

Robert Kennicott (1835-1865?)—Henry M. Bannister (1844-1920) Papers, 1857-1905
Series 11/2/2
Boxes 1-2

Biographical Background

Robert Kennicott and Henry Martyn Bannister were naturalists and explorers of the Alaska Territory in the mid-1860s. Their discoveries, as publicized before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, contributed to the eventual purchase of Alaska by the United States in 1867. Yet the exploration of Alaska was only the foremost of many achievements and discoveries by the two men.

Robert Kennicott, the older of the two, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on November 13, 1835. While he was still quite young, his parents moved to Northbrook, Illinois, a town northwest of Chicago. Kennicott received little formal education, yet, with the guidance of his father and others, he was able to train himself in natural history. His progress was rapid. At the age of twenty, he made a comprehensive survey of southern Illinois for the Illinois Central Railroad; at twenty-one, he helped to establish the Chicago Academy of Science; at twenty-two, he established a natural history museum at Northwestern University. In the late 1850s, Kennicott joined the Smithsonian Institution as an explorer and cataloger. He traveled through British America (new Canada) as far north as Fort Yukon and returned to the Smithsonian with many new discoveries. As a reward for his achievements, he was made the curator of the Chicago Academy of Science and later chosen to head the Western Union Telegraph expedition to Alaska. He died of a heart attack at Fort Nulato, Alaska, while on this expedition.

Henry M. Bannister carried on Kennicott's work. Born on July 24, 1844, the son of Dr. Henry Bannister, a professor in the Garrett Biblical Institute, Bannister received his education at Northwestern University, where he met Kennicott. After graduation in 1863, Bannister worked with Kennicott on the Northwestern University museum. Because he was a hard worker, Bannister was taken on the Western Union expedition to Alaska in March of 1865. After Kennicott's death, Bannister returned to Washington, where he delivered an expedition report to the Smithsonian Institution and supplied expert information to Senator Charles Sumner and Secretary of State William H. Seward. This information was later used in the Senate ratification of the purchase of Alaska. In later years, Bannister worked for the Illinois Geological Survey and studied medicine in the National Medical College in Washington, D.C. Bannister practiced medicine in Chicago for many years and published widely in the area of mental illness and nervous disorders. He died on May 1, 1920.

Description of the Series

The Kennicott-Bannister Papers constitute a small but valuable collection, especially for the historian of American science. The bulk of the collection consists of the letters and diaries of the two explorers between 1857 and 1873. The Kennicott correspondence is all incoming and concerns the establishment of the natural history museum at Northwestern and the classification of various flora and fauna. The Kennicott materials also include a copy of his Alaska journal as printed in the Transactions of the Chicago Academy of Science, vol. 1, part 2 (1869). The papers of Henry Bannister are more complete than those of his mentor. Of prime importance are the five volumes

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of his diary, recorded between March 21, 1865 and July 5, 1873. The entries after January, 1867 are irregular, however, Bannister's papers include his correspondence between January 1, 1864 and December 21, 1905, with Kennicott and officials at the Smithsonian Institution.

Other items of interest are Bannister's memoir of the Alaska expedition and a number of manuscript essays on the expedition, Kennicott, and Russian possessions in North America. Photographs and correspondence concerning the history of the collection are also included.

Restrictions: None.

Separations: One book, James Alton James (ed.) *The First Scientific Exploration of Russian America and the Purchase of Alaska* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1942), was separated to the University Archives Faculty Collection. Two folders of photographs were separated and added to the University Archives Photographic Collection under the heading Kennicott, Robert and Bannister, Henry M.

Processor: T. Walch, August, 1975. Refoldered and reboxed, August, 1999.

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Container List

Box 1

- Folder 1: Inventory
- Folder 2: Robert Kennicott biographical file
- Folder 3: Robert Kennicott Yukon Journal, 1857-1862
- Folder 4: Robert Kennicott correspondence, 1857-1864
- Folder 5: Henry M. Bannister biographical file
- Folder 6: Henry M. Bannister Alaska Journal, volumes 1, 2 (1865)
- Folder 7: Henry M. Bannister Journal, volumes 3, 5 (1866-1867, 1873)
- Folder 8: Henry M. Bannister Journal, volume 4 (1867-1872)

Box 2

- Folder 1: Henry M. Bannister correspondence, 1857-1905
- Folder 2: Henry M. Bannister unpublished writings, undated
- Folder 3: Correspondence concerning the discovery and publication of the Kennicott-Bannister Journals
- Folder 4 Henry M. Bannister: Reprints

ADDITIONS

Fifteen letters, certificates, and other documents have been interfiled into the Kennicott—Bannister Papers.

Provenance: These items were donated to the University Archives by Mabel Gardiner for Ruth Bannister in December, 1979, as Accession Number 79-229.

1. A letter from Lucy Kimble to H. M. Bannister, undated, probably around 1889.
2. A letter to Lucy Kimble from H. M. Bannister, dated Cazenovia, N.Y., May 6, 1889
3. Letter to H.M. Bannister from Lucy Kimble, dated Leyden, December 22, 1888.
4. Letter to H. M. Bannister, unsigned, probably from Lucy Kimble, from Louisville, June 28, 1888.
5. Letter to H. M. Bannister from Lucy Kimble, dated Leyden, April 7, 18--(?).
6. A letter and envelope to H. M. Bannister from his father, dated Evanston, May 11, 18--(?), about his going on the Rocky Mountain expedition.
7. Telegram to H. M. Bannister from Mary (Bannister Willard), dated Milano 410, July 31, 1886.

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Container List—Additions, continued

8. Letter to Dr. Blumer from a Dr. E. Regis in Bordeaux, about Bannister's work and writings on "mental maladies."
9. Letter from H. M. Bannister to his father, dated Washington D. C., August 14, 1869.
10. Letter to H. M. Bannister from Henry W. Elliot, dated St. Paul's Island, Bering Sea, May 1, 1873.
11. Certificate of Graduation to H. M. Bannister from the Illinois State Board of Health, September, 1877.
12. Letter to the Board of Commissioners from Wm. E. Laine recommending H. M. Bannister for Superintendent of Cook County Insane Asylum.
13. Letter to H. M. Bannister from S. A. L----, undated, about the latter's fish report.
14. 10 tickets of matriculation from the National Medical College, 1869-70, for H. M. Bannister.
15. 4 page typescript of a tribute to H. M. Bannister by Dr. Horace Greeley Smith.

ADDITIONS

Four of Henry M. Bannister's diplomas and certificates have been added to this series. They include Bannister's 1869 Liberal Arts graduate diploma from Northwestern University, his 1871 Doctor of Medicine diploma from Columbia, an 1879 certificate of membership in the State Natural History Society of Illinois, and an 1888 certificate of membership in the Chicago Medico-Legal Society.

Bannister's Doctor of Medicine diploma from Columbia has been filed in Room 110, Map Case, Drawer B. The other three items have been placed in an oversized folder along with Bannister's 1863 Bachelor of Philosophy diploma from Northwestern (a separation from an earlier accession) and shelved at Room 111B, B, 0.

Provenance: The University Archives received these items from Ruth Bannister donated these items to the University Archives on November 24, 1980 as Accession #80-183.

Processor: Kevin Leonard, June 11, 1981.