



Fairfield Museum  
EXPLORE *the past*, IMAGINE *the future*

# Jennings Family Papers, 1756-1987

## Ms 10

### SUMMARY INFORMATION

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#### Repository

Fairfield Museum and History Center

#### Title

Jennings Family Papers

#### ID

Ms 10

#### Date [inclusive]

1756-1987

#### Extent

7.0 Linear feet 16 boxes

#### Language

English

#### Abstract

This collection contains items from members of the Jennings family of Fairfield as well as items from various family businesses spanning 1756-1987.

#### ***Preferred Citation note***

Item, Collection Title, Collection number (Box #, Folder #). Fairfield Museum and History Center, Fairfield, Connecticut.



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## **BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE**

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The Fairfield branch of the Jennings family was founded in 1650 when Joshua Jennings came to Connecticut. Over the next three hundred years, his descendents would become an indispensable part of Fairfield society.

Not much is known about the Jennings family during the years of 1675-1780. Members of the family such as John B. Jennings (1707-1794), Nemiah Jennings (b. 1717), Aaron Jennings (b. 1757), Jessup T. Jennings (b. 1760) and Daniel Jennings (1734-1787) were all active in the farming industry. Matthew Jennings (1731-1797) and his wife Rebecca Morehouse were active in the community. Together they bought up quite a bit of property, and created a prosperous farm. This farm was left to their children, including Michael Jennings (1760-1812).

Captain Abraham Gould Jennings lived between 1781 and 1852. As a youth, Captain Jennings made several trips to the Orient, as well as a groundbreaking trip around Cape Horn. He was also highly involved in a high spirited chase with the British Navy during the War of 1812. He eventually settled down in Fairfield with his wife, Anna Burr, whom he had married in 1807. Together they reared a group of children including: Augustus Gould Jennings (b.1814), Isaac Jennings (b. 1823) and Oliver Burr Jennings (b. 1825).

Isaac Jennings (b. 1788) was Captain Abraham Jennings' younger brother. He was a renowned doctor who wrote several books and is credited with creating friction matches.

Jennings Brothers was founded in 1860 by Augustus Gould Jennings, originally a carriage maker, of Southport and his brother, Captain Isaac Jennings of Fairfield. The company was originally founded in order to manufacture paper, but in 1867 they began to produce Japanese Paper Ware. These specialty patented products were "molded out of one piece of hemp fiber under heavy hydraulic pressure." Afterwards, they were painted and varnished to resemble Japanese lacquer. These products were also waterproof and came with a warranty. At one point, Jennings Brothers' Japanese products were all the rage among Victorian society. Products such as bowls, wash basins, tubs, pitchers and water pails were sold from their store at 436 Pearl St. in New York City. They were also sold through the Montgomery Ward catalogue. The two brothers received several awards for the superiority of their products.



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Around 1893, the products began to go out of vogue and the company fell on hard times. In order to stay afloat, Captain Isaac's son Charles Buckley Jennings (b. 1865) took over the company in 1893. His first executive decision was to move the production plant from Easton to the corner of Round Hill Rd. and Paper Mill Lane in Fairfield, in order to keep overhead costs down. In 1897 they filled an order of pulp cannon wads for the government. They filled a similar order in 1910; it was to be their last. The advent of enamel ware contributed to the end of the company.

Augustus went on to become a driving force in the Fairfield community. Captain Isaac was a devout Episcopalian and sailed around the world. He also represented his town in the state legislature. His son Charles held several jobs after the demise of Jennings Brothers including selling wooden bowls, operating the Henry H. Perry Insurance Agency and was the treasurer of the Southport Savings Bank.

Captain Joseph Jennings was born in 1803 to Jesse and Sarah Jennings. He was involved in the import/export business, farming, and the merchant business. He was the driving force behind Jennings & Phillips, Jennings & Sherwood and J. Jennings & Son.

Jennings & Phillips was created in 1839 by Joseph Jennings and Hezekiah Phillips. The business was established for the purpose of importing and exporting goods to and from Fairfield. The partnership ended in 1841 with Phillips selling his share of the company to Albert Sherwood. Jennings & Sherwood were active from 1835-1843, importing and exporting goods from Southport harbor.

The most lucrative of the three ventures was J. Jennings & Son (1843-1872). Joseph Jennings and his son Charles owned the import/export company and worked in the mercantile business as well. They had a wharf and shop in Southport harbor where they shipped as far north as Providence, RI and as far south as Baltimore, MD. Their fleet of ships included the schooner White Rock and sloops Eliza, Mary Elizabeth and Ganges.

Oliver Burr Jennings (b. 1825) spent his youth in Fairfield before moving to New York City to open a dry goods business. During the gold rush, O.B. moved to California where he opened another general store. Jennings married Esther Judson Goodsell and had several children. He later partnered with William and John D. Rockefeller to form Standard Oil. Jennings moved back East and his family divided their time between the Jennings' homestead in Fairfield and 48 Park Ave. in New York City. O.B. was also a philanthropist who helped pay for the paving of several Fairfield roads and he co-founded the Fairfield Public Library and the Fairfield Beach Company.

