Guide to the Francis Family Papers
1783-1901 (bulk 1783-1838)

Rhode Island Historical Society
121 Hope Street
Providence, RI 02906
Tel: 401-273-8107
Fax: 401-751-7930
Email: reference@rihs.org

Published in 2009
©Rhode Island Historical Society
Collection overview

Title: Francis Family Papers

Date range: 1783-1901, (bulk 1783-1838)

Creator: Francis Family

Extent: 5 linear feet

Abstract: Correspondence, financial records and diaries, mostly of merchant John Francis, his wife Abigail (Brown) Francis, their son Gov. John Brown Francis, and his wife Ann B. (Carter) Francis. Among the most important items are John Francis's two 18th century mercantile diaries; Abigail (Brown) Francis's diary/memorandum book from 1792-1815; and eight of John Brown Francis's political letters from his tenure as Governor of Rhode Island.

Language of materials: English

Repository: Rhode Island Historical Society

Collection number: MSS 426

Scope & content

This collection includes correspondence, financial records and diaries, mostly of merchant John Francis, his wife Abigail (Brown) Francis, their son Gov. John Brown Francis, and his wife Ann B. (Carter) Francis. Among the most important items are John Francis's two 18th century mercantile diaries; Abigail (Brown) Francis's diary/memorandum book from 1792-1815; and eight of John Brown Francis's political letters from his tenure as Governor of Rhode Island.

Arrangement

• Series 1: Anne (Willing) Francis (1733-1812), grandmother of John Brown Francis.
• Series 2: John Francis (1763-1796), father of John Brown Francis.
• Series 3: Abigail (Brown) Francis (1766-1821), mother of John Brown Francis.
• Series 4: John Brown Francis (1791-1864).
• Series 6: Elizabeth Francis (1833-1901), daughter of John Brown Francis.

Historical note

John Francis (1763-1796) was the son of Tench Francis and Anne (Willing) Francis (1733-1812) of Philadelphia. By 1787, he had settled in Providence. He married wealthy Providence merchant John Brown's daughter Abigail (1766-1821) in 1788, and entered into a mercantile partnership with Brown in 1792. They had two children: Anne W. (1790-1798) and John B. (1791-1864). John Francis died in 1796, at the age of 32.

John Brown Francis (1791-1864), son of John and Abigail, was born in Philadelphia but spent almost all of his childhood in Providence. After the death of his father, he was raised in part by his grandfather John Brown, who then died in 1803. He graduated from Brown University in 1808, and then managed the John Brown estate for several years. In 1821 he moved to the family estate at Spring Green in Warwick. He represented Warwick in the General Assembly as a representative from 1821 to 1829, and as a senator in 1831, 1842, and from 1845 to 1856. He served as governor of Rhode Island from 1833 to 1838, and finished out William Sprague's term as U.S. Senator from 1844 to 1845. He married first Ann Brown Carter (1795-1828), daughter of Nicholas; and then to his first cousin Elizabeth W. (Francis) Harrison (1796-1866). His children were: Abby (1823-1841), John (1825-1826), Anne B. (1828-1896) m. Marshall Woods; Elizabeth (1833-1901); Sally (1834-1904); Sophia H. (1836-1860) m. George W. Adams; John B. Jr. (1838-1870).

Only one of John Brown Francis's children had children of their own. Anne B. (Francis) Woods had two children, including Abby F. (Woods) Abbott, who went on to have John Francis's only great-great-grandchildren by blood. John Brown Francis's daughter Elizabeth, who never married, adopted a cousin named Alice Francis, who married Frank Hail Brown (no relation), and also went on to raise a large family.

Access & use

Access to the collection: There are no restrictions on access.

