



Benson and Nichols Family Papers

COLLECTION, MS B134

DATE

1800 – 1966

CONTRIBUTOR

Fairfield Museum

ADMINISTRATIVE/BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY ELEMENT

Abraham Benson moved from New York to Fairfield after becoming enamored with the town; as a young boy he would work on the ships bringing goods to the town. His first wife was the daughter of General Jarvis; she lived about one year after marriage. His second wife was Grissel Burr, with whom he had 11 children. After her death, he married Finette Edwards of New Milford, 30 years his junior, with whom he had a daughter, Finette.

He owned several ships and regularly went to the West Indies. During the War of 1812 he managed a store out of his home, known as Benson House, and was Commissary to General Ford and the fort at Grover's Hill.

During the 1830's, the home was turned into an inn or tavern, a popular stop for Daniel Webster and Washington Irving. One of the largest inns in the area, it was a stagecoach stop from New York to Boston.

The Benson Home has seen several remodels since then, including the removal of the inn section. The home remained in the Benson family, passing down to Abraham and Finette's daughter, Finette Edwards Benson Nichols, and her two daughters, Finette Benson Nichols and Emma Starr Nichols. After the death of Finette Benson Nichols, the house passed to Gertrude Haynes Johnson Peden, and then to her daughter, Marcia Peden Miner.

SCOPE & CONTENT

Deeds, financial papers, shipping papers, and papers related to Abraham Benson's service as postmaster, as well as items relating to the Benson House inn. Items marked with an asterisk (*) are believed to relate to the fort at Black Rock.

Family and probate papers for Abraham and Finette Benson, information about the house itself, as well as papers and photographs of Finette and John Nichols.

ARRANGEMENT

The collection is arranged into series on the Benson family, the Nichols family, and the Benson house.

Collection Contents

Benson and Nichols Family Papers

Series 4: Benson House

Miscellaneous information about Benson House, 131 S. Benson Road, including historical descriptions, insurance policies and a list of books from the house to be sold

Series 3: Genealogical Material

Information on Edwards, Benson, Nichols, Haynes, and Peden family lines

Series 2: Finette Nichols and John Nichols

Papers of Finette Nichols and John Nichols

Estate of Finette E. Nichols

Series 1: Abraham and Finette Benson

Folder 8: Poetry

Handwritten copies of poems or fragments, no date

Folder 7: Benson Family materials

Marriage certificate 1831

Letter A. Benson to Finette Benson, 1832

Letter Susan Ann Benson to A. Benson, 1832

Letter Lydia Starr Edwards to Finette E. Benson and Finette Benson, 1859

Correspondence about Finette Benson's application for a pension for A. Benson's War of 1812 service

Letters to Finette Benson from Harriet Johnson and other relatives

Printed engraving of Theodosia Burr, reportedly given to the Bensons by Aaron Burr, who was a passenger on a Benson ship on the Hudson.

Reproduction photographs of paintings or dauguerreotypes of Hevlyn Benson, Emmeline Benson, and Silas Benson (collection of New York Historical Society)

Folder 6: Abraham Benson Financial Transactions

2) Isaac Hobart's account against Abraham Benson 1821

3) Abraham Benson account due from Abel Hubbell 1812

4) Abraham Benson debts paid 1814

5) Abraham Benson receipt for 29 muskets and co. from Gershom Burr 1814*

6) David Rowel Account against Abraham Benson 1814

7) Monies owed from Abraham Benson estate

8) David Rowel Account against Abraham Benson 1815

9) Seymour Taylor \$7.00 note of monies owed from Abraham Benson

10) Abraham Benson to Ephraim Burr receipt 1816

11) Abraham Benson to Ephraim Jennings 1821

12) Abraham Benson to D.F. Mallory 1815

13) Abraham Benson to Gershom Burr n.d.

14) Abraham Benson to James Burr 1816

15) Abraham Benson to various, debts owed

16) David Rowel account against Abraham Benson 1821

17) Indenture of George Scribner to Abraham Benson by Westport selectmen 1838

18) Abraham Benson Will 1847

19) Abraham Benson estate inventory, 2 copies 1847

20) List of church society members, Stratfield, Greenfield and Old Congregational

21) Abraham Benson account with David Rowel n.d.

