



Guide to the William Righter and Mary Wager Fisher Papers, 1830-1934

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David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

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Summary

Collection Title:

William Righter and Mary Wager Fisher papers, 1830-1934

Creator:

Fisher, William Righter

Extent:

4.5 Linear Feet

2,850 Items

Physical Location:

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

Language:

English

Language:

English.

Collection ID:

RL.00398

Permalink:

<http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/fisher/>

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Background

Scope and Content

The papers of the lawyer and educator William Righter Fisher and the journalist Mary Wager Fisher consist primarily of correspondence, but also include photographs (several of them tintypes and cartes-de-visite), financial papers, diaries, clippings, printed material, and writings and speeches. Among correspondents are many journalists, physicians, educators, and other notable figures of the late nineteenth century including Lucy Abbott, Mercy Baker, Jennie Chapin, Mary L. Booth, W.S. Burke, James Gowdy Clark, M.E. Dodge, Weston Flint, P. Girard, S. D. Harris, Albert Leffingwell, Henry C. Olney, W. Trickett, George Boyer Vashon, and Frank J. Webb. The collection also includes letters from James B. Hazelton of the First Regiment, New York Artillery. Hazelton's letters describe battles and political events of the Civil War,

including Lincoln's re-election campaign and the anti-draft riots. The papers are particularly rich in documentation of women in medicine and women's medical education in the second half of the nineteenth century; the Freedmen's schools in the Reconstruction South; the movement for women's rights; and friendship among American women in the late Victorian era.

The Correspondence Series includes letters from three prominent women physicians of the period (Jennie Chapin, Mercy N. Baker, and Lucy M. Abbott) to Mary Wager before her marriage to Fisher. In their letters they described their medical education, their obstetrical experience, and the high cost of tuition and living expenses at the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia. Letters prior to her marriage in 1876 also attest to Wager's numerous romantic involvements. Among her admirers was lawyer and educator Weston Flint, and the Correspondence Series includes over 100 letters from him describing his political, social, and literary interests as well as his deep affection for Mary Wager. He also wrote about his wartime travels and his interest in helping the contrabands medically and educationally. Flint detailed political events of the Civil War, including Lincoln's re-election campaign and the anti-draft riots, and mentions the Copperheads. He expressed particular interest in the moral state of soldiers, decrying their drinking of alcohol and consorting with prostitutes. Flint sometimes included poetry in his letters.

Also in the Correspondence Series are two letters (1870) from Frank J. Webb, the author of *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857), a daring novel about an interracial couple. In one of these letters dated May 5, he referred to a 500-page manuscript sent to Harper's for an unpublished novel, *Paul Sumner*, which he considered to be superior to *The Garies*. In a four-page letter to Wager (April 9, 1870), African American writer, attorney, and educator George Boyer Vashon provided an autobiography. The events of his life were penned on the letterhead of *The New Era: A National Journal*, Edited by Colored Men.

The collection offers insight into emotionally intense friendships between women of the nineteenth century. Wager's female friends sent good wishes, but expressed great jealousy at the time of her marriage to Fisher. Young women wrote of both romantic and sisterly love for Mary, and sometimes discussed such issues as women's education, women's dress, women's suffrage, and temperance.

The bulk of William Righter Fisher's letters in the collection were written between him and his parents. A small cache of letters from author and dean of Dickenson College Law School William Trickett, who lived in Germany in 1872, provide a vivid illustration of the political climate and structure of the Germany of Bismarck. Also to be found among letters to Fisher are several written in the late 1860's by agents of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's school in Wytheville, Virginia.

While the bulk of the collection consists of correspondence, some speeches and writings by Mary Wager Fisher and Weston Flint are included. Of particular

interest is a photocopy of Mary Wager's article entitled " Women as Physicians." Also, the Pictures Series includes both cartes-de-visite and tintypes.

The William Righter and Mary Wager Fisher Papers provide numerous windows through which researchers can view aspects of late Victorian America. The collection provides an unusual entree into the private and public lives of nineteenth-century men and women, and particularly provides information about the professionalization of American women, relationships between women in nineteenth-century America, and race relations in the Reconstruction South.

Biographical/Historical

William Righter Fisher

Date	Description
1849 June 27	Born in Montgomery County, Pa. to Wiliam A. and Sarah Fisher
1870	Graduated from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa.
1871-1874	Attended Universities of Heidelberg and Munich
1874-1876	Taught modern languages at Dickinson College
1876 Jan. 4	Married Mary Wager
1876	Admitted to Philadelphia bar and began to practice law
1932 Feb. 18	Died in Philadelphia, Pa.

Mary Wager Fisher

Date	Description
1845	Born in Lansing, N.Y.
1864	Graduated from Alfred University

Date	Description
1866	Taught freedmen at Dr. Manly's school in Richmond, Va.
1870	Became journalist, covering political events in Washington, D.C.
1872	Wrote series of articles entitled, "The Traveller Abroad" for The Rural New Yorker
1876	Married William Righter Fisher
1915 July 1	Died in Bryn Mawr, Pa.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection.

