
Inventory of the John Bouvier Collection, ca. 1783-1895

The Huntington Library

San Marino, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: John Bouvier Collection,

Date (inclusive): ca. 1783-1895

Creator: Bouvier, John

Extent: 233 pieces

Repository: The Huntington Library

San Marino, California 91108

Language: English

Provenance

The collection was a gift of David Blankerhorn in January, 1956.

Access

Collection is open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information please go to following [URL](#).

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Preferred Citation

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Biography

John Bouvier (1787-1851) was born of Quaker parents in 1787 in the small French village of Codognan, department du Gard. Of his life before the age of fifteen little is known, except that he attended school in Nimes. His father, Jean (1760-1803) was a man of considerable

means, having inherited property from his uncle and money from his grandfather. Bouvier's mother, Marie Benezet (1760-1823), also brought a respectable dowry into her marriage with Jean. Husband and wife farmed for a living, adding to this income money earned from a distillery and from a farm products and manufacturing exchange enterprise. As a result of his fortune, Jean Bouvier was one of the principal men of his village, occupying at one time or another almost all of the village offices. However, when he attempted to feed his friends and finance relief from the distress occasioned by the French Revolution (with which he sympathized), a series of misfortunes crushed the family. Thus circumstanced, Jean and Marie applied for passports to America in 1800, finally making the voyage in 1802 with their two sons, John and Daniel (c. 1795-1825). John's father died less than a year later, while his mother returned to France and died in 1823.

Soon after his arrival in Philadelphia, John Bouvier was apprenticed to Benjamin Johnson, printer and bookseller, until he was twenty-one. He seems to have read voraciously during this period. In 1808 friends helped him to establish his own business in Philadelphia. Two years later he married Elizabeth Middifield (1787?-1840?), daughter of James and Hannah Middifield, prominent Philadelphia Quakers. The union issued one child, Hannah Mary (1811-1870), who grew to become an accomplished astronomer and author of *FAMILIAR ASTROW: OR An Introduction to the Study of the Heavens*.

About 1814 Bouvier moved to Brownsville to publish the *American Telegraph*, moving again in 1818 to Uniontown, where he established the *Genius of American Liberty* with John M. Austin. That same year he was admitted to the bar, and four years later he was permitted to practice before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Returning to Philadelphia in 1823, Bouvier published an abridgement of Blackstone. Sometime later he became active with the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Capital Punishment, the Apprentices Library of Philadelphia, and the temperance movement. It seems that he was also interested, if not active, in Pennsylvania Democratic-Republican politics, for between 1820 and 1824 he received regular correspondence from James Todd, a member of the Pennsylvania legislature, about legislative proceedings and politics. A letter from former-governor Joseph Ritner is also suggestive.

But the highest offices which Bouvier himself attained were City Recorder and associate judge of the court of criminal sessions (1838). A year later his famous *Law Dictionary* appeared, going through numerous editions. Between 1841 and his death in November, 1851, he managed to publish two more works: a new edition of *Mathew Bacon's Abridgement of the Law* (1841-1845) and *Institutes of American Law* (1851).

- A. Family history
- B. Personal affairs
- C. Charges of corruption against Governor William Findlay of Pennsylvania (1817-1820)
- D. Democratic-Republican politics in Pennsylvania, 1820-1824
- E. Business affairs of Robert Evans Peterson
- John Bouvier, 29 pieces
- James Todd, 30 pieces
- Bouvier, John. Entry regarding the War of 1812 in his journal. June 1, 1813.
- Dallas, Alexander James. Letter to John Irvine giving professional opinion about a legal document.
- Todd, James. Letter to John Bouvier defending Governor William Findlay against the charges of corruption. Feb. 2, 1820.

Bibliography

Brigham, Clarence. *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers*. Vol. 2. pp. 978-979.

Dictionary of American Biography. Vol 2. pp. 490-491.

National Cyclopedia of American Biography. Vol. 8, 1. 99; Vol. 16, p. 34

North American Review; July, 1861. pp. 71-82

Simpson, Henry. *The Lives of Eminent Philadelphians*. pp. 111-123.

Genealogy

Identification of Bouvier's Relatives (for wife, parents, brother, see biographical sketch)

ANTOINE BENEZET

1st cousin, son of François

BELLAMY BENEZET

son of Jean, Husband of Fanny Majolier (the daughter of Louis)

FRANÇOIS BENEZET

uncle

JEAN BENEZET

uncle

JEANNE BENEZET

1st cousin, daughter of François, wife of Pierre Clavel

ETIENNE BOUVIER

cousin (probable)

GUILLAME BOUVIER

uncle

a JEAN BOUVIER

father of John (John occasionally signed as "Jean")

b JEAN BOUVIER

1st cousin, son of Guillame

PIERRE BOUVIER

uncle

PIERRE BOUVIER

Cousin, son of above

"SANIER" ANDRE GUILLAME BOUVIER

1st cousin, son of Guillame

ANTOINE CLAVEL

husband of Madalein Bouvier (the daughter of Pierre Bouvier a)

ETIENNE CLAVEL

cousin (probable)

PIERRE CLAVEL

cousin

LOUIS ANTOINE MAJOLIER

2nd cousin

JUSTIN PARADON

cousin (probable)

EMMA PETERSON

granddaughter, daughter of Robert Evans Peterson

GEORGE PETERSON

father of Robert Evans Peterson

HANNAH MARY PETERSON

daughter, wife of Robert Evans Peterson

JANE EVANS PETERSON

mother of Robert Evans Peterson

a ROBERT EVANS PETERSON

son-in-law, born Nov. 12, 1815, brother of Henry Peterson, author and publisher; partner in law firm with John Bouvier; went into insurance after the Civil War

b ROBERT ("ROB") EVANS PETERSON

grandson; son of [UNK].

Addenda

The additional material totals 114 pieces and falls within the dates of the original collection. The materials were a gift of Maurice Wells, 1973.

- 1. One box of photographs of military figures, primarily American, and Presidents.
- 2. One box containing letters and documents pertaining to personal affairs of George William Childs, principally, but also John Bouvier.
- 3. One scrapebook containing letters to or about Hannah Mary (Bouvier) Peterson and her text on astronomy from people eminent in the field. Some of the letters contain corrections of information found in the book.