Annie Burr Jennings (1855-1939), O. B.'s daughter, was born in San Francisco but spent a great deal of her life at Sunnie-Holme in Fairfield. She



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created Sunnie-Holme out of two houses that had been built by John B. Steenbergen in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1914 she established the Audubon Birdcraft Sanctuary and in 1916 bought a home on Unquowa Rd. to give to the town for use as a high school. Annie also donated sixteen acres of beach front property for public use. She led the woman's anti-suffrage movement in Fairfield and a crusade against FDR's New Deal. Annie dies in July 1939, two months before Fairfield's tercentenary.

Walter Jennings (1858-1939) was also born to O. B. and his wife in San Francisco. He spent most of his life in Fairfield and attended Hopkins Grammar School and Yale University. Walter dedicated his life to philanthropic works and divided his time between Fairfield and Burrwood, his estate in Oyster Bay on Long Island.

Another daughter of O. B.'s, Esther Brewster Jennings, was born in San Francisco on December 6, 1861. She married Hugh Dudley Auchincloss on November 19, 1891. Esther divided her time between Dormy House, Sasco Hill and Hammersmith Farm in Newport, RI. She died on April 21, 1913.

Esther Auchincloss (1895-1986), daughter of Emma and Hugh, married Edmund Nash, brother of Ogden. She later married Norman Blitz in 1930.

Oliver Gould Jennings (1865-1936), son of O. B. Jennings, was a charter member of the Fairfield Historical Society and the original building was named for him. He served as President of the Historical Society, the Fairfield Memorial Library, the Board of Fairfield Trust Company, the Fairfield Beach Company and the Resident Town Council. He was said to control the local Republican Party. Oliver also paid for the paving of several roads in Fairfield, donated acres of land to the town, paid for renovations of the Episcopal Church and created the Improvement Association of Fairfield & Vicinity. Their goal was to eliminate mosquitoes in the Fairfield area. In 1906 Oliver spent one million dollars to build a mansion named Mailands, a French chateau that sat on seventy-six acres. After his death in 1936, the Jesuits took ownership of the property and turned it into Fairfield Preparatory School. Today is it Fairfield University's McAuliffe Hall.

The O.B. Jennings' branch of the family was known to socialize with the social elite of Europe. They famously entertained the woman who called herself Anna Anderson in Fairfield.

Oliver C. Jennings was born on August 28, 1863 to Horace and Helen Jennings. He attended school in Fairfield and then went into the meat business with his father. In 1866 he opened up a butcher shop and from 1874-1893 ran a grocery store in Fairfield.

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## SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

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The material in this collection spans several hundred years and several generations of Jennings. It is organized so that individual family members are presented first, in alphabetical order, though later additions have been added to the last box. The business documents are presented next; they are in chronological order.

Series A contains the papers of Aaron Jennings from 1772-1814 including a contract promising Yale University \$500. Series B contains Captain Abraham Jennings' bills dating from 1882-1831. Series C is dated 1844-1881 and contains the papers of Augustus Jennings including a probate document regarding guardianship of Joshua Robinson.

The papers of Charles Jennings are in Series D. They date from 1861-1902 and contain mostly fire insurance documents. There is also a New York & New Haven Railroad Company commuter pass.

Series E contains the papers of Daniel Jennings including land deeds, writs and probate papers from 1766-1779. Emma Jennings Auchincloss' remembrance book is in Series F. The illustrated album contains friends' autographs from 1868-1873.

George Penfield's wedding papers are in Series G, as well as wedding certificates for George and Ida Louise Taylor and George and Mary Stewart Hempson.

Series H contains the bills of Jessup T. Jennings from 1842-1872. One highlight is his IRS tax form from 1869 requiring him to pay \$19.59 to the government. John B. Jennings' land deeds, 1841-1861, are in Series I.

Series J consists of five folders of documents pertaining to the life of Joseph Jennings. Folder 1 contains bills and writs from 1847-1849, including a letter from the House of Refuge inquiring as to whether David Wills is still indentured to Jennings. Folder 2 contains insurance papers from 1857-1878. Folder 3 holds bank books from the Connecticut Branch Bank during the years 1843-1851. The last two folders contain checks from 1847-1851.

The papers of Matthew Jennings are the focus of Series K. The first four folders contain land deeds dated 1756-1793. The fifth folder concerns Matthew's estate and probate papers from 1794-1798. One document is for the transfer of a Negro man named Pompey in 1798.

Series L contains various documents including writs and land deeds pertaining to Michael Jennings from 1774-1812. Series M is a compilation of deeds pertaining to three generations of Nemiah Jennings' family dated from 1780-1880. O. C. Jennings' Butcher Shop account books from 1876-1878 make up Series N.



