

Guide to the William D. Ely Family Papers

MS 944



compiled by Bruce P. Stark

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 944

CREATOR: Ely, William Davis, 1815-1908

TITLE: William Davis Ely family papers

DATES: 1834-1877

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.25 linear feet

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The largest part of the papers is made up of letters addressed to William D. Ely by young friends from 1837-1847, in which several of the men discuss their careers. Also in the papers are a number of letters (1834-1838) written by Anne Crawford Allen (later his wife) to various members of her family about a visit to Georgia and her view of slavery.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0944>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0944>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

William Davis Ely Family Papers (MS 944). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

William Davis Ely was born in Hartford, Conn., June 16, 1815, and was the eldest son of William Ely (Y. C. 1787) and Clarissa May (Davis) Ely. His grandfather was Rev. Richard Ely (Y. C. 1754), who was for thirty years pastor of the Congregational church in Centerbrook, Conn. He was prepared for college in the old Hopkins Grammar School in Hartford, where his father, having acquired a fortune in business enterprises, settled about 1810.

After graduation he remained in New Haven as a resident student, taking courses in the Divinity and Medical Schools in 1837 and 1838. The next year he became Tutor in Natural Philosophy in the College, and also began his course in the Law School. In the spring of 1842 he resigned his tutorship and went abroad spending much time in the study of art and antiquities, and during the winter and spring having the companionship of the sculptor, Philippe Grass. After a year in Europe he returned to Hartford and entered the law office of Governor Ellsworth. He was admitted to practice in the Connecticut courts, November 18, 1843, and March 6, 1849, to practice in the Supreme Court of the United States. In 1852, he made a second trip to Europe. After vigorous opposition from established companies he secured a charter for a railroad across Connecticut, the first section built being between Hartford and Willimantic. He was made Secretary and a director of the company. His efforts to secure a continuous line to Providence brought him in contact with the leading men of that city, to which he removed in 1856. This railroad extended to Waterbury soon after, and finally to the Hudson River at Fishkill, opposite Newburg, N. Y., was called the Hartford, Providence & Fishkill Railroad, and now forms part of the Highland Division of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad.

Upon his removal to Providence, he gave up active law practice and engaged with the Allendale Company in the manufacture of cotton. Of this company he was President and Treasurer at the time of his decease. He was a member of the Connecticut and Rhode Island Historical Societies, and of several patriotic societies.

He married in 1854, Anne Crawford, daughter of the Hon. Zachariah Allen, LL.D., a graduate of Brown University in 1813 and for over fifty years a trustee of that institution. She died in 1888, and a daughter is also deceased, but his only son, William Ely (Ph.B. Brown 1878), who was a graduate student at Yale in 1878-79, survives him.

Mr. Ely died from heart failure following an illness of ten days, at his home in Providence, June 11, 1908, having nearly completed his 93d year.

In 1886 he presented a set of magnetic instruments to the Yale Observatory.

(Taken from *Obituary Record of Graduates 1907-08*, pp. 843-845).

Scope and Contents

The William D. Ely Family Papers are contained in one box and span the dates 1834-1877. The collection consists exclusively of personal correspondence. Folders 1-9 have letters written to William Davis Ely from college friends, female acquaintances, and his brother Richard Sheldon Ely. It also includes drafts of three letters written by Ely to Frances Louise Apthorp, Folder 2. Two friends, William Ives Budington and Moses Hoge Hunter, were ministers. In several letters Budington writes about his professional prospects. He declined an invitation to settle at Lowell, Massachusetts in July 1839 in part because of his bachelor status. Moses H. Hunter was a Presbyterian minister in western Virginia and in an 1840 letter discusses the availability of rail transportation between New Haven and Virginia. While Ely was a tutor at Yale College, he also seriously considered the possibility of entering the ministry, a subject discussed by his brother and Hunter in two letters.

Folders 10-13 contain letters written by Anne Crawford Allen, later the wife of William D. Ely, to different members of her family. Eighteen were written between December 1834 and May 1835, when Anne was visiting relatives in Georgia. In these and other letters, she writes primarily about relatives and her social activities, but in a December 3, 1834 letter she discusses a solar eclipse and in several talks briefly about slavery. She displays a sympathetic attitude towards the institution of slavery, saying in one letter, "I only wished that an abolitionist was present....He could not, I am sure, wish to change the situation of these poor but happy people."

The provenance is unknown.

Collection Contents

William D. Ely

b. 1, f. 1	Apthorp, Frances Louisa	1845, 1847
b. 1, f. 2	Ely, William D. to Frances L. Apthorp	1845, undated
b. 1, f. 3	Budington, William Ives	1839
b. 1, f. 4	Collins, David Chittenden	1839
b. 1, f. 5	Ely, Richard Sheldon	1837
b. 1, f. 6	Hunter, Moses Hoge	1840
b. 1, f. 7	Porter, Noah	1877
b. 1, f. 8	Samson, Emily Apthorp	1845
b. 1, f. 9	Stith, Florence	1840

Anne Crawford Allen Ely

b. 1, f. 10	to Candace C. Allen	1834
b. 1, f. 11	to Eliza Arnold Allen	1834-1838
b. 1, f. 12	to Mary A. Allen	1834-1835
b. 1, f. 13	to Zachariah Allen	1834-1836

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

Businessmen
Clergy
Families
Lawyers
Slavery -- United States

Geographic Names

Europe
Georgia -- Social life and customs

Names

Budington, William Ives, 1815-1879
Ely, Ann Crawford Allen, 1818-1888
Ely, William Davis, 1815-1908