22) Debts due and payable Abraham Benson 1815

23) 2 scans of Dey Street NYC where Abraham Benson was born

24) Scan of timetable for burial procession 1812 (most likely Elijah Abel)

25) \$500 bond of Finette Benson to Samuel Nichols 1849

26) Advertisement for a dancing school to be held at Benson Hotel by Mr. White of New York, 1836

27) Bill from Finette Benson to William Burr for 3 cows October 16, 1849

28) Abraham Benson inventory list 1812/1815

29) Eleazer Wilson's Promissory note February 1815

30) Receipt for Cloth March 11, 1815

31) Receipt for \$13 (a month's wages) from Abraham Benson

32) William Benson Promissory note to Abraham Benson \$60.20 1821

33) Receipt from Finette Benson to Patrick McMahon \$7.75 1849

34) Receipt for various cloth signed by Eli Read of Redding for Abraham Benson Curtis B Marvin and Joel Marchant

35) Receipt for camp articles (pick axes, kettles, et al) from New Haven Walter Budington December 29, 1814*

36) Tax receipt for carriage and harness Abraham Benson March 28, 1817

37) 1 months pay \$13 to James Hamilton from Abraham Benson June 15th 1835

38) William West Promissory note to Abraham Benson \$2 February 15, 1815

39) \$.75 for horse boarding Peter Sturges to Abraham Benson

40) Receipt for Rations (potatoes, vinegar, etc) Abraham Benson to Aaron Adams

41) Resolution adopted at Benson house regarding War of 1812 August 24th 1812*

42) Six Articles of Association for creation of Militia Company to defend Fairfield*

43) Committee of men to "put our shore in Fairfield Society in such a state of defence as the nature of our danger requires"*

44) Letter from Abraham Benson to J Welles regarding politicians March 4th 1836 (includes typed transcription)

45) Great Clay Meeting, 10 resolutions calling for the election of Henry Clay and the removal of Andrew Jackson October 16th 1832, copy and original by Abraham Benson

46) List of order John W Hanford

47) State of Connecticut to Abraham Benson regarding list of expenses December 23, 1814*

48) John W Hanford order in favor of Zalmon Bradley for rations March 28th 1815*

49) Williams banks bill to Abraham Benson 1848

50) Abraham Benson due to Seth Osborn for cutting wood February 22nd 1834

51) Rations expense notes

- 52) Abraham Morehouse bond from Abraham Benson \$500 January 10 1810
- 53) Eleazer Wilson promissory note to Abraham Benson March 10 1815
- 54) George Perry Bill \$2.00
- 55) Promissory note from Abraham Benson to Henry Sherwood \$1200
 - a. See Henry Sherwood deed
- 56) Balance due to solders lists solders and who owes*
- 57) Invoice for Hosiery (uniforms) February 1814*
- 58) Letter to Abraham Benson regarding when a "taylor" will be at the store to measure 6 soldiers from John W Hanford February 8, 1815*
 - a. Also note asking for half gallon of Brandy
- 59) Receipt paid in full to Jonathan Manter May 1815
- 60) Letter from Walter Buddington regarding charges against (balance due) state of Connecticut April 3, 1815*
- 61) Receipt for \$4.00 in fines from Abraham Benson paid to Captain John Sturges*
- 62) Notification of fines for "not appearing on ...parade" September 20, 1813 Joseph Wakeman and Joseph Sturges to Abraham Benson
- 63) Fines paid to Samuel Beers from Abraham Benson March 31 1815
- 64) Load of wood to Fort Union \$4.00 18 March 1815 Jonathan Wilson*
- 65) 3 Load of wood 14 March 1815 Samuel Beardslee
- 66) Load of wood to Fort Union \$4.00 1 March 1815 Stephen Morehouse*
- 67) Load of wood to Fort Union \$4.00 25 February 1815 Aaron Turney*
- 68) Liet. John W Hanford's order from Wheeler Judson to be given to Abraham Benson
- 69) Selectmen of Fairfield will build a road near Mrs. Benson's property and the common field. March 30, 1818 Signed Jeremiah Sturges.

Folder 5: Benson Tavern

Letter requesting that an Inn be created at Benson House, that is "entirely exempt from the vices of intemperance," 1833
 Announcement of dancing school to be held at Mr. Benson's hotel, 1836
 Prints of acting troupe (including Edwin Wilkes Booth) that rehearsed in Benson's barn

Folder 4: Political and War of 1812 Items

Record of 1779 meeting asking General Assembly to erect new court house and jail
 Notice of militia drilling and fine for non-appearance
 Resolutions adopted re: War of 1812 at meeting held at A. Benson's house, 1812
 Draft of resolutions re: War of 1812
 Pledge of support for Fairfield's defense from Benson and other individuals, 1814
 Great Clay Meeting, 1832 (2 copies)
 Letter from Abraham Benson to J. Wellis about political affiliation, 1836

