

**THE HOFFMAN FAMILY COLLECTION
AT HISTORIC HUDSON VALLEY**

By Morgan Graham

The Hoffman family collection (1800-1850) contains over 300 artifacts, including letters, notebooks, photographs, calling cards, and books. The collection was preserved by Ann Hoffman Nicholas and her daughter, Emma Molony, and donated to Historic Hudson Valley by Emma's granddaughter in 1966.

Though there are some men's letters in the collection, the Hoffman collection contains mostly women's letters. These letters offer important glimpses into the lives of middle-class, New York women between 1800 and 1850.

The guide contains brief introductions to the collection's **PRIMARY CONTRIBUTORS**, based on information from their letters. **OTHER CONTRIBUTORS** are also listed; though they contributed fewer letters to the collection, their letters also merit investigation.

COLLECTION THEMES offers a starting point to researchers who want to peruse the collection topically. Each entry provides examples and writers with whom to begin.

This guide is not exhaustive. Its goal is to introduce researchers to the Hoffman collection and provide a starting point for research projects at Historic Hudson Valley.

PRIMARY CONTRIBUTORS

Judge Josiah Ogden Hoffman (1766-1837) is the patriarch of the Hoffman family. The bulk of his contribution to the collection are letters to his daughter, Ann, while she was away at school. These letters, dated between 1800 and 1808, were bound with string into a small booklet. Judge Hoffman's affection for Ann is evident in his letters, and his appreciation for her "epistolary talent." The correspondence between Judge Hoffman and his daughter, Ann, provides one example of a nineteenth-century father-daughter relationship and offers insight into the culture of the Hoffman family.

Ann Hoffman (Nicholas) (1790-1840) was the oldest child of **Josiah Ogden Hoffman** and his first wife, Mary Colden. Most of the letters written by Ann date to the period between 1800 and 1808, while Ann was away at boarding school. Ann updates her father on her progress learning French and her activities at boarding school. She also asks for money and expresses her love for her father and desire to return home to the family.

Ann's lively letters are full of humor, insight, and expressions of love for her family. Ann's is a foundational voice in the Hoffman collection both because of the number of letters written by her during this period, and because of her irresistible personality and clever observations about life at school. In his own letters, her father, Judge Hoffman, often remarks on Ann's "epistolary talent" and expresses his pride in her letter-writing ability.

Ann married Charles Nicholas, who died in 1835. She eventually moved west with her daughters, Matilda Nicholas (Whitman) and Emma Nicholas (Molony). Ann and her daughter, Emma, are the recipients of nearly all the letters in the Hoffman collection and played a key role in preserving them. Only three letters from Ann to Emma survive as examples of Ann's adult writing. The collection also contains a short story written by Ann.

Matilda Hoffman (1791-1809) was the second child of **Josiah Ogden Hoffman** and **Mary Colden**. Matilda also attended school and wrote to her father during the early years of 1800, though fewer of her letters are housed at HHV. Matilda was engaged to be married to Washington Irving, a close friend of the Hoffman family and apprentice to Judge Hoffman, but she died suddenly of consumption in 1809.

Emma Nicholas (Molony) (1816-1866) was the second daughter of **Ann Hoffman Nicholas**. She, like her mother, was the recipient of much correspondence in the Hoffman collection. But the collection only contains a few letters written by Emma: one from Emma to her grandfather, Judge Hoffman, at approximately age 12; a fragment (attributed to Emma) that requests the recipient to purchase her preferred writing supplies; and a will, addressed to Emma's daughter, Anne Hoffman Molony.

This lack of writings makes Emma an elusive character; however, her personality and interests become clearer in the letters of her correspondents, who occasionally quote from Emma's own letters or reference shared experiences.

And although few of Emma's letters exist, many of her notebooks were saved in the Hoffman collection: notes from classes at the Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution, and journals about her spirituality and journey west.

Emma seems to be the primary force in gathering and preserving this robust collection of women's writings. Her role becomes especially significant when one considers the ordinariness of some pieces of writing that she saved; for example, tiny slips of paper from friends declining her invitation or inviting her over for a visit. These notes might have been easy to justify discarding, but Emma kept them. One of Emma's contributions to this collection are the numerous pieces of *ordinary* women's writing from the nineteenth century.

Emma married Richard Sheppard Molony, a young doctor whom she met in Illinois when he treated her sister (according to a letter by Julia), in 1839. Molony survived Emma by nearly thirty years.

Julia Hoffman (1810-1861) was the youngest daughter of **Josiah Ogden Hoffman** and his second wife, **Maria Fenno**. Julia never married and lived with her brothers, Charles and George, after their father died in 1837. Julia wrote many letters in the Hoffman collection, some to her half-sister Ann Hoffman (Nicholas), but most to her niece, Emma Nicholas (Molony), to whom she was much closer in age. Julia's letters report on weddings, births, deaths, and her experience of social events. She often censures herself for taking too long to reply to letters and remarks how little she enjoys writing them. Julia seems to be a receptacle for Hoffman family information and knows at least a little about everybody. She keeps Emma updated on the news from New York.

Julia's writing is incisive and slightly prickly, increasingly so as she gets older. She relegates herself to old maidhood as early as age 23 and continues to refer to herself as an old maid thereafter. Julia provides insight into the Panic of 1837, the year Judge Hoffman dies and the Hoffman family, like many others, lose their possessions to debts. Julia is concerned that they have no place to go, and she and her brothers will live in boarding houses or rely on the kindness of friends. Julia's writing takes on a much more serious tone after this year and loses some of the liveliness of her earlier writings.

Julia's correspondence is another anchor of the Hoffman collection and provides valuable insights into the goings-on of the Hoffman family and their friends, as well the life of a spinster aunt in the early nineteenth century.