All or portions of this collection may be housed off-site in Duke University's Library Service Center. There may be a 48-hour delay in obtaining these materials.

Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library to use this collection.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in the William Righter and Mary Wager Fisher Papers have not been transferred to Duke University. For further information, see the section on copyright in the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The papers of William Righter and Mary Wager Fisher were purchased by Duke University in 1993.

Processing Information

Processed by Melissa J. Delbridge and Joann Kleinneier

Completed June 30, 1996

Encoded by Stephen D. Miller

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Names and Subjects

- Women in medicine -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Freedmen -- Education -- Southern States -- History -- 19th century
- Draft Riot, New York, N.Y., 1863
- Female friendship -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Tintypes (prints)
- Women teachers -- Southern States -- History -- 19th century
- Women's rights -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Presidential candidates -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Cartes-de-visite
- Booth, Mary L. (Mary Louise), 1831-1889
- Chapin, Jennie
- Abbott, Lucy
- Baker, Mercy
- Webb, Frank J.
- Vashon, George Boyer, 1824-1878

- Trickett, William, 1840-1928
- United States. Army. New York Artillery Regiment, 5th
- Leffingwell, Albert, 1845-1916
- Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865
- Fisher, William Righter
- Flint, Weston
- Fisher, Mary Wager, 1845-1915
- Fisher, William Righter, 1849-1932

Collection Inventory

Correspondence, 1830-1934 and undated

Scope and Contents note

Letters to and from Mary Wager and William Righter Fisher and friends, family members, and associates. Correspondents include many educators, artists, and illustrious Americans of the period.

Arranged chronologically.

1830 Jan. 18-1868 Dec. 31	Box 1
Physical Description: 15 folders	
1869 Jan. 6-1875 May 13	Box 2
Physical Description: 19 folders	
1875 June 5-1934 Mar. 12 and undated	Box 3
Physical Description: 12 folders	

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Financial Papers, 1839 Apr. 11-1901 Apr. 1 and undated

Scope and Contents note

Small personal account books, pages of William Fisher's accounts with merchants in Pennsylvania, and receipts.

Arranged chronologically.

1839 Apr. 11-1901 Apr. 1 and undated	Box 3
Physical Description: 2 folders	

1879 July 14

Oversize-folder 1

Physical Description: 1 item

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Pictures, undated

Scope and Contents note

14 photographs, mostly portraits of unidentified young men and women taken by Philadelphia photographers. None of the photographs are dated. Series includes cartes-de-visite and tintypes.

N.d.

Box 3

Physical Description: 1 folder

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Diary, 1879 Jan. 1-Dec. 1

Scope and Contents note

Small personal diary belonging to William A. Fisher. Entries are brief accounts of daily activities.

1879 Jan. 1-Dec. 1 (1 vol.)

Box 3

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Clippings, 1859 Mar. 9-1915 July 18 and undated

Scope and Contents note

Clippings concerning friends and family members of the Fishers, as well as items of general interest to them. Includes poetry by Mary Wager Fisher, her obituary, and a few short articles about her.

Arranged chronologically.

1859 Mar. 9-1915 July 18 and undated

Box 3

Physical Description: 1 folder

1869 Aug. 4-1915 July 18

Oversize-folder 2

Physical Description: 5 items

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Printed Material, 1861-1876

Scope and Contents note

Transcript of Supreme Court case, " Elizabeth C. Acuff vs. John Righter" and the Fishers' wedding invitation.

1861-1876

Box 3

Physical Description: 1 folder

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Writings and Speeches, 1862 Aug. 2-1864 July 21 and undated

Scope and Contents note

Manuscript of "Tempus Fugit," a poem by Weston Flint; photocopy of article by Mary Wager Fisher entitled " Women as Physicians" (copied from The Galaxy, 1863 Dec.); anonymous manuscript poem entitled, " Watkins' Glen;" fragments of articles and speeches; and a page from a manuscript speech by Mary Wager Fisher imploring the women of Allegeny County to donate provisions for soldiers and their families.

Arranged chronologically.

1862 Aug. 2-1864 July 21 and undated

Box 3

Physical Description: 1 folder

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Miscellaneous Papers, 1864 Jan. 23-1899 Jan. 2 and undated

Scope and Contents note

Lease for the rental of a house belonging to William A. Fisher, form letter signed by Weston Flint requesting that a commanding officer send the descriptive role to U.S. General Hospital, an address book, list of members of the Peoples' Institute, drawings, calling cards, and assorted covers.

Arranged chronologically with calling cards and covers at the end.

1864 Jan. 23-1899 Jan. 2 and undated

Box 3

Physical Description: 1 folder

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