



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Am .1881

Whiteman Family
Papers

1849-1856

9 boxes (47 vols.), 0.75 lin. feet

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Abstract

This collection is comprised of several small, handwritten, juvenile works, the longest of which is “The Ladder,” 1849-1853, of brothers John G., William A., James G., and Horace Whiteman of Philadelphia, reflecting mid-nineteenth-century popular culture. The miniature volumes contain articles on natural history, descriptions of different museum exhibitions, news items, poetry, satire, stories, puzzles, riddles, descriptions of 4th of July and Christmas holiday festivities, and line drawings and color illustrations. The collection also contains works attributed to a more mature John G. Whiteman, amateur musician and leader of an orchestra who, between about 1851 and 1856, produced several operas and light operas.

Background note

The four Whiteman brothers, John G. (1831-1921), William A. (1834-1867), James G. (1836-1894), and Horace (1838-1899), were a creative group. Not much is known about the family itself. The boys were probably raised in Philadelphia, and may have spent some time in Philadelphia’s suburbs. Around the early 1850s, when the boys ranged in ages from the early teens to early twenties, they created small booklets that were modeled after newspapers and magazines of the time. These booklets served as sources of amusement and entertainment for the boys. Eventually, the oldest brother, John G., turned to writing prose, light operas, and operas.

Scope & content

While the collection is quite interesting in terms of its contents, there are no personal papers, correspondence, or business papers from the family. Researchers can glean small bits of information about the boys from their stories and anecdotes. For instance, throughout the writings, there are several references to towns named “Smokyville” and “Oasisville.” In the booklet entitled “The Geography of Smokyville,” the boys wrote, “Smokyville is a fine country in the eastern part of Gardenville.” They may have been talking about the town of Gardenville in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Since Smokyville appears as a point of reference in many of the booklets, one may surmise that the boys

spent time in Gardenville. Other interesting multiple references include those to the addresses 136 North 11th Street, where “The Ladder” was created, 301 Dudley Street, where Horace Whiteman apparently owned a store, and 90 Dudley Street, where several of the other booklets were “published.”

Most of these handmade volumes measure approximately three inches by four inches. They are small booklets, in which are combined elements of homemade newspapers and comic books, made by teenage boys to amuse themselves. They have paper covers and hand-stitched bindings, and many include sketches, watercolors, or colored pencil illustrations. While the content in each booklet and each series of booklets varies, they all contain a few common elements, such as fictional stories, puzzles, and drawings.

“The Ladder” appears to have been the boys’ main source of entertainment and probably took a great deal of time to put together. Anecdotes, games, gossip, poetry, editorials, illustrations, and puzzles are included. This collection contains twenty-five volumes of “The Ladder,” which includes several special or holiday issues. These charming volumes reflect on current events, outings and visits, and the school activities of these amateur newspapermen. The boys remarked on visits to exhibits at the Franklin Institute and the “Pennsylvania Museum.”¹ There are detailed accounts of natural science exhibits, including black ink or colored drawings of various items, such as shells or flowers, in each exhibit.

In addition to “The Ladder,” the boys also produced titles such as “The Summer’s Day,” “Annual and Grand Exhibition of American Manufactures,” “Grand Annual Horticultural Exhibition,” “The Fair,” “The Museum,” and “The Oasisville Journal.” In this collection there is only one volume of “The Summer’s Day,” but it contains several numbered issues. Published by James or John G. and William A. Whiteman in 1850, this work includes sections on botany, chemistry, and engravings. There are riddles under the heading “wit and humor,” and on each front page is a short editorial. A few of the issues contain an original fictional story entitled “Zaparilli!”

Issues of “The Fair,” are the smallest booklets in the collection. There are six booklets total, dating from 1851 to 1852. Measuring a mere two inches tall, these diminutive creations, “published” by James or John G. Whiteman, primarily contain writings on an American manufacturing exhibit held at or sponsored by the Franklin Institute. Amazingly, these booklets each contain detailed writings and drawings on various items that were shown at this exhibition, from designs on “hanging paper” to a brush and comb set to a box stove.

Another interesting set of booklets titled “The Museum” were created by James or John G. Whiteman in 1851 and 1852. There are three booklets; each focused on a particular group of museum objects, in this case shells and animal skulls. Each booklet contains descriptions of items as well as vivid colored drawings. Created in a similar fashion, but without the drawings, are the leaflets that the boys created on American manufacturing

¹ They may have been referring to the Philadelphia Museum, founded by Charles Wilson Peale and later owned by P.T. Barnum.

and horticulture, which are quite interesting because of their detailed lists of items that appeared in each exhibition.