Folder 3: Abraham Benson, Postmaster

Abraham Benson, Postmaster

- 1) 1834 Letter regarding overdue balance, unknown recipient
- 2) 1838 letter regarding percentage allowed to keep as postmaster
- 3) 1838 letter regarding broken key to Postmaster General Amos Kendall
- 4) 1836 letter to Amos Kendall regarding emoluments
- 5) 1835 letter to W.J. Elliot examiner's office Washington D.C.
- 6) 1832 letter to postmaster General regarding the appointment of Abraham Benson
- 7) 1837 Abraham Benson account due to U.S. Government
- 8) 1838 letter accusing Abraham Benson of Abusing Franking privilege
- 9) 1834 letter from Postmaster General regarding depositing money
- 10) 1836 Godey's Lady's Book subscription letter E.A. Clark and C Clark
- 11) 1836 Godey's Lady's Book subscription letter for Mrs. Burritt and Jay
- 12) Letter to Abraham Benson from Woodward and Sprague
- 13) Notice regarding bills
- 14) Letter to Abraham Benson from John Brown, Stamford Postmaster, regarding a colonel Thorp's package
- 15) Postmaster Oath signed by Abraham Benson 1834
- 16) Letter from Abraham Benson to Robert Johnson August 17th 1835
- 17) Post Office account due receipt April 4, 1840
- 18) Letter to F.E.B. (?) from Abraham Benson regarding \$57.68 due from Post office April 11th 1835
- 19) Post Office account due receipt April 9, 1838
- 20) Post office income 1838 \$174.96
- 21) Distances to post office from various locations around town, April 6 1853 by John Skinner

Folder 2: Benson Family Ship's Papers

David Penfield to Abraham Benson quarter share of Sloop *Dolphin* of New York 1805
 Bill of sale for Sloop *Elfrida* to Abraham Benson, David Penfield and T Reilly from William Stannard, Jedediah Chapman and Tabor Pratt of Saybrook CT 1805
 Bill for Corporation Wharfage of Sloop *Elfrida* by Charles Smith from May 1805 to April 1806
 Release of Debt of David Penfield, Abraham Benson and T Riley from Tabor Pratt Junior, William Stannard and Jedediah Chapman, November 26, 1810
 Isaac Hinman deed to shares of Schooner *Live Oak* of Bridgeport, 1812 (see also OS Item B)
 Lease Agreement for Schooner *Live Oak* to travel to the West Indies, from Abraham Benson to Bulkley, Somarindyck, Goodrich and Deforest 1812
 1/3 share of Schooner *Live Oak* William Deforest to Abraham Benson February 8th 1812
 Slip for sales of good from Sloop *Intrepid* 1820
 Abraham Benson expense book for steamboat operations, 1828-32
 Ship's log for *Beaver*, Hevlyn Benson, voyage from New York to Canton
 Letter from son Hevlyn in Macao (Macau, China) 1839

Folder 1: Abraham Benson Deeds and Property

Abraham Benson Deeds and Property

Isaac Burr and Nathaniel Burr to Abraham Benson, Fairfield land, 1808
 Elijah Abel Lease to Abraham Benson, 1808
 Lease from Elijah Abel to Abraham Benson, 1809
 Elijah Abel to Abraham Benson, right to harvest wood (Benson House), 1809
 Simeon Abel to Abraham Benson, Elijah Abel's Estate, 1810
 Simeon Abel to Abraham Benson, Elijah Abel's estate, with inventory
 One silver tankard to Simeon Abel from Abraham Benson for Tamar, a slave
 Abraham Benson, land on Greenfield Hill, 1810
 William Hoyt to Abraham Benson, 1812
 Thomas Bartram to Abraham Benson et al Grover's Hill Property and Black Rock Fort, 1814 (2)*
 Abraham Jennings to Abraham Benson, Grover's Hill formerly belonging to Thomas Bartram, 1814*
 Nathaniel Sturges to Abraham Benson 1/7 of land held in common with Walter Thorp, Sullivan Moulton, Gershom Sturges, James Knapp and Abraham G Jennings, September 27th 1814*
 Selectmen of Fairfield to Abraham Benson, land surrounding home and part of highway, 1815
 Agreement between Abraham Benson and Abel Turney regarding fence, 1815
 Nathan Beers to Grissel Benson, piece of land sold to him by Abraham Benson, 1816
 Louis Jennings to Abraham Benson, property in Westmoreland N.Y., 1816
 Abraham Benson to Nathaniel Beers, 1816
 One year lease to John Jackson, former property of Abraham Morehouse in Liberty N.Y. 1818
 Deed to Abraham Benson from Henry Sherwood April 11, 1828
 b. See promissory note in Series 2
 Henry Sherwood to Abraham Benson, 1834
 Julia Fairchild to Abraham Benson, 1836
 John Ryker and Wife of N.Y.C. to Abraham Benson, 1847