Use of materials: Researchers are advised that express written permission to reproduce, quote, or otherwise publish any portion or extract from this collection must be obtained from the Rhode Island Historical Society.
Preferred citation: Francis Family Papers, MSS 426, Rhode Island Historical Society

Contact information: Rhode Island Historical Society
121 Hope Street
Providence, RI 02906
Tel: 401-273-8107
Fax: 401-751-7930
Email: reference@rihs.org

Administrative information

About the collection

Acquisition: The Abby (Brown) Francis diary was a gift from John Carter Brown Washburn in 1987. The Ann B. (Carter) Francis diary was donated by Brock Bierman in 1990. The provenance of the two John Francis diaries is unknown; the earlier one seems to have been cataloged circa 1965, and the later one circa 1985. The remainder of these papers arrived in 1970 from Norman Herreshoff (#1970.112 and #1970.122) and Elizabeth Holton (#1970.125).

Processing information: This collection was brought together in 2000 from many different sources. Many of these papers were for many years interfiled with the larger collection of Francis papers that were on deposit from Henry A.L. Brown (now MSS 1031). Others came from the Herreshoff-Lewis Family Papers (MSS 487), the Washburn Family Papers (MSS 783), the John Brown Papers (MSS 312), and the Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection. The former John Brown Francis Papers (MSS 427) were split up between this collection and the Henry A.L. Brown Deposit. A large number of John Francis and John Brown Francis papers can now be found in sub-groups 3 and 4 of the Henry A.L. Brown Deposit (MSS 1031).
About the finding aid

Author: Finding aid prepared by Rick Stattler.

Encoding: Finding aid encoded by Mark Chepkwony 2009 July 02

Descriptive rules: Finding aid based on Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)

Additional information


Search terms

Names: Beach, Nelson J.
Blake, Joseph M., 1809-1879
Brown, John, 1736-1803
Bullock, Nathaniel, 1779-1867
Carlile, Elizabeth, 1810-1903
Cuffee, Paul, 1759-1817
DeWolf, John J., 1807-1894
Eaton, Amasa M., 1841-1914
Francis, Abigail (Brown), 1766-1821
Francis, Ann B. (Carter), 1795-1828
Francis, Elizabeth, 1833-1901
Francis, John, 1763-1796
Francis, John Brown, 1791-1864
Herreshoff, Anne F., 1802-1887
Herreshoff, Charles F., 1763-1819
Herreshoff, Sarah (Brown), 1773-1846
Man, George F., 1807-1885
Morris, Gouverneur, 1752-1816
Otis, Harrison Gray, 1765-1848

Pearce, Dutee J., 1789-1849
Potter, Elisha R., Jr., 1811-1882
Potter, Elisha R. Sr., 1764-1835
Putnam, David, 1769-1856
Van Buren, Martin, 1782-1862
Washington, Bushrod, 1762-1829
John Brown House (Providence, R.I.)
John Brown Tract (Herkimer Co., N.Y.)

Subjects:
Azores - Description and travel
Diaries, 1783-1784
Diaries, 1793
Diaries, 1792-1815
Diaries, 1823-1828
France - History - Revolution, 1789-1793
Haiti - Commerce
Merchants - Rhode Island - Providence
Portugal - Description and travel
Rhode Island - Politics and government, 1775-1865
Warwick (R.I.) - Social life and customs
## Inventory

**Series 1, Anne (Willing) Francis (1733-1812), Grandmother of John Brown Francis.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 1</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 1, Court document received from New Jersey</td>
<td>1802</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Series 2, John Francis (1763-1796), Father of John Brown Francis.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 2</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 2, Copies of letters from Harrison G. Otis (originals in MSS 1031)</td>
<td>1787-1793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 3</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 3, Diary Discusses trip to Portugal to purchase East India goods, return, and sale at New Castle, Delaware. Sets out philosophy of life to begin 1783 diary: &quot;I mean to move in a private sphere, neither above nor below the rank of gentleman. I wish to accumulate a fortune which will enable me to live free and independent of a world only to be won by knavery &amp; flattery, and in a condition to support my parents &amp; my friends when they stand in need.&quot; &quot;Departed from Philadelphia on board a small boat accompanied by a father whose good intentions I have endeavored to follow, whose paternal care I have experienced in the fullest degree, and whose wishes are that I should turn out a great and good man.&quot; [8/15/1783]. Long description of several of the islands of the Azores,</td>
<td>1783 Apr 15-1784 Apr 04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9/17/1783. After cross-Atlantic journey on a Portuguese vessel: "The whole crew were Portuguese, and do not understand a word of English. Their cookery is different than ours and very nauseous. But their cabin! Oh heavens!... the most fertile imagination added to the greatest experience could scarcely picture so complete a sense of filth and nastiness." [9/25/1783].


