

Guide to the Robert Porter Keep Papers

MS 1316



compiled by Diane Ellen Kaplan

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Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
(203) 432-1735
(203) 432-7441
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 1316

CREATOR: Keep, Robert P. (Robert Porter), 1844-1904

TITLE: Robert Porter Keep Papers

DATES: 1849-1902

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.5 linear feet (5 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Correspondence and memorabilia documenting the personal and professional life of Robert Porter Keep, a teacher of Greek and a school administrator. The papers also document the life and work of other members of the Keep, Porter, and Haines families including: Samuel Porter, Sarah Porter, and Margaret Haines Keep. The papers document, especially through correspondence with his parents, Keep's student days at Yale College, his religious training, his early teaching duties, his travels and studies in Europe, and his scholarly work and later teaching. Keep's father John, a teacher at the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in Hartford, Connecticut and his mother Rebecca write of their own work and of religion, health, and other family news from Hartford and Farmington, Connecticut. The papers include letters from Yale classmates, notably William Scranton, and from family members prominent in educational circles; Samuel Porter, a teacher of the deaf; Sarah Porter, founder of Miss Porter's School; and Noah Porter, president of Yale University. The papers also include many business letters to Samuel Porter concerning his land holdings in Missouri and correspondence of Margaret Haines Keep, the wife of Robert Porter Keep, prior to her marriage. These include letters concerning family life in Elizabeth, New Jersey and Brooklyn, New York and student life at Miss Porter's School.

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Requesting Instructions

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

- b. box
- f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Robert Dalton Harris in 1981.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Robert Porter Keep Papers (MS 1316). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Robert Porter Keep was born on April 26, 1844 in Farmington, Connecticut. He was a scholar of classical Greek, teacher, and school administrator. Keep died in Farmington, Connecticut on June 3, 1904. After graduating from Yale College in 1865, Keep taught at the school for children of staff at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York. He received a Ph.D. from Yale and then served as United States consul at the Piraeus until 1871 when he undertook further research in Germany and Italy. From 1876 to 1885 he taught Greek at Williston Seminary, Easthampton, Massachusetts, and from 1885 until 1902 he served as principal of the Free Academy of Norwich, Connecticut. From then until his death he was trustee of Miss Porter's School for Girls in Farmington, Connecticut. He was the author of several texts for use in the teaching of Greek. Keep married Margaret Vryling Haines in 1879. They had two children, Robert and Dorothea. Margaret Keep died in 1893, and Keep married Elizabeth V. Hale in 1897.

Scope and Contents

The Robert Porter Keep papers contain correspondence and memorabilia documenting the personal and professional life of Robert Porter Keep, a teacher of Greek and a school administrator. The papers also document the life and work of other members of the Keep, Porter, and Haines families including Sarah Porter (1813-1900), founder of Miss Porter's School; Samuel Porter (1810-1901) and John R. Keep, both teachers of the deaf; and Margaret Haines Keep, the first wife of Robert Porter Keep. The papers are of most interest to researchers of 19th century education, social life in Hartford and Farmington, Connecticut, family history, and domestic relations. There are also several references to 19th century

medical treatments. The papers reflect a social circle of highly educated, religious people, who were deeply committed to education and educational excellence.

The Keep papers were purchased in 1981. Additional correspondence of Keep, Porter, and Haines family members is found in the Sarah Porter Papers housed in the library of Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut.

The Keep papers are arranged in three series by family. Series I, KEEP FAMILY, is the largest series and contains all letters to or from Robert Porter Keep, as well as correspondence of other Keep family members and family memorabilia. Series II, HAINES FAMILY, is composed almost entirely of the correspondence of Margaret Haines Keep. A few items belonging to other Haines family members are also included in the series. Series III, PORTER FAMILY, contains primarily the correspondence of Samuel Porter, though other family members are represented in correspondence and memorabilia.

The KEEP FAMILY series chronicles the life of Robert Porter Keep from his departure for Yale College in the fall of 1861 until his engagement to his second wife, Elizabeth V. Hale, in 1895. The most complete correspondence and the most useful in terms of documenting Robert Porter Keep's life is that with his parents John R. and Rebecca Porter Keep. At Yale Keep was a serious student, and in his letters from college he often writes of his work and occasional despondency over his own failures. The parents letters are full of their preoccupation with Robert's health, and advice on diet, manners, deportment, and religious piety. Letters from 1864 describe brother Willie's urinary disease and surgical treatment at Massachusetts General Hospital. The Keeps were familiar with prominent families in Hartford society such as the Beechers and the Stowes, and in their letters there is frequent news of affairs in Hartford, especially within the church, and also news of the Porter family in Farmington and of the fortunes of friends and neighbors serving in the Union Army. John Keep occasionally writes of his own work at the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in Hartford.

