



Guide to the Fairbank Family Papers, 1837-1971

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Summary

Collection Title:

Fairbank Family papers, 1837-1971

Creator:

Fairbank family

Extent:

4.8 Linear Feet
circa 3,600 Items

Physical Location:

For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

Language:

English.

Collection ID:

RL.00378

Permalink:

<https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/fairbank/>

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Background

Scope and Content

The Fairbank Family Papers consist almost exclusively of correspondence written between members of the Fairbank family and their religious associates. The letters, carried by steamer between India, America and other parts of the world, span the years 1837-1971, with the bulk occurring between 1905 and 1940. Earlier letters were sent by Samuel Bacon, Katie, and Emily Fairbank and Thomas Snell Smith to Samuel's brother and other relatives in the United States.

This collection is useful in providing a comprehensive view of the religious, educational, bureaucratic and financial aspects of mission work in an underdeveloped country. Since this is documented by letters written by the missionaries themselves, it provides personal insights into their daily life and work. The lives of women missionaries in particular are well-documented, since many of the correspondents were female. Despite the fact that the Fairbanks

worked in India during a period of British occupation, involvement of the British government in mission activity is rarely noted in the correspondence.

A number of themes run consistently through all the correspondence. There is a great deal of family news, including accounts of trips ranging from ocean voyages to family visits and vacations in India and America. Births, deaths, weddings and illnesses are chronicled in detail. Letters also include descriptions of church and school activities, work-related trips, meetings, conferences, and visits by religious and government officials and missionaries from other parts of the world. There is occasional discussion of contemporary world events, such as World War I, the Great Depression, and the rise of Gandhi in India. Yearly letters from a missionary friend in Foochow, China relate the turbulent events and political climate there between 1911-1931 in detail, including the Foochow rebellion of 1911. Observations and anecdotes about the Indian people, their religion, food and way of life; discussion of the political and economical climate in India; and descriptions of the physical environment and climate are woven throughout, although they rarely dominate any one letter. Many letters were written in a round-robin format and passed through the hands of different family members. Most of the correspondence is one-sided, generated in India and sent to the United States.

According to background material found in the Printed material series, the Fairbanks worked as agents of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (A.B.C.F.M.), a religious organization that was later known as the United Church Board for World Ministries, and had its home offices in Massachusetts. The A.B.C.F.M. established a network of boarding schools, trade schools, hospitals and churches at its mission sites. Schools and hospitals were divided by gender into male and female units. The mission's major goals were to: increase the literacy of the Indian people, educate women, establish good health care practices, improve agricultural productivity, develop industry, raise the standard of living of the lower classes, and, ultimately, to train Indians to be their own Christian leaders in all of these areas. Involvement of Fairbank family members in all of these activities is documented in the Correspondence and Beals Family series. The American Marathi Mission, where most of the Fairbanks worked, was located in West Central India in an area which included Bombay, and eventually covered 80 villages within 500 square miles.

Most of the letters fall into two generational groupings: those of Samuel Bacon Fairbank and those of his children. These are contained in both the Correspondence and Beals Family series.

Samuel's letters, 1837-1898, were sent regularly to America. They include detailed accounts of his agricultural and teaching projects in and around Vadala, as well as descriptions of the Indian environment. He conducted experiments with agricultural methods and farm machinery to increase the productivity of the land and people, who were subject to frequent droughts and famine. He started a boarding school in Vadala and a higher school in

Ahmednagar. He also taught the singing of hymns in Marathi, the dialect of India spoken in that region.

There are quite a few letters from Samuel's daughters, Katie and Emily, and his son-in-law, Thomas Snell Smith. They describe their activities as missionaries to friends and relatives in America. Katie, who left a teaching career in the United States, taught rug-weaving and lace making at a girls' school in Ahmednagar. Later, stationed at Wai, she gave religious counsel and led Bible readings for patients in the women's hospital. Emily ran a girls' boarding school in Ceylon, while Thomas helped administer the school system throughout the district, attending to a variety of religious, financial and educational duties.

Letters from Samuel's son, Henry Fairbank and Henry's wife, Mary ("Momo"), written from Ahmednagar, comprise the majority of correspondence during the period 1905-1926. They describe his work while serving as chairman of the Ahmednagar mission and pastor of the church, and in various other capacities for famine relief and religious leadership as needed. The first portion consists mainly of weekly letters sent to their children while attending school in America. Later letters are addressed collectively to other relatives in Illinois and Massachusetts. After Henry's death, Mary assumed the role of chief correspondent from Ahmednagar. She eventually became the head of the village schools and their teachers in the Ahmednagar District, but her letters focus more on family news than on meetings and professional activities.