Anicartha Miller was an adult friend of Ann Hoffman (Nicholas). The collection contains only four letters by Anicartha, but they are important to understanding the role women played in abolition and activism in the nineteenth century. Anicartha's letters brim with information about her efforts to purchase the freedom of Elizabeth Spencer's two daughters, Rebecca and Olive. Anicartha writes of gathering subscriptions to raise money, and she relates her experience asking for donations from one Mrs Cruger, a northern woman married to a southern man. Mrs Cruger had committed to donate, but her husband accompanied her on a visit to Anicartha and made clear that she would not be giving any money to the cause. This anecdote offers a sense of the tension between the north and south in the years leading up to the Civil War; a northern woman's

perception of the south; and the roles northern women played in abolition in the early nineteenth century.

Elizabeth Spencer was a servant of the Hoffman family. The Hoffman collection contains one letter written in a unique hand that could be Elizabeth's, and one letter dictated by Elizabeth and written by Julia Hoffman. Elizabeth and her husband, Spencer, seem to be longtime servants of the Hoffman family, though their history is unclear. Anicartha Miller and Ann Hoffman (Nicholas) raised money in the late 1830s to purchase manumission for Elizabeth's daughters Rebecca and Olive. Ann Hoffman (Nicholas) seems to consider taking the Spencer family west with her around that same time. Julia objects to this idea in a letter to Emma Nicholas (Molony). Julia's letters comment on the skills and personalities of each Spencer family member. More research is necessary to ascertain their history and to assemble a clearer picture of their relationship to the Hoffman family.

Fanny Colden was Emma's cousin and a regular correspondent who provided news about friends and social events. Her letters offer insight into the life of nineteenth-century young women, as well as the close, intimate friendship that was possible between cousins.

Philip Rhineland (1815-1839) was Emma's cousin and close friend. Phil (as the family affectionately called him) wrote letters detailing his travels in Europe. He died suddenly in Vienna in 1839, and his death devastated his sister, **Mary Rhineland King** (1818-1894), who never fully recovered. Mary also contributed letters to the Hoffman collection, many of which are cross written.

Eliza Storrs (1814-1837) was the daughter of Henry Randolph and Esther White Storrs. She was a close friend of Emma Nicholas (Molony), and the two corresponded regularly from at least 1835 until Eliza's death in 1837. Eliza's letters are witty and thought-provoking; she often writes a full four pages, and her handwriting is neat. Eliza relays social news (engagements, marriages, parties, and conversations) to Emma; but she also discusses her feelings about love and marriage, the engagements and marriages of others, and travel; and she sends poems or verses and includes quotations frequently in her letters. Eliza's correspondence depicts a young woman actively working out her understanding of herself—her letters are thoughtful and thought-provoking—in an epistolary space between friends where she feels safe.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Gratz (1781-1869) was an eminent Jewish philanthropist and close friend of Ann Hoffman (Nicholas). In addition to her own letters in the collection, she is mentioned regularly in the correspondence of friends.

Manton Eastborn seems to have been a religious leader and friend of Ann Hoffman (Nicholas). He writes complimentarily of Ann's intellect and the long, lively conversations they had discussing religion.

Anne Watson was an adult friend of Anne Hoffman (Nicholas). She tends to write about social engagements and women's reading practices.

Augusta and Mary were school friends of Ann Hoffman (Nicholas). Their letters are undated, and they sign them with only their first names. Both consistently write on small sheets of paper and discuss school friends, reading, and social events. Augusta's letters are particularly pensive and fanciful.

Mary Ella and Susan M. Clark were school friends of Emma Nicholas (Molony). Mary Ella often writes to say she won't be able to make it to events. Susan M. Clark's letters are a bit more substantial. Both girls' notes offer insight into the social and emotional lives of young women in 1830s New York.

Charles Fenno Hoffman (1806-1884) was the younger half-brother of **Ann Hoffman (Nicholas)**, older brother of **Julia Hoffman**, and uncle of **Emma Nicholas (Molony)**. He wrote a few letters to Emma Nicholas (Molony).

Ogden Hoffman (1794-1856) was the younger brother of **Ann Hoffman (Nicholas)**, older half-brother of **Julia Hoffman**, and uncle of **Emma Nicholas (Molony)**. He wrote a few letters to Ann Hoffman (Nicholas) and Emma Nicholas (Molony).

COLLECTION THEMES

This section introduces a few major themes that arise in the Hoffman family collection. Each entry contains an overview of the topic, a few notable examples, and a list of writers who discussed that topic. This section is not intended to be exhaustive; there are more topics and examples in the collection than there is space in this guide.

ABOLITION

A central story in the Hoffman letters is that of Elizabeth Spencer and her husband, Spencer. Elizabeth and Spencer seem to be long-time servants of the Hoffman family, though their history is unclear. Anicartha Miller, a friend of Ann Hoffman (Nicholas), raises money via subscriptions to purchase the freedom of Elizabeth's two daughters, Rebecca and Olive, and bring them to New York. Anicartha's letters detail the process of raising money for Rebecca and Olive's manumission and her preparations to reunite the family. Anicartha also writes about an encounter with a northern woman who is married to a southern man; this prompts her to reflect on the ideological differences between northerners and southerners regarding slavery.

The Hoffman collection also includes one letter dictated by Elizabeth Spencer and scribed by Julia Hoffman, and one that was signed by, and may have been written by, Elizabeth Spencer. These letters capture Elizabeth's own voice.

The writings of Anicartha Miller, Elizabeth Spencer, and Julia Hoffman provide insight into the role of a few New York women in abolition, and their discourse on slavery, in the decades leading up to the Civil War. Future research could reveal more about the history of the Spencer family and their relationship to the Hoffman family, as well as the process of manumission for Rebecca and Olive.