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At this point, the alphabetical order of individuals is altered to present the material related to Annie Burr Jennings in Series O. Due to the volume, her material is presented last. Folder 1 contains postcards sent to Annie from 1914-1921. Folder 2 contains Christmas cards sent to and from her. Various types of correspondence are in Folders 3 and 4, including Annie's will. Her applications to the Daughter's of the American Revolution are in Folder 5. The 6th Folder contains ABJ "Her Book", a remembrance book given to Annie by the DAR in 1925. It includes several photos, some taken by Mabel Osgood Wright, a noted local author, photographer and naturalist. The final folder contains Annie's commonplace books. The first volume contains the history of General Silliman's capture by the British in 1779 and the second volume details the history of the Connecticut State Society of the Cincinnati during the years 1783-1804.

The information concerning the Jennings' businesses are organized in chronological order, except for Series P, the records of the Jennings Brothers. Series P has been presented first due to the inter-relatedness of Series Q, R and S.

Series P is information pertaining to Jennings Brothers including price lists, an illustrated catalog and various sales slips. There is also a typed biography of the company's history on their letterhead.

Series Q is concerned with the import export business of Jennings and Phillips covering the years 1839-1841. Of note is the document selling Hezekiah Phillips' shares of the company to Albert Sherwood on March 1, 1841.

Jennings and Sherwood are the focus of Series R. Documents date from 1835-1843. Folders 1-24 contain bills. A bill from April 1837 shows the company was importing Bible and prayer booklets. Checks from 1835-1841 are in Folders 25-33. Folder 34 contains the company's bank books.

A large portion of the collection is made up by Series S: J. Jennings & Son. The first folder contains insurance forms and the second contains customs forms. Folders 3-157 contain bills from the years 1843-1870. The bills reveal much about their business including that they imported books for education and paid for a letter for a servant's passage. A card allowing Mrs. Jennings the use of the Employment Office appears in March 1858. Evidently this service aided in the finding of servants for domestic use. Folders 158-172 contain checks from 1852-1863. The company's bank books are in Folder 173 and Folder 174 contains their daybook for the years 1851-1855. Of particular note are lists of crew members on various vessels. A significant number of accounts relate to card purchases.

Series T contains documents pertaining to various Jennings family members, many of which were added years after the collection was first organized. The documents span over 200 years. Folder 6 contains papers



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related to a lumber business. Folders 7 and 8 contain the account book of Henry Jennings from the Sloop Hysco. Folder 17 contains Esther Auchincloss Nash Blitz's papers. An interesting copy of an O. B. Jennings letter with commentary from Edmund W. Nash Jr. is in Folder 18. Folders 19, 20 and 23 are of particular interest because they contain information related to the Jennings connection to Anna Anderson.

Box 19 contains a guest book used by Annie B. Jennings while living at Sunnie Holme from 1910-1938.

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## ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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### ***Publication Information***

Fairfield Museum and History Center  
370 Beach Rd.  
Fairfield, CT  
203-259-1598

### ***Conditions Governing Access note***

There are no restrictions on access to this collection.

### ***Conditions Governing Use note***

Use of the material requires compliance with the Fairfield Museum and History Center regulations.

### ***Processing Information note***

This collection was initially processed by Martha Rockwell in July 1981 with additional processing by Renee Romano in December 1997 and Marie Jarry in November 2011.

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## CONTROLLED ACCESS HEADINGS

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### ***Corporate Name(s)***

- J. Jennings & Son (Fairfield County, Conn.) .
- Jennings & Phillips (Fairfield County, Conn.).
- Jennings Brothers (Fairfield County, Conn.) .



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## **Family Name(s)**

- Jennings Family

## **Geographic Name(s)**

- Fairfield(Conn.)

## **Personal Name(s)**

- Anderson, Anna
- Auchincloss, Emma Brewster Jennnings, 1861-1913
- Auchincloss, Esther
- Auchincloss, Hugh Dudley
- Jennings, Aaron, b. 1757
- Jennings, Abraham Gould, 1781, 1852
- Jennings, Annie Burr, 1855-1939
- Jennings, Augustus Gould, b. 1814
- Jennings, Charles Bulkley, 1865-1950
- Jennings, Charles
- Jennings, Daniel, 1734-1787
- Jennings, Isaac, b. 1788
- Jennings, Isaac, Capt.
- Jennings, Jessup T., b. 1760
- Jennings, John B., 1707-1794
- Jennings, Joseph, b. 1803
- Jennings, Matthew, 1731-1997
- Jennings, Nemiah, b. 1717
- Jennings, Oliver B. (Oliver Burr), 1825-1893
- Jennings, Oliver C., b. 1863
- Jennings, Oliver Gould, 1865-1836
- Jennings, Walter, 1858-1933
- Nash, Edmund W., Jr.
- Phillips, Hezekiah
- Rockefeller, Almira Goodsell
- Sherwood, Albert

## **Subject(s)**

- Account books--Connecticut--Fairfield.
- Correspondence.
- Daughters of the American Revolution.
- Deeds--Connecticut--Fairfield.
- Merchants--Connecticut--Fairfield.





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- Probate records--Connecticut--Fairfield.
- Writs--Connecticut.