From about 1926 until 1940, the majority of letters are round-robin notes from Edward Fairbank and his wife, Mary, in Vadala to relatives and friends in America. Much of the time he was away from home, touring in the villages of his district. He paid frequent visits to the Indian and American teachers and pastors who worked in the mission, hearing reports and offering consultation and guidance for the administration of churches and schools. He also had charge of a language school in Mahableshwar, where Americans were trained in the Marathi dialect. Mary was involved in orphan care and famine relief, as well as various religious and educational interests. She began a lace-making industry in Vadala for girls. These letters are written mostly by Edward. Letters from their son, Robert, who assisted Edward in these duties, become frequent in the late 1920s. There is very little correspondence after 1940.

The Beals Family series consists of accounts of mission work done by Rose and Lester in the hospital at Wai. There are also quite a few printed newsletters sent to patrons in America which include accounts of hospital activity and Indian life and culture. Rose had charge of health care for women and children at the hospital.

Scattered throughout the Correspondence series are handwritten letters from other family members and friends living in both India and America, mostly containing family news. Letters printed for distribution among patrons in

America containing descriptions of mission activities and the development of new facilities can be found at regular intervals.

Related manuscript collections in the Rubenstein Library are the papers of E.Loleta Wood and the papers of Joseph L. Moulton, both of whom worked in the Ahmednagar District.

Biographical/Historical

This collection encompasses three generations of the Fairbanks, a Protestant family that had roots in New England and later relocated to Illinois. There was an extensive network of family members and associates, bound together by their Christian ideals and way of life. Many of the Fairbanks married other missionaries from families such as the Woods, Moultons, Humes, Beals and Hardings. A number of Fairbank relatives remained in and around Jacksonville, Illinois while others went to Massachusetts for their education or traveled to India to carry out years of missionary service.

Biographical/Historical

Samuel Bacon Fairbank, the first family member to travel to India, was born on December 14, 1822 in Stamford, Connecticut. After spending his boyhood years in New England, he was educated at Illinois College, where he received a B.A. in 1842, an M.A. in 1845 and a D.D. in 1897. He attended Andover Seminary in 1845. On March 26, 1846, he married Abbie Allen, and traveled with her to India that same year, under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (A.B.C.F.M.). He lived primarily in the Vadala District, carrying out his work as a missionary among the rural Indians who lived in villages throughout the region. Samuel married his second wife, Mary Ballantine on July 11, 1856, following the death of Abbie Allen in 1852. With Mary he had ten of his fourteen children, and remained in India for over 50 years of almost continuous service until his death on May 31, 1898.

Many of Samuel's children followed their parents' precedent and also entered into missionary service. They include Emily, Katie, Henry, Edward, and Rose. Emily Maria Fairbank was born November 24, 1846 in Ahmednagar, India. She married Thomas Snell Smith in 1871. The two spent many years working in the Jaffna District of Ceylon, another A.B.C.F.M. mission.

Biographical/Historical

Katie Fairbank was born in Ahmednagar on May 8, 1859. She attended Mount Holyoke Seminary, and graduated from Bradford Academy in 1879. She went to India in 1882 and married Dr. Robert Hume of the Wai District on September 7, 1887. Katie spent many years working in that district, and remained after

her husband returned to the United States to die. At the age of 70, she was appointed to serve yet another missionary term. She died on April 14, 1932.

Biographical/Historical

Henry Fairbank was born in Vadala, India on June 30, 1862. At the age of thirteen, he was sent to Massachusetts to begin his formal education. He graduated from Amherst College in 1883 and Yale Divinity School in 1886. He returned that same year to India as a missionary and married Ruby Harding on September 16, 1886. With her he had three children, Samuel, Alan and Ruth, all of whom were educated in the United States and remained there to live and work. He remained in India's Vadala District from 1886-1898, then took a furlough in America until 1899. Upon his return, he was given charge of a large high school and an industrial school in the Ahmednagar District. His first wife died in 1906. In 1908 he married another missionary, Mary Etta Moulton, who was often called "Momo." In 1916, Henry was appointed principal of the Union Theological Seminary in Ahmednagar, a post he held until his death. He was awarded an Honorary D.D. from Yale in 1923. He died on September 19, 1926. Mary died on July 28, 1933.