Notable Examples:

Accounts of purchasing Rebecca and Olive's freedom

“He did not think that the two daughters could be worth \$200 each, and believed that under the circumstances they might be obtained for something less even than their value. ... I do not at present think it expedient to endeavour to obtain more than \$350 ... If I succeed in effecting the object, I shall feel that a very good result has been accomplished, at the expense of a small amount of labour to myself.” (Anicartha Miller to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, December 17, 1836, W3030 G)

“Elizabeth was exceedingly disappointed that they did not come in a ship which arrived a fortnight ago, but every thing has been arranged by a wiser hand than our own, for if they had come then, she would have had no house to receive them. They are now comfortably settled in the lower part of a house in Elm Street. Spencer, as yet has no place but I believe thinks of going to Martin Hoffman's. Elisabeth will take in washing and ironing and Rebecca can of course be very useful to her. I have no doubt of their ability to earn their

livelihood, and I hope in addition to the blessings of freedom, they may become participants in the highest benefits of a land of religious light and liberty. I have paid \$496 for their manumission, and \$50 more are to be paid for their passage. I shall always esteem it a cause of [unintelligible]fulness, my dear friend, that you permitted me to complete our unfinished undertaking, and I know that you will rejoice with me in the result. It has been one cause for my silence until now, that I could not write any thing definite on the subject.” (Anicartha Miller to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, May 21, 1839, W3030 K)

Abolitionist vs pro-slavery sentiment

“The fact of [Mrs. Cruger’s] husband’s being a southern man made it very probably that he might have exercised an unfavorable influence on her mind, and such eventually proved to be the truth. ... After an interval of nearly three weeks, Mrs Cruger called, and with her was Mr C. It would be long to tell you all that was said, but the amount of it was, that Mr Cruger was very much opposed to the emancipation of slaves, and as she would be under the necessity of acting in opposition to his feelings, she, although contrary to what she had at first intended, could give nothing. ... You will draw your own conclusions from the circumstances. I must say in justice to Mrs Cruger, that I thought she acted like a kind-hearted and well-meaning woman, and her husband like a disagreeable and overbearing man. She was so evidently doing violence to her own feelings by the refusal, and was so candid in explaining the reasons for it, that I conceived a higher opinion of her than I had ever done before.” (Anicartha Miller to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, December 17, 1836, W3030 G)

Descriptions of the Spencer family

“I think your plan of having Spencer’s family among you is not a judicious one, in the first place Spencer and Elizabeth though altogether excellent and capable in the work to which they have brought up would be almost useless to you, Spencer is a first rate waiter but has no idea of out of door work, I don’t believe he ever even sawed a stick of wood in his life, they are neither of them strong either and I believe it would be quite impossible for them to do the labour country work requires... they will get along much better here, where they can all get the kind of work that suits them.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, January 30, 1842, W3037 AC)

“Elizabeth Spencer’s wife begs to be remembered poor soul she has hard work to get along she has so many to assist in supporting her daughters are not much aid to her Rebecca is helpless and indolent and her husband is a lazy fellow who makes no exertion. I shall look after them as much as I can this winter and Miss Miller is an unfailing friend so I hope they may bear through it.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, November 27, 1841, W3037 AK)

Raising funds for manumission

“I have read with much interest the narrative, of the peculiar situation of the young female slaves, which your benevolent heart so kindly communicated. Altho I cannot follow Mr

Astor's generous example, I beg you to accept the enclosed sum of 20 dollars as a pittance towards their emancipation, and cannot doubt but Elizabeth will ultimately have cause for rejoicing, when I discover she possess so eloquent an advocate as Mrs Nicholas" (P.J.[?] Stuyvesant to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, February 22, 1836, W3030 D)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Anicartha Miller
Julia Hoffman

DEATH AND LOSS

The Hoffman letters provide glimpses of how women wrote to share news of death, offer comfort, or express grief. Julia Hoffman writes a long letter detailing the final days of her father's life. She writes to express sympathy when she hears that Emma's baby has died. And Mary Rhineland King writes to Emma about the tragic death of her brother, Philip Rhineland. Often, condolences include an assertion of faith in God.

Notable Examples:

Deaths of family members

"Before this reaches you, you will probably have been informed tho' [?] your family of our affliction in the death of dear Phil at Vienna on the 12th of Aug!!! As soon as my anxiety for poor Mary permits, I have thought how gratified you would be with a few lines..." (Mary Rhineland King to Emma Nicholas, September 27, 1839, W3039 V)

"I began this dearest Sister yesterday week and now it is my painful task to tell you of our father's death, which took place yesterday morning at ten o'clock he had been better since I began this until Saturday he seemed stronger and took more nourishment and I hoped would recover entirely but on Saturday about twelve o'clock a dreadful weakness came on and increased so that by the afternoon he could scarcely speak intelligibly, he evidently was alarmed himself and murmured 'I am a very sick man write to Anne, when will George come, where's Ogden.'" (Julia Hoffman to Ann Hoffman, January 25, 1837, W3024 I)

Deaths of others

"Mrs. Biddle has lost her brother John Craig he died in Italy after a few days illness and his child which was left in Philadelphia died just before Mrs. Craig reached home." (Julia Hoffman to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, September 28, 1837, W3024 G)

"The theme of conversation here for some time has been the shocking death of Elliott Taylor who committed suicide, it seems that his whole life has been one of dishonour at eighteen he first stole money from his employer and since then he has forged, gambled, and supported the style in which he lived by other persons' money, and when it could no

longer be concealed he completed his crimes by suicide, his poor wife is dreadfully distressed she is left with three children, one only a week old, she knows that her husband took laudanum but thinks that his failure caused a temporary derangement, and has no idea that his name is a disgrace to bear she continually repeats ‘it is all ordered for the best and he is happy in heaven.’” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, February 26, 1833, W3037 F)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Julia Hoffman
Mary Rhinelanders King
Eliza Storrs

