
Inventory of the Anna Dorothy Bronson Collection, 1848-1857

The Huntington Library

San Marino, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Anna Dorothy Bronson Collection,

Date (inclusive): 1848-1857

Creator: Bronson, Anna Dorothy

Extent: 40 pieces

Repository: The Huntington Library

San Marino, California 91108

Language: English

Provenance

Purchased from the Alta California Bookstore, June 12, 1984

Access

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Preferred Citation

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Biography

Anna Dorothy Mason was born in September, 1830, in Grafton, New Hampshire. Of the five children of Jesse and Dorothy Mason, she was the only daughter. After completing public school, she studied the classics at the Thetford Academy in Vermont. In 1851, the family financial situation worsened and Anna felt compelled to leave the Academy and seek employment.

Like thousands of other young New England women of the time, Anna chose to work in some of the many cotton factories which had sprung up in the region since 1815. She spent almost six years in the mills in Manchester, New Hampshire. Working first at the Manchester Corporation as a weaver, Anna later worked in the drawing room of an Amoskeag Corporation factory. She labored twelve to thirteen hours Monday through Friday and also worked a shorter day on Saturday. After hours she lived in a factory owned and supervised boarding house. For all this her pay rarely exceeded \$4.00 a week.

Her parents, who had moved to Greensboro, Vermont, repeatedly urged her to come home and teach, but Anna refused all offers. Most certainly, the money was better in the mill. However, sometime between August, 1856, and March, 1857, Anna did quit the factory and moved home. On March 23, 1857, she married William D. Bronson of Greensboro, Vermont. Residing on Brondale Farms until her death in 1910, Anna raised three children and apparently never again worked outside the home.

Subject Matter

The letters in the collection cover the period of Anna (Mason) Bronson's schooling at the Thetford Academy in Vermont and her employment in the cotton mills of Manchester. The letters from Thetford provide an interesting perspective on a situation that was probably not all that common in the 1840's - a young woman attending a college preparatory school and boarding away from home.

The majority of the letters were written by Anna to her parents during her six years in the mills. They are full of information on hours, wages, and working and living conditions. Because personal accounts of workers are not that common, the letters should also be helpful in resolving questions about the adjustment of young farm women to the factory regimen and the impact of industrial work upon family life.

Also discussed are family affairs, including news of a brother in the California mines; evangelical religious belief; and events in and around Manchester, including fires, lyceum lectures, fairs, exhibits, etc.