Biographical/Historical

Edward Fairbank, born June 5, 1867 in Kodaikanal, India and educated at Amherst College and Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, spent most of his missionary career stationed in the Vadala District. He married Mary Adelaide Caskey, who had attended Mount Holyoke College, on June 14, 1893. Edward died on July 9, 1963. Edward and Mary had a son, Robert Fairbank. Robert graduated from Amherst College in 1920 and returned to India that same year to teach in the Vadala District. He graduated from the Hartford Theological Seminary in 1926, and returned to Vadala with his wife, Marie Lively, as a full missionary. In 1938, the James Friendship Memorial Hospital was opened there under his leadership.

Biographical/Historical

Rose Fairbank, born August 1, 1874 in Ahmednagar, graduated from Smith College in 1885. She was trained as a doctor at Johns Hopkins University and received her medical degree in 1900. She served as head of the Union Mission Hospital in India until 1905, when she married Dr. Lester Beals. Together they built the Willis F. Pierce Memorial Hospital in Wai, near Bombay, which they managed until their retirement in 1941. The Beals then returned to the United States and eventually settled in California. Rose died on March 24, 1955, leaving behind three children, Albert, Annette, and Charlotte.

Biographical/Historical

Other children of Samuel Bacon Fairbank who worked in India, but whose letters do not appear as frequently in the collection, are Mary Crocker Fairbank and Mary Darling Fairbank.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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askRL@duke.edu

URL: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in the Fairbank Family papers have not been transferred to Duke University.

Acquisition Information

The Fairbank Family papers (1837-1974) were donated to the Rubenstein Library in 1983, 1985 and 1986 by members of the Fairbank family.

Processing Information

Processed by: Denise Dolan and Janie C. Morris

Completed June 24, 1991

Encoded by Stephen Douglas Miller

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Names and Subjects

- Missionaries -- India -- Pictorial works
- Women missionaries -- India
- World War, 1914-1918
- Foochow (China) -- Politics and government
- Missionaries -- India -- Vadala (District)
- Depressions -- 1929
- Missionaries, Medical -- India -- Wai (District)
- Missions -- India -- Agricultural work
- Missions -- India -- Educational work
- India -- Economic conditions
- Missionaries -- India -- Ahmednagar (District)
- Missionaries -- Sri Lanka
- India -- Social life and customs
- India -- Description and travel
- Fairbank, Henry, 1862-1926
- Fairbank, Edward, 1867-1963
- Beals, Rose Fairbank, 1874-1955
- Beals, Lester
- American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
- United Church Board for World Ministries
- Willis F. Pierce Memorial Hospital (India: Wai District)
- Smith, Emily Maria Fairbank, b. 1846
- Smith, Thomas Snell
- Gandhi, Mahatma, 1869-1948
- Hume, Katie Fairbank, 1859-1932
- Fairbank, Robert
- Fairbank, Samuel Bacon, 1822-1898
- Fairbank, Mary Caskey
- Fairbank, Mary Etta Moulton, d. 1933

Collection Inventory

DIARY SERIES

Henry Fairbanks diary, 1894-1902

Box 1

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CORRESPONDENCE SERIES

Transcripts and lists of letters, 1871-1897	Box 1
1837, Sept.-1883	Box 1
Physical Description: 5 folders	
1884-1906, Apr.	Box 2
Physical Description: 6 folders	
1906, May-1909	Box 3
Physical Description: 6 folders	
1910-1911	Box 4
Physical Description: 5 folders	
1912-1914, June	Box 5
Physical Description: 5 folders	
1914, July-1920, June	Box 6
Physical Description: 5 folders	
1920, July-1922, Oct.	Box 7
Physical Description: 6 folders	
1922, Nov.-1925, Aug.	Box 8
Physical Description: 4 folders	
1925, Sept.-1930, Feb.	Box 9
Physical Description: 5 folders	
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Physical Description: 6 folders	
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MISCELLANEOUS SERIES

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Genealogy--Journal, 1835-1930, undated	Box 11
Photographs: 1867-1918, undated (numbered)	Box 11
Physical Description: 2 folders	
1899-1940, undated	Box 11

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PRINTED MATERIAL SERIES

Clippings, 1916-1968	Box 11
Missionary work: India, 1898-1977, undated	Box 11
General, 1921-1924, undated	Box 11
Programs and announcements, 1879-1971, undated	Box 11

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BEALS FAMILY SERIES

Correspondence, 1920-1936	Box 12
Physical Description: 6 folders	
Miscellaneous, 1884-1986, undated	Box 12

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OVERSIZE MATERIAL

Miscellaneous Series, 1937-1939, undated	Box Sec. A OV8
Physical Description: 2 folders	
Printed material Series, undated	Box Sec. A OV8

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