ECONOMIC DEPRESSION AND FINANCIAL INSECURITY

The Panic of 1837 caused a depression that lasted nearly a decade, and many Americans suffered. The aftereffects of the Panic are detailed in letters in the Hoffman collection from 1837 onward; Julia writes of her family’s having to sell their home, furniture, and other possessions to settle debts, and of finding new arrangements for their servants. Julia’s letters over the following year document her movements between friends’ homes, and she remarks feeling like she was drifting. Eliza Storrs suggests that no one was untouched and recounts the losses of other affluent New York families in her letters to Emma Nicholas, who was then living in Belvidere, Illinois.

Notable Example:

“Elizabeth and Spencer are still in the house and will remain until the sale of the furniture which will be towards the end of March as the possession of the house is promised in the advertisement on the first of April, we hope the furniture and books will pay the debts, though we cannot tell yet how large they are the tradesmen’s bills do not amount to a great deal, but private debts may be claimed which we know nothing about as yet. We retain no piece of furniture but my secretary which I am going to leave at Duer’s until I have again a home, as to the Portraits those belonging to me I have sent to Miss Gratz, the one by Stewart will be Ogden’s and the one of your mother’s mother I shall send to Ogden’s room and tell him that it is to be sent to Illinois when there is a good opportunity, the miniature of Sister Matilda I will take charge of until it can be sent...” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, February 27, 1837, W3037 K)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Julia Hoffman
Eliza Storrs

EPISTOLARY CULTURE, WRITING TECHNOLOGY, AND THE POST OFFICE

Women in the Hoffman collection often comment on the efficacy and speed (or lack thereof) of the Postal Service. They mention postal schedules, the logistics of sending and receiving letters, the best addresses at which to be reached, and the writing technology they use to write letters (i.e., the writing desk and specific types of pen and paper). Women with servants might be prompted to finish writing so their servant could hand deliver the note. Patterns emerge across the Hoffman letters that suggest the contours of women's epistolary education and showcase each writer's style.

Notable Examples:

Writing supplies and technology

"& don't forget dearest to get the 'Saturated Tincture of Aconite Root.' from C. Adamson's 699 Broadway – if you cannot get it in Washington – also the pens & some paper for Annie such as she writes to you on - & I would like a little of the largest sized note paper, or the smallest sized letter paper I don't know which it is called." (Emma Nicholas Molony, fragment, n.d., W3040)

"After having made several successful attempts to mend a pen with my scissors, I have at last given up in despair [...] I was foolish enough to leave pens, paper, knife and all, at home, and must be contented with the best I can find now. Grandmama is so old, that she can neither see to read or write, and therefore does not know the situation of her writing desk[.]" (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, July 8, 1836, W3043 F)

"I have written quite a long letter notwithstanding the stick I am writing with." (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, July 8, 1836, W3043 F)

The pace of the post

"I shall send this by a private opportunity for I think you will receive it sooner than through the Post Office." (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, July 26, 1836, 3043 G)

"I feared you might receive a [news]paper before my letter it must indeed have been a dreadful shock to you..." (Julia Hoffman to Ann Hoffman, April 13th, W3024 H)

"Enclosed is a letter I wrote immediately after its receipt, I sent it to your House yesterday[?] it returned, a little soiled by the bearer's fingers, with word that Miss Hoffman was out of Town." (Augusta to Ann Hoffman, Saturday Morning, W3033 A)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Eliza Storrs
Julia Hoffman

FEMALE FRIENDSHIP

This collection contains a dearth of writings by young women, school friends of both Ann Hoffman and Emma Nicholas. The correspondence between Eliza Storrs and Emma Nicholas, for example, is one of affection and devotion. Eliza often expresses hope that she is Emma's best friend, and they continue to write to each other even after Emma moved to Illinois. In addition to saving her multi-year correspondence with Eliza, Emma also saved short notes from friends that extended or answered invitations for social events. Each writer shines in her cleverness, sense of humor, and ardent affection. This series brims with insights into young women's friendships and their trust and confidence in one another.

Also notable is the extensive correspondence between Emma Nicholas and her aunt, Julia Hoffman. Emma and Julia maintain a close relationship of trust through frequent letters that span more than a decade. Friendships between family members are a strength of the collection, and letters between aunts and nieces, and cousins, shed light into the family culture of the Hoffman family, and the ways nineteenth-century families may have stayed connected despite distance.

Notable Examples:

"I flatter myself that your eyes will be so blinded by affection that the crooked marks, halformed [sic] letters, and all which is as it should not be will be passed over unseen." (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, July 8, 1836, W3043 F)

"Love you less My beloved Ann! What suggested such an Idea? Surely my words did not convey it, or but ill did they express the feelings of my heart; Indeed I believe I love you better than you do me, Whilst of all the Young Ladies here, you possess the first place in my Affections, I can lay claim to only the second, third, or fourth and am hardly certain of that." (Augusta to Ann Hoffman, Tuesday Morning, W3033 D)

"Dear Em, If you have any love for me come down and spend the day tomorrow I will not take no for an answer. Bring your work if you have to hire a wagon, I am clear down in the dumps You must & shall come or I shall not believe you care anything for me." (Susan M Clark to Emma Nicholas, n.d., W3044 J)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Eliza Storrs
Augusta
Susan M Clark
Marie Campbell
Mary Ella
Rebecca Gratz
Anicartha Miller
Julia Hoffman

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

The Hoffman letters frequently mention illnesses and the medicines and methods used to treat them. These comments provide important insights into the practice of nineteenth-century medicine, the role the doctor played in New York women's lives, and women's own caretaking and nursing responsibilities. Eliza Storrs, who suffered from chronic and often debilitating illness, writes extensively about her own health.