Diary, February 14 - December 27 1793, written in Providence. Discusses family, gardening, mercantile activities. Some random notes:

Famous African-American ship captain mentioned: "Paul Cuffee of Westport master schooner Mary for 500 bushels salt is to deliver 83 2/3 codfish 20 Oct. next as security he has a note for 200 dr deposited." [4/15/1793]. "Unfortunately employed a no leg'd sailor for a gardner and he dug all up - roots & all. Parbleu." [3/25/1793].

From Boston, "returned with Tingay to

Box 1, Folder 4

MSS 426 Item 4, Ledger
Kept at Cape Francois, Haiti. Later used to transcribe a long academic passage by John Brown Francis, 1809; and for diary and memoranda entries by Abigail (Brown) Francis, 1807-1820. The most noteworthy diary entry reads: "Provi. June 14th 1818 Sunday. On this day just as the bells had ceased for church they were renewed together with the cry of fire. We learn that the distillery of Mr. Jno Clarke is almost destroy'd wh all the provinder for his cattle &c &c. It is believed Mr. Carrington is an equal looser." Also notes re servants Sarah Veney, 10/7/1812; Lilly ---, 4/1819 and undated; Debby ---, undated; and Patience --, 7/7/1820.

Letter copy book, containing only copies of two long letters to sister Sophia, dated January 23 and 29, 1793. Both letters give his account of the French Revolution, based partly on his experience in France. He describes it as "a tale that even now chills me with horror and almost induces me like Hannibal to swear eternal hatred to frenchmen."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 5</th>
<th>MSS 426 Item 5, Loose correspondence</th>
<th>undated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bushrod Washington (nephew of the President) to John Francis. Dated Mount Vernon, July 23 1784. Visited Mr. Byrd; forwards two letters; will visit in winter.</td>
<td>1784 Jul 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Francis to Harrison Gray Otis. Identification uncertain.</td>
<td>1788 Aug 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 5a</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 5a, List of books owned and loaned by Abby and John Francis</td>
<td>1794</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Series 3, Abigail (Brown) Francis (1766-1821), mother of John Brown Francis.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 6</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 6, Correspondence and diary page</td>
<td>undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frederick to Abigail Francis Angry letter from suitor asserting that &quot;there can be no justification for your silence.&quot;</td>
<td>1785 Nov 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unidentified to Abigail Francis Previously unidentified, but seems to refer to &quot;dr Mrs. Francis&quot; in the second person on page three, and seems to refer obliquely to the impending birth</td>
<td>1789 Dec 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of Anne W. Francis at the end of page four (making Sally Brown an aunt).

,Charles F. Herreshoff to Abigail Francis 1801 Jul 15,
Two letters from brother-in-law 1801 Jul 31
Charles F. Herreshoff, July 15 and
July 31 1801, written in West Chester,
Pennsylvania.

,Sarah Brown to Abigail Francis 1801 Oct 29
Letter from sister [Sarah (Brown)
Herreshoff] written in West Chester.

,Undated letter fragment signed "SL" undated

,Diary page 1819 Dec
Re death of brother-in-law Charles
F. Herreshoff. Entry in full: "Tuesday
the 28th. On the evg of the 28th of
Decr 1819 we recd the melancholy
intelligence of my brother-in-law Mr.
Herreshoff's death. The followg morng
I took Anne & Sarah [Herreshoff,
nieces] wh me & James [brother] drove
us to Pt Pl [Point Pleasant, Bristol,
the Herreshoff homestead] in my old
carriage. After tea Sister discovered fm
the appearance of Anne that something
painful had occured when, Alas, I was
compelled to say that two days more
only were wanted to make a fortnight
since the fatal deed terminated the
life of a friend who had from my 1st
acquaintance been interestg to me. The
1st letter fm my son informd me that a
Mr. Post was soon expected from Boon
Ville who had assisted at the funeral
of our friend. I remained at Pt Pl wh
the afflicted family until Thursday 5th
of January 1820. The boys go to Mr. Bates in Bristol. I found Mr. Post on the eveg of his departure. He appears to be a worthy man & I hope his presuming loss will eventually be made up to him. It was at Boon Ville that the remains of Mr. H. were deposited."