After graduating from Yale in 1865 Keep left New Haven to teach at the West Point school for staff children. There are few letters from Keep at this time to explain his work or his feelings about teaching, but after Keep returned to Yale for graduate training (1867-1868) and later there are letters (in the chronological file) from former students. In the chronological file there are also letters from classmates, many of whom also went on to teaching positions. The letters from one classmate, William Scranton, are of particular note (folder 28). He returned to Scranton, Pennsylvania after graduation to go into his father's iron and steel business. The letters contain occasional references to labor relations, strikes, and new developments in the steel industry. Letters from Keep's parents continue to be solicitous of his health and future occupation and show interest in Keep's work with the Sunday School in New Haven.

In 1870 Keep went abroad, first as U.S. Counsel in Piraeus, Greece and then for further study in Germany. There are few letters about his work in Greece, but more lengthy ones from Germany along with some bills for purchases of books and clothing. Keep's sister Elizabeth, referred to as Lizzie, came to visit him in Germany in 1873, and her letters to sister Mary and their parents (filed in Other Keep Family) give more details of their social life and customs. While Keep was still abroad his sister Mary died (February, 1874), and it is in correspondence with his Aunt Sarah Porter that one can learn of her lingering disease and the prescribed treatment.

Rebecca Keep's letters of 1884 describe their courtship and housekeeping. In the years that follow there are letters concerning the births of Robert Porter Keep's children and condolences on the loss of an infant in 1889.

In 1885 the Keep family moved to Norwich, Connecticut where Keep became principal of the Norwich Free Academy. A few letters of application and recommendations for applicants for teaching positions, in the chronological file in 1890, reflect Keep's administrative responsibilities.

The folders "Other Keep" at the end of the series contain letters to John and Rebecca Keep from their other children, Lizzie, Mary, and Willie, letters from Samuel, Sarah, and Elizabeth Porter to their sister and brother-in-law and to their nieces and nephew, letters between John and Rebecca Keep, and letters to Robert Porter Keep's children, Robin and Dorthea. Letters addressed only to Margaret Haines Keep are in Series II.

The HAINES FAMILY series is composed almost entirely of the correspondence of Margaret Haines Keep with her family and friends, both prior to her marriage and after, though the letters before 1879 are the greater in quantity. All her correspondence with her husband is filed in Series I.

Margaret Haines Keep's major correspondent is her sister, Lillian M. Haines. Their correspondence traces some of the events in Margaret Haines Keep's life and centers on family and social activities in Elizabeth, New Jersey and, after 1882, in Brooklyn, New York. There are also some letters from New Orleans where Margaret spent a winter. Other files contain correspondence with Margaret's mother and brother Ed. In her letters to her mother in 1872 Margaret writes of her life at Miss Porter's School. The files also contain notes from Sarah Porter and from classmates at Miss Porter's School, as well as letters concerning Margaret's initial attempts at housekeeping, the birth of children, and the family move to Norwich, Connecticut in 1885.

The PORTER FAMILY series is composed primarily of Samuel Porter's correspondence and much concerns his business affairs. The series is also interesting as a reflection of the intellectual tenor of Porter family life. Correspondents include: brother Noah, president of Yale College; sister Sarah, founder of Miss Porter's School; and brother-in-law John R. Keep, a fellow teacher of the deaf. The series also includes a small amount of correspondence of family members other than Samuel Porter and some memorabilia from Miss Porter's School (folder 62).

The great bulk of letters from 1867-1869 concerns Samuel Porter's land holdings in Missouri. Correspondents are tenants and prospective purchasers of land in Caputville, Barton County, and their letters often mention local conditions and the financial outlook.

With John Keep, Samuel Porter discussed affairs at the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, where he had been an instructor prior to joining Edward Minor Gallaudet in Washington, D.C. at the National Deaf Mute College. Most of their letters concern asylum finances but in a few letters in 1868 Keep comments on the use of sign language in chapel and experiments to teach deaf students to articulate.

Sarah Porter's letters to her brother convey her sense of mission and religious duty and also her lively intellect and awareness of political happenings. In various letters she writes of her interest in helping a family of black children, her opinions of the Grant administration, and her views of the Beecher case. In 1874 she writes in detail of Mary Keep's illness and death.