Notable Examples:

Diagnoses and prescriptions

“Cornelia has been quite ill for the last fortnight with a bilious fever she is better but is suffering a great deal now from the effects of calomel and will not be able to go home for several weeks.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, May 30, 1834, W3037 H)

“George has been quite sick with an attack upon the lungs he is well now and goes out on pleasant days but the Doctor orders great prudence until the warm weather comes, the rest of us have all been quite well Pa had not even had a sick head ache this winter, the advantages that the Battery has been to him counterbalances the inconveniences of this miserable house...” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, February 26, 1833, W3037 F)

“Do you remember Charlotte Huntington who married Mr Goring[?] a cousin of mine, she is very ill, the doctor fears that her disease is consumption. She is a lovely woman, I hope she may recover but it is very doubtful.” (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, February 16, 1835, W3043 A)

The role of a doctor

“Burrall's death was a great affliction to his father it was very sudden he had no idea of his being dangerously ill until it was too late to do any thing for him, on Thursday while playing with the boys at school he fell and struck the back of his head but got up and went on with his play, though little Ogden says he complained of his head hurting him, on Saturday he was taken with a fit, which the physician, not knowing of his fall, attributed to something he had eaten and told Ogden that there was no cause for alarm it was not an unusual thing, then he seemed to have a cold head in his head, but that was nothing alarming and on Monday Ogden left him thinking that he would be in school the next day, but early Tuesday morning he was sent for, he had fallen into a stupor in the night, and so he continued until Tuesday morning when the breath left him. I do not think he had been well since last summer when he had an attack of inflammatory rheumatism which left him with a palpitation of the heart and flushing of the face whenever he took any exercise.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, February 26, 1833, W3037 F)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Eliza Storrs
Julia Hoffman

WASHINGTON IRVING AND IRVING FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Comments about and news of Washington Irving and members of his family (Peter Irving, Ebenezer Irving, John Treat Irving, Sr., Pierre Munro Irving, Helen Irving, Pierre Paris Irving, Theodore Irving, Edgar Irving, Amanda Irving, Saunders (Sanders) Irving), Catharine (Kate) Irving are sprinkled throughout the Hoffman collection. These comments or pieces of news offer opinions and information, not from the 19th century press and reviewers or scholars of several centuries but from friends, associates and casual acquaintances of the Irvings during their own lifetimes.

Notable Examples:

Literary News,

“Mr. Washington Irving has been writing a new work, copies of which have been sent to England, and it will appear simultaneously in each country; as this is an on dit in the literary world which only transpired on Saturday last I am in hopes it may be news to you, Mr Irving kept his own counsel so well that the first information we had of his having again resumed his pen through the public prints – the subject of his work is as yet unknown, though I presume it will be composed of materials collected during his western excursion, embodied in the form of Tales and Sketches illustrative of western life – on second thoughts I think I have heard the name of the Book, as the Prairies...the noted Cuenhovens of Sleepy Hollow of notorious memory who first discovery the secret by which a quart of beer could be conjured into a fruit bottle – via the authentic History of New Amsterdam by Mr Knickerbocker – Book 1.” (Philip Rhineland to Emma Nicholas, February 5, 1835, W 3039 L)

Irving Family

“Mr. Theodore Irving has been called to the Chair of Belles Lettres in Geneva College, he is now Prof: Irving...” (Philip Rhineland to Emma Nicholas, December 22, 1836, W 3039 O)

Sunnyside

“I have just returned from spending a fortnight with Mary at Washington Irvings cottage at Tarry Town on the Hudson – we passed a delightful time indeed – the cottage is most beautifully situated immediately on the banks of the river, and everything about it is arranged with so much taste that it is difficult to tell which is most enchanting the beauties of nature or of art – You can have no idea of the relief which one feels at leaving the bustle & tumult of the odious city to spend your time at such a place as this – every thing is so calm, and still, so gently beautiful that mere existence is a pleasure, you feel not the want of excitement but pass your time delightfully,

musings, and gazing on the river a scene that never tires – and when to all these sources of enjoyment is added the agreeable qualities of our host (for when he chooses he is the most agreeable of men) you may imagine the pleasure that we must have enjoyed. (Philip Rhineland to Emma Nicholas, June 21, 1837, W 3039 R)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Philip Rhineland

Julia Hoffman

MARRIAGE AND LOVE

Nineteenth-century letters were a means of sharing news of engagements, weddings, and births. It was common for women in the Hoffman collection to write about an engagement and then express their thoughts about that match. These observations often led writers to discuss their own feelings about love and marriage. Women in the Hoffman circle begin to refer to themselves as “old maids” or “spinsters” as soon as their early twenties. Julia Hoffman first labeled herself an “old maid aunt” around age 23, and Eliza Storrs began to anticipate that she would not marry in her early twenties, too.

Insights about New York marriage culture emerge from these reports and responses to the engagements of others. Women’s letters in the Hoffman collection provide insight into nineteenth-century perceptions of love, marriage, and the potential for happiness in marriage. Also notable is the ardor with which the school friends of Ann Hoffman (Nicholas) and Emma Nicholas (Molony) write to each other in their teenage correspondence. Each young woman in the collection possesses her unique perspective, but read collectively, the reader gains a sense of cultural expectations for young women coming of (marriageable) age in New York.