Among the latest of the boys' small works is "The Oasisville Journal," edited by Horace Whiteman in 1854. This title contains several numbered issues of one volume. In keeping with themes prevalent in their other works, "The Oasisville Journal" contains stories, drawings, puzzles, and poetry. The front page of the "Extra" edition dated July 11, 1854, exclaims "Great fire at Oasisville! 301 Dudley St in ruins!" This is an apparent reference to a store Horace Whiteman owned at this address. Whether or not the story is entirely true is a mystery, but it demonstrates well the boys' writing ability. The back page of this same issue contains a drawing of the building in flames.

Rounding out this collection are several handwritten works attributed to a more mature John G. Whiteman, 1851-1856, an amateur musician and leader of an orchestra that produced his light operas, "Jack and the Bean Stalk: a fairy drama" and "The Queen of Hearts"; and his operas "Blue Beard," "Lord Bateman," and "Miranda." Each work is generally complete with dialogue, songs, a cast of characters, and stage directions. There are no indications of where the works were produced.

Separation report

None.

Subjects

Wit and humor—Juvenile.

Children's poetry.

Child authors.

Children's stories.

Children's drawings.

Franklin Institute (Philadelphia, Pa.).

Whiteman, Horace, 1838-1899.

Whiteman, James G., 1836-1894.

Whiteman, John G., 1831-1921.

Whiteman, William A., 1834-1867.

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Gift of Dora A. Whiteman, 1935.

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], Whiteman Family Papers (Am .1881), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Processing note

Processing made possible through a generous donation from Dr. James D. B. Weiss Jr.

This collection was formerly known as Collection 712.

Box and folder listing

PLEASE NOTE: Because each of these boxes contain multiple volumes, researchers may use only one box at a time.

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box
"The Ladder," vols. 1-2	1849	1 item	1
"The Ladder," vols. 3-4-5	1849	1 item	1
"The Ladder," 4 th of July special issue	1849	1 item	1
"The Ladder," vol. 6	1849-1850	1 item	1
"The Ladder," vols. 7-8	1850	1 item	1
"The Ladder," vol. 10	1850	1 item	1
"The Ladder," Christmas issue	1850-1851	1 item	2
"The Ladder," vol. 11	1850	1 item	2
"The Ladder," vol. 12	1850	1 item	2
"The Ladder," vol. 13	1850	1 item	2
"The Ladder," vol. 15	1851	1 item	2
"The Ladder," extras	Feb., July 1851	3 items	3
"The Ladder," almanac and riddles	n.d.	1 item	3
"The Ladder," vol. 16	1851	1 item	3
"The Ladder," vol. 17	1851	1 item	3
"The Ladder," vol. 18	1851	1 item	3
"The Ladder," vol. 19	1852	1 item	3
"The Ladder," vols. 21-22	1852	1 item	4
"The Ladder," Christmas issue	1852	1 item	4
"A Geography of Smokyville"	1850	1 item	5
"The Oasisville Journal," vol. 1	1854	1 item	5
"The Summer's Day," vol. 2	1850	1 item	6
"3 rd Grand Annual Horticultural Exhibition"	ca. 1850	1 item	6
"4 th Grand Annual Horticultural Exhibition"	1850	1 item	6
"5 th Grand Annual Horticultural Exhibition"	1851	1 item	6
"6 th Grand Annual Horticultural Exhibition"	1852	1 item	6
"4 th Annual Exhibition of American Manufactures"	n.d.	1 item	6

"5 th Annual Exhibition of American Manufactures"	n.d.	1 item	6
"1 st Word"	n.d.	1 item	6
"Jack and the Bean Stalk: a fairy drama"	1851	1 item	6
"The Fair," no. 1	ca. 1850	1 item	7
"The Fair," no. 2	ca. 1850	1 item	7
"The Fair," no. 1	18 Oct. 1851	1 item	7
"The Fair," no. 2	25 Oct. 1851	1 item	7
"The Fair," no. 1	16 Oct. 1852	1 item	7
"The Fair," no. 2	23 Oct. 1852	1 item	7
"The Museum," no. 2	1851	1 item	8
"The Museum," no. 3	ca. 1851	1 item	8
"The Museum," no. 5	ca. 1851	1 item	8
"The Queen of Hearts"	ca. 1855	1 item	9
"Miranda"	ca. 1855	1 item	9
"Blue Beard"	ca. 1855	2 items	9
"In Memoriam, verses on the death of a cat, Sept. 1, 1855."	Sept. 1855	1 item	9
"Lord Bateman"	26 Dec. 1856	1 item	9