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Historical note:

Elizabeth Buffum Chace (1806-1899) was a tireless life-long worker for women's rights and the abolition of slavery, and is probably best known for opening her home as the main Rhode Island stop on the Underground Railroad.

Elizabeth Buffum was raised in Smithfield, R.I., the daughter of active Quakers Arnold and Rebecca (Gould) Buffum. The family moved to Pomfret, Connecticut for several years, before Elizabeth spent a year at the Friends' Boarding School in Providence in 1822. Her family then moved to Fall River, Massachusetts, where she met and married Samuel B. Chace (1800-1870) in 1828.

Following in the footsteps of her father, the first president of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, Chace helped found the Fall River Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1835. Her family moved to Valley Falls, R.I. after Samuel's business failed in Fall River in 1840. It was in Valley Falls that Elizabeth and Samuel served on the Underground Railroad. After the Civil War, Chace served as vice-president of the American Anti-Slavery Society as it continued its efforts to assist the freedmen.

Chace's work for women's rights began in 1850, when attended the Worcester Women's Rights Convention. She served as president of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association from 1870 to her death. She was the driving force behind a women's suffrage amendment that was rejected by Rhode Island voters in 1887, and was also influential in the founding of Pembroke, the women's college associated with Brown University.

Chace's other crusade was prison reform, and she convinced the state legislature in 1870 to allow female inspectors as part of a Board of Lady Visitors. Her lobbying also led to the establishment of the Rhode Island Home and School for Dependent Children in 1884.

After losing her first five children at an early age, Elizabeth had the following five:

Samuel O. Chace (1843-1867)

Arnold Buffum Chace (1845-1932), m. Eliza C. Greene. Chancellor of Brown University.

Elizabeth B. Chace (1847-1929), author, married John C. Wyman.

Edward G. Chace (1849-1871)

Mary E. Chace (1852-), m. James P. Tolman

Bibliography:

Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), 317-319.

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Scope and content:

This small collection consists mostly of family correspondence between Elizabeth Buffum Chace and her children. It includes 32 letters written by Elizabeth Buffum Chace to her young sons Samuel and Arnold, dated 1858 to 1874, mostly while they were away at school. The content is mostly personal and heavily laden with maternal anxiety. The letters admonish her sons for not writing regularly, remind them to dress warmly, and warn them of the evils of billiard halls. Other family members are mentioned periodically, including several letters regarding the death of her brother, journalist Edward G.A. Buffum (1823-1867); and a note regarding a serious dispute with her brother William A. Buffum (1821-1901). Only occasionally does she mention a visit from Wendell Phillips, or a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society, to remind the modern reader that she was one of the most influential women in the state. The letters are partially abstracted in the inventory below.

Also included in this collection are letters received by Elizabeth Buffum Chace from her son Samuel from 1858 to 1860; letters received by Arnold Buffum Chace and his wife Eliza C. Greene; and Arnold's passport from 1868.

A larger collection of Elizabeth Buffum Chace's papers can be found at the John Hay Library at Brown University.

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Provenance:

This collection was the gift of Malcolm G. Chace III, the great-grandson of Arnold Buffum Chace, in 1997. It was donated along with a small collection of papers of Eliza Greene's parents Christopher and Sarah Greene (now MSS 1003) and family cousin Sen. Jonathan Chace (now MSS 998).

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Inventory:

Folder 1. Elizabeth Buffum Chace letters to sons Samuel and Arnold, 1858-1859. 11 items.

All dated at Valley Falls except as noted. Written during a period when Samuel and Arnold, her two oldest sons, were attending the Hopedale Academy in Milford, Mass.

11/19/1858. 4 pages. "If either of you is sick, of course you must send for me, and I can board there a few days, and cure you."

11/21/18[58]. 4 pages. Concern for health.

[1/8/1859?]. 6 pages. "Run and jump and not allow thyself to be lazy at all; and thee ought to get up in the morning time enough to have a little run before breakfast; and keep away from everything bad."

2/8/1859. 4 pages. Sleighing, health.

2/23/1859. To Arnold. Dated "New Home". 1 page. Advice on boarding the train in Woonsocket safely.