Notable Examples:

Reporting on engagements

“I must say my dearest Emma I was much surprised on receiving your letter yesterday with the news of your engagement, last summer when you wrote me of the intelligent young physician who had cured Matilda I said to myself perhaps Emma may marry this young Doctor, but as you have never mentioned him since then it had passed from my mind entirely, I do now most sincerely congratulate you if you are to live West it will be happier for you to live there as a married woman that you may have one interest so great as to make you forget all the inconveniences of your situation and I fancy you will no more complain of the want of society...” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, May 9, 1839, W3037 R)

“Phil Paulding is engaged to Catherine Irving and will take her to his marble palace in the spring, of course both families are pleased.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, January 30, 1842, W3037 AC)

“Miss Gratz writes that Becky Moses is engaged to John Nathan of New York he has been in love with her a long time and she always used to ridicule him but a month in his society in New York changed her mind and she is very much in love, I am glad she is going to be married for she never would have been contented as an old maid, and he is amiable and gentlemanlike.” (Julia Hoffman to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, September 28, 1837, W3024 G)

“Matilda Roberts expects to present an heir to the noble family of Roberts in the course of a few months, she is as happy and her new relations as disagreeable as ever.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, February 26, 1833, W3037 F)

Musing on romantic love

“As to my heart, my dear Emma it is still my own. I will not deny, or rather venture to say that it might not have been won, but no one has ever attempted to gain it. Indeed, I am inclined to think that I shall be an old maid, for as I possess neither riches or beauty and am altogether destitute of attractions, such a person as I should admire would unfortunately not admire me, and I have no idea of falling in love first. ... I love my friends most dearly, yes ardently, but do not condemn me as hard hearted or cold if I tell you that I am half, and rather more than half a disbeliever in the doctrine of loving a gentleman so much as to be willing to give up every thing for him; what is called the tender passion I think I shall never feel...” (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, March 30, 1835, W3043 C)

Resigning to spinsterhood

“My best love to your mother and Matilda kiss the dear baby for me and when he begins to understand tell him that he has an old maid aunt in New York whom he must learn to love very much.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, February 26, 1833, W3037 F)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Julia Hoffman
Eliza Storrs
Mary Rhinelander King
Fanny Colden

MOVING WEST

In the late 1830s, Matilda Nicholas (Whitman) moved west, along with her mother, Ann Hoffman Nicholas, and sister, Emma Nicholas. More research is needed to determine the specific circumstances of their move, but the group seems to have settled in Belvidere, Illinois. In Illinois,

Emma met her husband, Dr. Molony. The family's move west became a common theme in correspondence with family and friends in New York, primarily with Julia, who expressed regret that her tight finances prevented her from visiting, and Eliza, who discussed the growing distance between them, and her desire to see Emma the next time she came to New York. Though Ann's and Emma's letters were not preserved in the collection, their correspondents' responses shed light on their experiences living on the frontier.

In addition to responding to the relocation of Ann Hoffman Nicholas and her daughters, Julia Hoffman also writes about others, including her brother, who struck out west to try to make a living.

Notable Examples:

“My heart ached for you while I read about your rides on the prairies. & to find a house at the end of your wanderings with so few of what we call comforts was discouraging. As ‘home is where the heart is,’ and as any place looks pleasant when it is illumined by the smiles of those we love, even your rude habitation may be the abode of that happiness. I must confess Emma that seems to me the only pleasant thing that you are with some of your nearest friends, every other circumstance looks to us rather gloomy.” (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, February 25, 1837, W3043 M)

“[Y]ou must indeed have had a terrible journey ... I am glad to hear that you are comfortably settled at board I should think that in a place where it is so difficult to get a good servant it would be more agreeable and convenient than keeping house, though to be sure it is wearisome to be among so many people continually as one finds in a hotel or boarding house.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, January 30, 1842, W3037 AC)

“Your experience of Western life has not made it charming to my eyes and it seems to me that wealth would be dearly purchased by the actual sufferings in mind and body which you have all undergone in the last two years. In Rockford you will say there is more comfort and more society it may be so but yet not such as Charles has been accustomed to, and even the luxuries which the wealthy have among you such as horses and carriages cease to be such when their owner must undergo the drudgery of taking care of them himself.” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, May 9, 1839, W3037 R)

Notable Writers on this Topic:

Julia Hoffman
Eliza Storrs

PRIVACY

It was customary in the nineteenth century for friends and family to share each other's letters. This practice allowed loved ones to stay up to date with each other's activities and whereabouts without maintaining a direct correspondence, or while waiting for a letter. Ann and Emma's school friends

were aware of this custom and expressed concerns in their own letters about privacy. They asked Ann and Emma not to show their letters to anyone, or even to burn them after reading. These comments were customary in nineteenth-century letters, as letters could be used as blackmail or simply be read by the wrong person. And once a young woman sent a letter, she could not control who read it, only ask the recipient to please not show it to anyone. It is notable that in the Hoffman collection, the writers who most often ask their recipients to keep their letters private are young women. They seem to want to safeguard their privacy and maintain a safe space where they can write about and come to understand themselves better, in the confidence of a friend.

