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Guide to the Alonzo A. Hill Papers

WA MSS S-1297



by Diane J. Ducharme

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: WA MSS S-1297

CREATOR: Hill, Alonzo A., 1828?-1857

TITLE: Alonzo A. Hill papers

DATES: 1849-1857

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.5 linear feet (1 box)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence and other papers documenting Alonzo Hill's voyage to California, experiences in the gold fields, San Francisco, and Sacramento.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.ahill>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.ahill>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased on the Frederick W. and Carrie S. Beinecke Fund for Western Americana, 1975.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Alonzo A. Hill Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Alonzo A. Hill Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Scope and Contents

The Alonzo A. Hill Papers consist of one box of correspondence, journals, and miscellaneous papers documenting Hill's voyage to and life in California between 1849 and 1857.

There are twenty folders of correspondence, consisting almost entirely of letters from Hill to his family in Massachusetts. In April 1849, Hill sailed for San Francisco on the *Areatus* as a member of the Bay State and California Mining and Trading Company, hoping to make his fortune and to aid his financially distressed family. The 1849 letters describe the voyage; his stopover in Rio de Janeiro; the crowded wharves and tents of San Francisco; typical wages and prices in California; and Hill's first attempts at mining.

The Bay State and California Company disbanded in December 1849, and the discouraged Hill abandoned mining for higher-wage work. The 1850-54 letters, some on illustrated stationery, detail his series of jobs, among them stump-digger, bookkeeper, auctioneer, bar manager, and purchasing agent. They also discuss Hill's attempts to sell consignments of goods, including boots and scythes shipped to him by his father, Washington Hill. Many letters describe Hill's life in Sacramento and San Francisco. Topics include Hill's bout with typhoid fever; an epidemic of Asiatic cholera; the 1850 San Francisco fire; the lynching of a gambler and murderer in Sacramento; emigration from California; the decor of gambling saloons; and Hill's opposition to the idea of a "Women's Rights Convention." Letters written in late 1853 comment on his brother Luther's brief visit to San Francisco and his investment in the Franklin Hotel.

The letters also chronicle Hill's increasing depression and disillusionment with California, expressed in pleas for "more sympathy" from his family, complaints about being swindled in business, and apologies for his failure to become wealthy. Hill repeatedly attempted to explain the realities of the gold rush to his father, remarking as early as September 1850 that "it is astonishing how few of the unfavorable reports reach the Eastern states." He described the misfortunes of other members of the original company and the hardships faced by most immigrants, and often announced his intention of leaving California.

There are no letters for the years 1855 and 1856. Hill's last letter to his family, written in May of 1857, explained that "insanity for nine or ten years has preyed upon my brain," and asked that they forgive him for committing suicide. A letter to his partner, Wells, listed legacies for his family. Both were enclosed in a condolence letter from the San Francisco Coroner's Office.

Folders 21 and 22 hold two journals written by Hill during his 1849 voyage. They contain notes on navigation and shipboard life and describe Hill's participation in a weekly debating society. There is much information about the Bay State and California Mining and Trading Company, including by-laws, minutes of business meetings, and a complete list of members which indicates age, former occupation, and former place of residence for most of them. The last three folders in the collection contain another members list, Hill's life insurance policy, some shipping receipts, and a photograph of Hill.

Collection Contents

b. 1, f. 1-3	Correspondence	1849
b. 1, f. 4-7	Correspondence	1850
b. 1, f. 8-10	Correspondence	1851
b. 1, f. 11-13	Correspondence	1852
b. 1, f. 14-16	Correspondence	1853
b. 1, f. 17-18	Correspondence	1854
b. 1, f. 19-20	Correspondence	1857, n.d.
b. 1, f. 21-22	Journals	1849
b. 1, f. 23	Bay State and California Mining and Trading Company: membership list	[1850?]
b. 1, f. 24	Insurance policies and receipts	1849-50
b. 1, f. 25	Photograph	[1849?]

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Frontier and pioneer life -- California
Gold mines and mining -- California
Suicide -- California
Voyages to the Pacific coast

Geographic Names

California -- Description and travel
California -- Gold discoveries
California -- Social life and customs -- 19th century
Sacramento (Calif.) -- Description and travel
San Francisco (Calif.) -- Description and travel

Genres / Formats

Letterheads -- United States

Occupations

Gold miners -- California

Names

Hill, Alonzo A., 1828?-1857
Hill, Washington

Corporate Bodies

Areatus (Ship)
Bay State and California Mining and Trading Company