3/8/1859. To Arnold. 4 pages. Father very ill. "I went to a Spiritual meeting and heard a most excellent and beautiful discourse from a trance medium...Then I attended a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Committee at 4 o'clock."

3/16/1859. Dated "Eagleswood". 1 page. Funeral of father Arnold Buffum.

4/3/1859. 2 pages. "We are having company and Anti-Slavery meetings today."

4/7/1859. 2 pages. "I am arranging Anti-Slavery meetings about the state and have to write several letters almost every day."

11/11/1859. Dated "New Home". 4 pages. Visit to cousin Jonathan in Manville.

11/16/1859. To Arnold. Dated "Home". 4 pages. Thanksgiving vacation.

Folder 2. Elizabeth Buffum Chace letters to sons Samuel and Arnold, 1860-1864. 7 items.

All dated to "Home" except as noted.

- 1/24/1860. Dated Valley Falls. 4 pages. Son Eddie struck by a carriage and badly injured. "Last night, Wendell Phillips lectured at Lonsdale, & he came here, and we carried him up, and then he returned with us, and spent the night. We had a nice time. He told us about his visit to North Elba, when he went with the body of John Brown; relating many little incidents which were not published in the papers."
- 2/8/1860. 4 pages. "I am sorry thy head aches; and I think that if Algebra makes it ache, thee better suspend Algebra for a while. Thou wilt gain nothing by overtaking thy brain."
- 3/29/1860. 4 pages. "I have had a class in Familiar Science, reciting three times a week." "The men throughout the State, are just now half-crazy about the election of Governor, which occurs next week; showing by their zeal and enthusiasm, what they could do, if they were engaged thus in a worthy cause."
- 4/2/1860. 4 pages. "There is one thing Sammie, that sometimes gives me some anxiety. Thee knows what thee told me about thy going into a billiard room in Milford with one of the boys...remember, Sammie, that no one can go into a bad place and come out unharmed...so if thee has any regard for me, or for thy own welfare, refuse all invitations to enter such places, will thee, darling?"
- 8/11/1862. To Sammie. First two pages of letter only; not signed. needs college admission certificates (possibly to forestall draft).
- 8/19/1862. To Sammie. 3 pages. "Gen. Hunter has disbanded his Negro regiment. How strange that such blindness prevails. That white men must go by hundreds of thousands...but the colored man must be saved! ...the country will ere long be inhabited by women and children and negroes. Oh! how I long to hear the right word spoken, that of Universal Freedom which would so soon put an end to this War! When will it come?"
- 7/29/1864. To "Dear Boys". 4 pages. Sammie and Arnold are apparently traveling in Vermont. "Eliza Dudley is crazy and will probably go to the Asylum."

Folder 3. Elizabeth Buffum Chace letters to son Arnold, 1866-1868, 1874. 14 items.

These letters are mostly on thin paper and continue vertically over the horizontal script, making them very difficult to read. During this period, Arnold was doing graduate work in Cambridge and Paris. All letters are dated Valley Falls.

7/30/1866. 4 pages. Offers advice on whether to return to Brown University to teach.

11/11/1867. 4 pages, with addition from daughter Mary, plus 1 page postscript.

"We had quite an interesting meeting of the Division. The paper was read, L. Franklin and G. Dexter and A. Earle were furnished with withdrawal cards. Remarks made thereon by various persons. S.D. leaves because of the sex of the Worthy Patriarch. Fourth Day evening we heard Mr. Fulton's lecture 'Women's right to be a woman'. It was memorable stuff. The audience seemed pretty generally disgusted." In postscript, "Thy uncle Wm [William A. Buffum] said he thought of going to Europe this fall. Now, if thee should meet him, avoid a recognition if possible. He would try all ways to get every dollar away from thee, and he is so angry with us, that he might try to injure thee."

12/25/1867. 4 pages, including 2 pages from daughter Lillie. Death of Elizabeth's brother Edward G.A. Buffum.

12/30/1867. 4 pages, including postscript by Lillie. Anxiety over death of Edward.

1/7/1868. 2 pages.