Notable Examples:

Acknowledgement of letter-sharing culture

“[T]he sweet picture of your domestic happiness was so delightful that I could not resist the temptation of reading your letter to Mrs T.[?] Biddle with whom I often converse about you.” (Rebecca Gratz to Ann Hoffman, July 28, W3027)

“I had heard of your safe arrival my dearest Emma through Mrs. Gaylord’s letter which she was kind enough to send us, a few days before I received the one to myself” (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, January 30, 1842, W3037 AC)

“We have heard of you dear Emma in roundabout ways through the Gilmans and Morris’ but not one line from yourselves...” (Julia Hoffman to Ann Hoffman, n.d., W3024 I)

Entreaty for privacy

“How could you mention such nonsense to any one, for although I am willing you should know my folly I don’t wish anyone else to possess such information.” (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, n.d., 3042 W)

“Do you adhere strictly to your promise, and does no one see my letters? — Ann cannot deceive me, and what she says I will believe.” (Augusta to Ann Hoffman, Tuesday Morning, W3033 D)

“Do not let any person see this, it may be a foolish request but I hope you will grant it.” (Susan M Clark to Emma Nicholas, Sunday Evening, W3044 N)

“As we shall have no other means of expressing our thoughts to each other, I do wish my dear Emma and I ask as a favour that you will not shew my letters to any one not even your mother... I dislike, and you know it, the foolish practice of saying ‘do burn this letter,’ and ‘don’t shew this,’ and I would not say so, but you will excuse me when I tell you that the idea that you do let others read my letters prevents freedom in writing...” (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, September 15, 1836, W3043 J)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Eliza Storrs
Augusta
Susan M Clark

PROFESSIONAL WRITING AND PUBLISHING

Julia Hoffman's brother Charles was a writer. Though few letters by Charles were preserved in the Hoffman collection, Julia also wrote about Charles's writing. Her letters comment on the potential for earning a living by writing in the nineteenth century, nineteenth-century literary preferences and culture, the publishing industries in Britain and the United States, and the role that women might have played in the writing processes of men.

Notable Examples:

"I should have written to her a good scolding this winter but my pen has been a great deal employed by Charles not only in copying but in writing to his dictation..." (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, January 30, 1842, W3037 AC)

"Charles has been very busy finishing his novel which I hope will find a publisher and a ready sale novels seem to be the only money making books nowadays, his other book which was published in England has not been republished here, volumes of tales they say are unusable, the English copy which Charles sent me is lying by me now it contains the stories which were published in the magazines..." (Julia Hoffman to Emma Nicholas, October 29, 1839, W3037 S)

Notable Writers on this Topic:

Julia Hoffman

RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Allusions to God and faith are common throughout the Hoffman collection. Letters were a space where women could express their devotion to God, especially when offering condolences in the case of death or loss. But women in the Hoffman collection also discuss their religious observance, education, and participation in faith communities. R.R. Kallock, a friend of Ann Hoffman (Nicholas), reaches out to invite Ann to contribute essays to, and participate in, the Society for the Promotion of Literature in the C.F. Seminary. And though we do not have many of her letters, Emma Nicholas (Molony) wrote extensively about her own spiritual feelings in notebooks that have been preserved in the Hoffman collection. Emma also wrote detailed notes on texts such as *Paradise Lost* while she attended classes at Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution. These texts offer insights into the ways women practiced, expressed, and grappled with their faith in the nineteenth century.

Notable Examples:

"On Sunday morning was the ordination, and it was a most impressive service. [Indistinguishable] were ordained Henry read the Gospel, and can I tell you how I felt when

I heard his voice in the church for the first time. How much he felt I knew, for he read with such a low and trembling voice that even where I was which was quite near I could hardly hear him. In the afternoon he preached in St Paul's. I went, although I wished not to go for many reasons. I cannot tell you my feelings dear Emma. I did not dare to look at him hardly, until after the sermon, while the last hymn was sung. I hope he may be all that he ought to be, for he has chosen a most responsible profession; and spoken most solemn vows." (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, July 8, 1836, W3043 F)

"I most sincerely rejoice at the strain of piety throughout your letter. No earthly pleasures or possessions could compensate for the want of that obedience to our Heavenly Father's will, which appears to be your greatest delight, and may it be the will of our heavenly Parent to multiply greatly your spiritual blessings." (Mary Nicholas to Emma Nicholas, May 14, 1836, W3041 I)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Emma Nicholas
Mary Nicholas
Eliza Storrs
R.R. Kallock

TRAVEL

Some letters in the Hoffman collection discuss the logistics of travel throughout the Northeast United States and out west. Women mention the types of transportation they used, the duration of their trips and visits, and who they planned to stay with when they arrived. Because women frequently included their location before a letter's date, it is possible to retrace a woman's movements (roughly) from place to place.

It is significant that women continued to write letters even while away from home. This was possible, in many cases, because women took their writing desks with them when they traveled. That nineteenth-century women maintained their correspondence while away from home, giving directions about where letters should be sent to catch them on the next leg of their journey, signals the importance of staying connected with friends and family through letters. And women demonstrated confidence that the Postal Service would find them and deliver their mail as they moved from place to place, even if the letters just caught up with them down the road.

Notable Examples:

"It is so common to go to Europe now, that it seems no more than going to Utica, indeed it is quite vulgar to be rich and travel in Europe, two vulgarities however which I must say almost any one would be willing to put up with." (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, February 16, 1835, W3043 A)

“Tuesday morning I was doing a little of every thing and at five Mama and I went on board the Cleopatra which was as full of men women & children as it could well be ... Such a collection I have not seen in a long time, and concluded they were persons who had been to NY to pass the 4th of July and were returning home after hearing the crackers, & seeing the soldiers, & fire works. Mr and Miss Elsworth of Hartford were on board, and another young lady and her brother whom she knew I found them very agreeable and until 10 the time flew, after that when we went into the cabin it ‘dragged its slow length along’ until half past three, when Mama and I were safely landed in the dock, we had no trunk and went as soon as possible up to Grandmama’s, where we preferred sitting on the piazza and enjoying the fresh morning air until five, rather than disturb the family.” (Eliza Storrs to Emma Nicholas, July 8, 1836, W3043 F)

Notable Writers on this Topic:

Julia Hoffman
Eliza Storrs

WOMEN’S INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Many letters in the Hoffman collection describe social events, outings, conversations with friends, dinners, and dances. Women’s social activities in nineteenth-century New York included attending, hosting, and RSVPing for parties; riding horses; reading; making calls and visits; and going for walks.