 Abahram Benson to Gershom Wakeman \$4 for negotiating property deal
 Payment to Amos Burr for measuring property
 2 maps of lots of land.
 A survey of Salt and Freshwater meadows near Mr. Silliman
 Plan of "Bridge lot and Company"
 Map of Stony Point N.Y. (2 scans)
 Right of Driftway to Jabez Hubbel across Abraham Benson's property
 a. Notes regarding balance due soldiers on back*

Folder 9: Estate Papers of Abraham and Finette Benson

Papers relating to estate of Abraham Benson (d. 1849) and Finette Benson (d. 1864)

Oversize Items

Oversize Item E: Photo album of Nichols family and Cased photograph of Susan W. Nichols

Photo album with photos identified of Samuel Nichols; Finette Nichols, Finette Benson, and Emma, Henry and Finette Nichols as well as a photo of Charles and Lavinia Stratton's wedding.

Cased photograph of Susan Warner Nichols matches the photo in the album opposite Samuel Nichols.

Oversize Item D

Periodicals, books and published sermons belonging to Abraham Benson:

The Cultivator (1836), *The Olive Plant and Ladies' Temperance Advocate* (1842-3), *Journal of the American Temperance Union* (1841-2), and *Youth's Temperance Advocate*, no. 26

Notebook containing list of (Benson's?) books by year

"God's Thoughts of Peace in War" – London, 1759

"Election Sermon." – 1791 (?) pgs. 5 – 40

"An Inquiry; The End and Design of Baptism..." – Cyprian Strong, Hartford, 1793

"Reasons for the Necessity of Silent Waiting..." – Mary Brook, New York, 1795

"Sermons to Doctors in Divinity; Being the Second Volume of Sermons to Asses" – Philadelphia, 1773

"Doctor Wales's Election Sermon, Preached Before the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut at Hartford, May 12, 1785" – Samuel Wales, D.D., Hartford, 1785

"A brief Account of the People called Quakers." n.d.

"Dr. Trumbull's Century Sermon, or Sketches of The History of the Eighteenth Century." – Benjamin Trumbull, D.D., New Haven, 1801

"The Warning Voice" – March 1809

"Free-Masonry a Copy of Revelation: A Sermon, Delivered in St. James' Church, Danbury" – Rev. Reuben Hubbard, Danbury, Jan. 1813

"The Christian Indeed" Rev. J. Flavel – Andover, 1817

"Three Dialogues" No. III – Rev. Thomas Vivan – Sidney's Press, New Haven

"The Nature and Design of The Lord's Supper; with Devotional Exercises" – Henry Grove, Andover, 1817

"Andrew Jackson Inaugural Address, Delivered on being sworn into office on March 4, 1829"

"An Address Delivered Before the Philoclean and Peithessophian Societies, of Rutgers College." – Theodore Frelinghuysen, New Brunswick, NJ, 1831

"Democratic State Convention" – Ralph I. Ingersoll, President – c. 1837

"Mr. Beach's Answer to Mr. Sigourney. To the Stockholders of the Phoenix Bank" – c. 1837

"Professor Hopkins' Sermon, Delivered on the Annual State Fast, at Williamstown, March 28, 1839" – Troy, NY, 1839

"Dr. Blakeman's Address to the Candidates for Degrees and Licenses, in the Medical Institution of Yale College, January 20, 1847" – Rufus Blakeman, M.D., New Haven, 1847

"Brief Memoirs of the Class of 1797." – Thomas Day and James Murdock. – New Haven, 1848

"A Sermon, Delivered in St. John's Church, Bridgeport, Conn. October 23, 1858" – Rev. Gurdon S. Coit, D.D., Bridgeport, 1858

Pgs. 17 – 24; "...benefitted by their lifeless devotions..."

'A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of the Late Mrs. Mary S. Dimon." – Lyman H. Atwater, D.D., New Haven, 1852

Pgs. 355 – 408; "...papers within the United States, free of postage..."

"The Standard of the Spirit Lifted Up, A Sermon Preached on Sunday, September 13, 1868" – Edward E. Rankin, D.D., New York, 1868

"Mr. Lynn...in Reply to the...Gain Between..."

Oversize Item C

Certificate appointing Abraham Benson as postmaster, 1834



Oversize Item B

Deed for ship Live Oak

Oversize Item A

Six broadsides (or parts thereof) advertising steamboats, 1830s.