 September 1850].

1843 August-1843 November [Box 1 F23]

An account of Juliet's trip to Indiana and her arrival in Evansville to live with the Barnes family. Also includes brief daily entries describing her first two months as a schoolteacher.
1847 October-1848 March [Box 1 F24]

The first month describes Juliet's trip to Mississippi, including a weeklong stop in Philadelphia. The remainder of her journal contains brief daily entries about the weather, her school, church, social activities, and news about family and local friends.

1848 March-1848 August [Box 1 F25]

1848 August-1849 January [Box 1 F26]

1849 January-1849 July [Box 1 F27]

1849 July-1850 July [Box 1 F28]

1850 July-1851 April [Box 1 F29]

The diary concludes on 1 April 1851, a few months before Juliet's return to New England because of ill health.

[1850 September 2] [Box 1 F30]

A brief notebook that lists names of students and contains notes on teaching.

Subseries II.D. Sarah M. Blanding, 1850-1851

A diary of Sarah's experiences as a teacher in Camden, Mississippi, where she lived with her sister, Juliet. Provides an account of her work, social activities, correspondence and the weather. The diary ends shortly after Juliet takes ill in the spring of 1851.

1850 January-1850 April [Box 1 F31]

1850 April-1850 December [Box 1 F32]
Subseries II.E. Household diary, 1855-1858

This diary chronicles the daily life of the Blanding family in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. Family members regularly mentioned include William ("Uncle"), James, Elizabeth C., Nancy, Lephe, Sarah, and William W. Blanding, as well as Elizabeth P. Blanding Plimpton, who lived nearby in Providence. The entries were recorded almost daily and regularly included details on the weather; William Blanding's health; the daily chores, health, and travels of other family members; local activities and social calls; incoming and outgoing correspondence; church attendance; and news of family and friends. See also Nancy Blanding's diary, 1848-1849, in folder 22. The writing is shared by Nancy and Sarah Blanding as follows: Nancy writes 1855 January 1-1855 February 11 and 1855 March 30-1856 April 26. Sarah writes 1855 February 12-1855 March 29 and 1856 May 1-1858 April 30.

1855 January-1855 March [Box 1 F34]

1855 April-1855 September [Box 1 F35]

1856 January-1856 March [Box 1 F36]
[There were no entries for 1855 September 2-1855 December 31. The entry for 1856 January 1 begins with a description of the previous four months.]

1856 April-1856 September [Box 1 F37]

1856 October-1856 December [Box 1 F38]

1857 January-1857 March [Box 1 F39]

1857 April-1857 September [Box 1 F40]

1857 December-1858 April [Box 1 F41]
[There were no entries for 1857 September 7-1857 November 30. Dr. William Blanding died during this break in entries and his death is not noted in subsequent entries.]