1/19/1868. 4 pages. Discusses late brother Edward's alcoholism at length. "I feel very anxious about Herbert, and I fear he is acquiring the same appetite." At a Division meeting, initiated "Pollard, the Lonsdale constable. I think he is one of the most perfect embodiments of brute force that I ever saw. And at the same time I should think there is a pretty fair share of moral power in the man." Visit from Charles Adams.

1/26/1868. 4 pages. "Mass. Anti-Slavery Society at Mercantile Hall on Summer St. We had a good meeting. The speakers were Phillips and Frothingham and Higginson and the two Fosters and quite a number of others."

[2/?/1868]. 2 pages. Edward's funeral in Fall River. "Tomorrow we expect to go to the Radical Meeting in Boston."

- 2/23/1868. 4 pages. "In the evening Lillie and I went in [to Providence] to hear Dickens read the Christmas Carol and the trial scene in Pickwick...It was wonderfully done."
- 3/15/1868. 4 pages. Death of niece Susan. "They are forming an Association for Christian Work..which we are invited to join. This is to be a sort of Moral Police force. And indeed there is need enough of it."
- 4/12/1868. 4 pages. Local temperance movement. "Arnold, I have often thought whether when you are traveling, thee wouldn't be often invited to drink wine...Oh! remember always thy principles, dear child." Death of George Bartlett.
- 5/21/1868. 4 pages. Visit to New York. "In the afternoon, we went to the [Anti-Slavery] office where he had been very anxious to show us him composing room, where the types are set entirely by girls, whom he pays as he would men."
- 8/25/1868. 4 pages. "I hate to have thee in New York at all, dreadfully. It is a horrible place to me, and I should think must be to thee."
- 7/19/1874. 4 pages. Arnold apparently vacationing in Ireland. "We had a Free Religious Picnic in the Grove last week." Family news, requests for purchases overseas.

Folder 4. Elizabeth Buffum Chace letters from son Samuel, 1858-1860.
31 letters, all dated from school in Hope Dale.

Folder 5. Samuel O. Chace correspondence with sisters Mary and Lillie, 1859-1860
One letter from Lillie, one to Mary, and one to Lillie.

Folder 6. Arnold B. Chace letters received, 1866-1868
[1866?] letter of introduction, Rebecca Spring to William Hewitt of London re ABC.
8/27/1866 from Abby S. Greene. 8 pages.
10/3/1866. Notice electing Arnold as delegate to New England Temperance Convention.
11/8/1866 from Abby S. Greene. 6 pages.
12/28/1867 from Finley Anderson re death of Edward Buffum.
4/13/1868 from "Moll" (sister Mary), Valley Falls. 4 pages.
10/1/1868 from Nellie Magill. 8 pages.
10/27/1868 from H.M. Pitman. 2 pages.

Folder 7. Arnold B. Chace envelopes (to establish residence)

Folder 8. Arnold B. Chace memoranda book and passport, 1868

Folder 9. Arnold B. Chace estate inventory, after 1932

Folder 10. Eliza C. (Greene) Chace letters received, 1870-1890; sketchbook

- 4/30/1870 from Henry W. Poor. 2 pages.
7/20/1874 from "loving sister". 4 pages.
7/22/1874 from sister. 4 pages.
2/2/1886 from George Clarke. Poem, 2 pages.
6/1890 card from T.F. Jameson.

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Subjects:

Alcoholism - Massachusetts - Fall River
American Anti-Slavery Society
Buffum, Edward G.A. (1823-1867)
Buffum, William A. (1821-1901)
Chace, Arnold B. (1845-1932)
Chace, Eliza C. (Greene) (1851-1924)

Chace, Elizabeth (Buffum) (1806-1899)
Chace, Samuel O. (1843-1867)
Children - Rhode Island - Cumberland
Cumberland, R.I. - Social life and customs
Dickens, Charles (1812-1870)
Phillips, Wendell (1811-1884)
Slavery - Anti-slavery movements - Rhode Island
Temperance - Societies, etc. - Rhode Island
Valley Falls, R.I. - Social life and customs
Women's rights - Rhode Island

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