

Sturgis Library Archives | The Knowles-Thacher Papers
Genealogical and Personal Document Collection

Knowles-Thacher Papers
MS. 15

Volume: .5 linear foot

Content: Correspondence to members of the Knowles and Thacher families, primarily letters to Eleanor Pratt (Knowles) Thacher, daughter of Captain Allen H. Knowles and wife of Frank Thacher, from her relatives and friends. Also includes a letter written by Frank Thacher during his service in the Civil War, and the 1835 diaries of Mary Rowe Knowles.

Provenance: Gift of Isabel Harris Matterson, granddaughter of Eleanor Knowles-Thacher, of Ames Iowa, in 1989. Civil War letter written by Frank Thacher donated by Caroline Matterson of Bloomington, MN on July 11, 2009. Mary Rowe Knowles letters donated by Caroline Matterson in June of 2021.

Restrictions: None stated. Credit Sturgis Library Archives.

Processed by: Pamela Narbeth, 5/98. Material added and finding aid updated by Lucy Loomis, January 2010 and July of 2021.

Biographical note: This collection contains correspondence between three generations of the Knowles family of Cape Cod in the mid-nineteenth century, primarily of Eleanor Pratt (Knowles) Thacher, who lived on Cape Cod from 1839 to 1912.

Eleanor was born April 22, 1839 to Mary (Rowe) Knowles and Captain Allen H[inckley] Knowles. Her father was a sea captain who was away at sea for long periods of time, and her daughter misses him a great deal as a small child. This is mentioned in the earliest letters of the collection, those of Mary Rowe Knowles to her husband Allen. Starting a few months before their marriage in 1836, Mary Rowe writes to her "dear friend", then husband, Captain Allen Knowles, frequently until 1842. Most of the letters dwell on her loneliness and how she misses him, although she speaks lovingly of their daughter Eleanor, also called Ellen. The last letter announces the birth of her second daughter, Eleanor's younger sister, whom they would name Mary after her mother.

Mary Knowles was not a healthy woman, and her children were sent to relatives for a portion of their childhoods. Eleanor lived with their grandmother in Brewster and Mary lived with their "Aunty Betsy" in Orleans. Her aunt wrote many letters to Eleanor during her childhood, and sent along letters from her sister. She also received letters from her father, Captain Allen Knowles, while he was at sea, and from her uncle, Captain Josiah Knowles. Her mother dies in the mid-1840s, and Captain Knowles marries Caroline Doane of West Yarmouth in 1849. As Eleanor grows older she goes away to school. Her number of correspondents broadens to include friends and Franklin Thacher, whom she

married on November 18, 1869. They first lived in Yarmouth, then moved to Hyannis in 1874. They had four children named Eben, Frank, Winslow and Caroline. The correspondence of the later years includes some from her husband Frank, her children to her and to each other, presumably saved by their mother with her letters. The correspondence ends in 1888, when she is 49, but she lives until 1913.

Scope and content note: The Knowles - Thacher papers consist of collections of personal letters and diaries from three generations of the Knowles and related families and a few documents. The letters cover the period of 1836 to 1888, and the legal documents from 1851 to 1870. They are divided into two series: Correspondence and Legal Documents.

Series I contains personal letters from 1836 to 1888 and are primarily letters received by Eleanor Pratt Knowles Thacher, spanning 50 years of her life from childhood to wife and motherhood. The writers are members of her immediate family and friends and are full of family and neighbor news, illnesses and deaths. The earliest letters from 1836 to 1842 are letters from Eleanor's mother Mary Rowe Knowles to her friend, then husband, Captain Allen H[inckley] Knowles. They were saved by their daughter Eleanor, along with her own correspondence, which continues until 1888. This is primarily letters from her husband Franklin Thacher, and her children.

Series II contains a few Legal Documents, consisting of an appointment, will and estate papers, Eleanor's marriage certificate, and some genealogical notes.

Series III contains the 3-volume 1835 diaries of Mary Rowe Knowles.

All of the materials are copied for access, and the copies and originals are foldered separately.

THE KNOWLES-THACHER PAPERS CONTAINER LIST

Box	Folder	Contents
SERIES I - CORRESPONDENCE, 1836 - 1888: copies and original letters filed separately		
1	1	Correspondence from Mary Rowe Knowles to Captain Allen H. Knowles; 1836-1842 COPIES
1	2	Correspondence, Betsy Knowles, aunt of Eleanor, of Orleans; n.d., 1848. COPIES
1	3	Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; 1848 - July 15, 1854. COPIES
1	4	Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; 1855 - 1859. COPIES
1	5	Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; 1860 - 1873 COPIES
1	6	Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; 1874 - 1879 COPIES
1	7	Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; 1880 - 1888 COPIES

- 1 8 Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; undated letters and unmatched envelopes. COPIES
- 1 9 Correspondence from Mary Rowe Knowles to Captain Allen H. Knowles (Eleanor's parents), 1836-1842 ORIGINALS
- 1 10 Correspondence of "Aunti Becky" Knowles, 1848, [1849?] ORIGINALS
- 1 11 Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; Feb. 20 1848 - July 15, 1854. ORIGINALS
- 1 12 Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles; June 27, 1855 - Nov. 8, 1859. ORIGINALS
- 1 13 Correspondence to Eleanor Pratt Knowles, and Eleanor Knowles Thacher after 1869; July 25, 1860 -Jan. 2, 1873. ORIGINALS
- 1 14 Correspondence to Eleanor Knowles Thacher; 1874-1879 ORIGINALS
- 1 15 Correspondence to Eleanor Knowles Thacher; 1880-1888 ORIGINALS
- 1 16 Correspondence to Eleanor Knowles Thacher; undated letters and unmatched envelopes. ORIGINALS
- 1 17 Correspondence from Frank Thacher to Mrs. Davis, written from Newborn, North Carolina, December 5th, 1862, while he served in Company E, 5th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteers during the Civil War with the "Yarmouth Boys."

SERIES II: LEGAL DOCUMENTS; 1851-1870s, original documents and copies filed separately.

- 1 18 Legal Documents - certificate of appointment to Ebenezer Knowles (Eleanor's uncle) as Postmaster of Brewster, 1851; marriage certificate of Frank Thacher (written Thatcher) and Eleanor P. Knowles, Nov. 18, 1869; will, receipts, lists of sales, accounts of estate of Winslow L. Knowles, 1870(Eleanor's grandfather); some family genealogy notes. COPIES
- 1 19 Legal Documents above ORIGINALS

SERIES III: DIARIES, 1835

- 1 20 3 diaries of Mary Rowe Knowles, 1835.