Letters from Ann’s and Emma’s school friends respond to or extend invitations to events. These notes provide examples of the process of hosting a gathering, and the role letters played in that process. Women wrote to each other about what they were reading, too. They shared recommendations of new books and coordinated book borrowing and lending.

The Hoffman collection contains notebooks that Ann Hoffman (Nicholas) used to learn and practice Burmese. These notebooks could be useful for exploring the culture around women’s language learning, and language acquisition pedagogy, in the early nineteenth century.

The collection also houses a set of calling cards, material symbols of visiting culture in nineteenth-century New York. These cards are printed or hand-written, and sometimes personalized.

This robust collection of written and material examples of women’s social lives provides insights into the ways middle-class women in New York and the surrounding areas spent their time, and engaged their intellect, during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Notable Examples:

Writing about reading

“I have no new book my dear Lady I was reading The Pioneers which I began but could not get on with as long as Mr J. was in town.” (Anne Watson to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, n.d., W3032 Q)

“Julia has not finished the second vol. but as she will have company & won’t be able to read this evg she sends it to you – she will be much obliged to you for it so soon as you have perused it as she will be ‘wicked and worldly enough to read it after church tomorrow’” (Anne Watson to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, n.d. W 3032 S)

Planning and attending parties

“Will Mr Nicholas and yourself do us the favor to take a family dinner with tomorrow? This is dismal weather to ask any one to leave their own comfortable fire side, indeed Heaven and Earth seem to forbid it, but Mrs Fitzhugh has promised to come...” (Anne Watson to Ann Hoffman Nicholas, Friday, W3032 Z)

“What is to be done at ‘Miss Betsy Gibbons’ this evening? I suppose as you were with her last evening you are perfectly acquainted with her plans for to day. Do you dine there? I understand there is to be company at dinner – tell me all you know about it, who are to be of each party I do not feel much like going but perhaps by 6 this evening I may feel very differently” (Anne Watson to Ann Nicholas, Thursday, W3032 T)

Notable Writers on this Topic:

Anne Watson
Eliza Storrs
Julia Hoffman
Mary Rhinelander King
Fanny Colden
Susan M Clark
Marie Campbell
Mary Ella
Augusta

YOUNG WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Ann, Matilda, and Mary Hoffman attended school in the period between 1800 and 1808. Their letters home document homesickness, study schedules, money requests, and social activities, as well as plans to return home. Mary Hoffman, who was approximately 12 years old during this period, wrote her letters in large, neat handwriting on faintly lined paper, the evidence of a young woman learning good penmanship and letter writing in school.

Ann and Matilda were living at a boarding school in Philadelphia learning French; they both wrote at least one letter home to their father entirely in French. Their lively correspondence with Judge Hoffman shed light on the relationships between parents and children, and the experience of

attending school, for middle-class daughters, away from home during formative years of their lives. Similarly, Judge Hoffman's letters to Ann and Matilda also illuminate his perspective on his daughters' education, and the influence their education would have on their future.

Each of the Hoffman daughters expresses her thoughts and ambitions about her education. The schoolmistress also emerges as a secondary character in these letters.

The Hoffman collection also contains Emma's notes on texts such as *Paradise Lost*, which could provide insight into the format of women's education, the standards of lecturing and notetaking, and nineteenth-century pedagogy in the United States.

Notable Examples:

“[E]very night I dream of home, & every day I wish I were home, but to kiss you all & return to my studies[?]. Four months & then I shall once more embrace you. a tedious four months indeed they will be, but I will be perfect mistress of french” (Ann Hoffman to Josiah Hoffman, January 16, 1805, W3011 D)

“On Saturday we spent the day in making rewards for the little girls; and I hope soon to make some pretty enough to send home. Miss Brenton says she does not believe Eliza loves her, for the very reasons she has given, in the first place, because she says she is good, in the next place, because she is neither a Whig, or Tory, for she thinks women have nothing to do with politicks.” (Mary Hoffman to Ann Hoffman, January 26, W3023 D)

“I non begin my letter to tell you that I got a reward this morning, a little Bible, for being head in lecture 12 times. Every night we have a bucket of cold water poured over us. I hope you will be in town Christmas holidays, I shall be at home 3 weeks. ... We get up so early that the other morning Miss Brenton brought a candle with her to call us it was so dark.” (Mary Hoffman to Ann Hoffman, November 18, W3023 B)

Notable Writers on This Topic:

Ann Hoffman
Matilda Hoffman
Mary Colden Hoffman
Emma Nicholas
Josiah Ogden Hoffman

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This list suggests potential future projects for which the Hoffman collection could be useful.

- Abolition and women's activism pre-Civil War (see Anicartha Miller letters, W3030)
- Format of women's education and nineteenth-century pedagogy in the United States (see Emma's lecture notebooks, W3001-3002)
- Nineteenth-century women and poetry (see Emma's wedding gift, a collection of poems, W3005-3006; Eliza Storrs letters, W3042-3043)
- Nineteenth-century wedding culture (see Emma's wedding gift, a collection of poems, W3005-3006)
- Social calls and culture, and female friendship (see calling cards, W3058; Augusta letters, W3033; Mary Ella letters, W3044; Eliza Storrs letters, W3042-3043; Susan M Clark letters, W3044)
- Westward expansion (see Eliza Storrs letters, W3042-3043; Julia Hoffman letters, W3024, W3037)
- Women's creative writing (see Ann's short story, W3053)
- Women's language study and acquisition (see Ann's Burmese notebooks, W3004)
- Women's material objects (see Ann and Emma's books, W3005-3008)
- Women's travel in upstate New York (see Eliza Storrs letters, W3042-3043)