Letters of another Porter, nephew Samuel, son of brother Giles, show his struggles to obtain an education while growing up on a farm in Clayton, Iowa. Later he writes from school in Jacksonville, Illinois.

Arrangement

Arranged in three series: I. Keep Family, 1849-1902; II. Haines Family, 1860-1892; III. Porter Family, 1849, 1864-1883.

Collection Contents

Series I: Keep Family, 1849-1902, undated

KEEP FAMILY is composed primarily of the papers of Robert Porter Keep, which are arranged together at the beginning of the series. Where the correspondence with an individual is particularly full (a folder or more) these letters have been organized by the name of the individual. Smaller quantities of correspondence with individuals are arranged together in chronological order. At the end of the series are a few letters of other Keep family members, not to or from Robert Porter Keep. These are arranged in chronological order.

Papers of:

Robert Porter Keep

b. 1, f. 1	Chandler, J.E. ("Chalk")	1864, 1866
b. 1, f. 2	Keep, Elizabeth P. ("Lizzie")	1861-1884
b. 1, f. 3-16	Keep, John R. and Rebecca Porter	1861-1890, undated
b. 1, f. 17-20	Keep, Margaret Haines	1879-1892, undated
b. 2, f. 21	Keep, Mary	1861-1873
b. 2, f. 22	Keep, William	1861-1867
b. 2, f. 23	Porter, Elizabeth G.	1855-1876, undated
b. 2, f. 24	Porter, Noah	1864-1880, undated
b. 2, f. 25	Porter, Samuel	1865-1885
b. 2, f. 26-27	Porter, Sarah	1861-1889, undated
b. 2, f. 28	Scranton, William W.	1864-1876
b. 2, f. 29	Seymour, Thomas Day	1872, undated
b. 2, f. 30	Wenner, George Unangst	1866-1867
b. 2, f. 31-39	Chronological file	1863-1895
b. 3, f. 40	Memorabilia	[ca.1857-1876]
b. 3, f. 41-43	Other Keep Family	1857-1902, undated
b. 3, f. 44	Unidentified recipient, fragments	1849-1895, undated

Series II: Haines Family, 1860-1892, undated

0.25 linear feet (1 box)

HAINES FAMILY is composed almost entirely of the correspondence of Margaret Haines Keep. Her major correspondent is her sister, Lillian M. Haines, and all letters between the sisters are arranged together at the beginning of the series. These are followed by Margaret Haines Keep's correspondence with a number of people, arranged together in chronological order. The last folder contains a few miscellaneous letters of other Haines family members, not to or from Margaret Haines Keep.

Papers of:		
Margaret Haines Keep		
b. 4, f. 45-47	Haines, Lillian M.	[1872], 1876-1877, 1880-1890, undated
b. 4, f. 48-52	Chronological file	1860-1892, undated
b. 4, f. 53	Other Haines Family	1873-1877

Series III: Porter Family, 1849, 1864-1880

0.25 linear feet (1 box)

PORTER FAMILY is arranged with all letters to or from Samuel Porter filed at the beginning of the series in chronological order. Correspondence and memorabilia of all other Porter family members are filed together in chronological order at the end of the series.

Papers of:		
b. 5, f. 54-61	Samuel Porter	1849, 1864, 1867-1875, 1880
b. 5, f. 62	Other Porter Family	1872-1880

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

Deaf -- Education
Domestic relations
Education
Educators
Families
Greek language -- Study and teaching
Medicine -- Practice
Religious thought -- 19th century
Women -- Education

Norwich Free Academy (Norwich, Conn.)
United States Military Academy
Williston Academy (Easthampton, Mass.)
Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1865
Yale University -- Faculty
Yale University -- Students

Geographic Names

Barton County (Mo.)
Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.) -- Social life and customs
Caputville (Mo.)
Connecticut -- Social life and customs
Easthampton (Mass.)
Elizabeth (N.J.) -- Social life and customs
Europe -- Description and travel
Farmington (Conn.) -- Social life and customs
Hartford (Conn.) -- Social conditions
Norwich (Conn.)

Names

Avery, George Whitefield, 1836-1893
Haines, Lillian M.
Keep, John R. (John Robinson), 1810-1884
Keep, Margaret Vryling Haines, 1853-1893
Keep, Rebecca Porter
Porter, Noah, 1811-1892
Porter, Samuel, 1810-1901
Porter, Sarah, 1813-1900
Scranton, William W.
Seymour, Thomas D. (Thomas Day), 1848-1907

Families

Haynes family

Corporate Bodies

American School, at Hartford, for the Deaf
Miss Porter's School (Farmington, Conn.)