Extracts:

"Mr. Jonathan Tillinghast came in the stage at New Haven. We found him good humored & most obliging. I was & still am astonished that he is spoken of so contemptuously particularly by the female sex." [3/18/1799]

"After driving 3 miles to the ferry Mr. Tillinghast discovered the loss of an umbrella which his saving disposition would not admit of being left behind, he therefore encountered several vexatious circumstances in order to recover it & Mr. Hazard concluded that the necessary expenses would amount to the full worth of the treasure." [3/19/1799]

"Poor Nancy Smith, my mantua maker died on the 3rd of Decr 1801. A woman of remarkable powers of mind & great good sensce with unvaring sweetness of disposition."

Long note on death of mother of Maria Balch, 11/18/1800

Re John Brown: "My father went with his darling grandson to -- the ship up from below Prudence. He has
been detain'd all night with the little adventurer. I am very desirous to know how he has acquitted himself." [5/1797]

"My dear boy returned home from a jaunt in the country at Taunton where he had been with his grandpapa." Thrown from horse on the trip but unharmed. [10/17/1799] "This day my good father left his home in order to take his seat in Congress. A circumstance that I could wish otherwise." [11/23/1799] "My dear father expired on the ev'g of the 20th of sept. 1803 just one month after he attended the funeral obsequies of his much esteemed sister in law. His malady was first observed by us in the beginning of the preceding July & it continued most alarming at night time untill the last symptoms of a dropsy of the breast were I believe considered by his physicians to be the cause of his dissolution. Altho he had other most distressing complaints notwithstanding which his unvaring sweetness of temper was such as I never before witnessed in a sick room. His end was blessed be God without a struggle on Tuesday evg the 20th of Sept. 1803. After having past an evg with us in great harmony of spirits without bodily pain." [9/20/1803]

"My beloved sister Alice is at this date ... a very unhappy woman owing to ill health as well as that her family disapproved her connection with Mr. Mason to whom she is engaged. I pray to God in case my sister marries him
that all the opposition which is made may not create a lasting dissention & that real merit may triumph over every report to his disadvantage." [6/23/1800]

Notes on yellow fever in Providence, 10/29/1797.

Notes on children: Long critique of son's table manners, 7/8/1803 (near front of book). Long descriptions of her two children, 1/28/1798 and 3/29/1798. Death of daughter, 5/28/1798. "My dear children went for the first time to Miss Tenty Sweet's school ... on Thursday morn'g Anne could then call her letters imperfectly but John scarce knew one in the alphabet." [circa 1795?] "My dear children first went to Miss Balch's school a few days before she celebrated her birth day" [2/27/1797] "On Monday the 13th of November [1797] my dear children went for the first time to a man's school. Having heard great commendations of this man I thought ... it as well to send 'em both as Miss Balch's school was so far off. I'm convinced it is most proper for John. But on account of his sister's sewing, a woman would be most proper for her." "My son went for the first time to Mr. Carew's school, Mr. Burges having resigned his care." [5/30/1798]

Series 4, John Brown Francis (1791-1864),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 8</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 8, Correspondence</td>
<td>undated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Uncle Charles F. Herreshoff to John Brown Francis
Asks nephew to send cloth from Mr. Ames and two sheets of iron.

H.G. Otis Jr to John Brown Francis
Photocopy of letter from H.G. Otis Jr., describing application requirements for Harvard.

Aunt Sarah (Brown) Herreshoff to John Brown Francis
Family news. "We have not yet heard of your uncle's arrival in the wilderness, of his success I have only gloomy presages, the difficulties however we are unable to over-mount. Death will finally overcome."

Two memoranda re money received by J. Beach

Nelson J. Beach of Lowville, NY to John Brown Francis
Re proposals for John Brown Tract.

Dutee J. Pearce to John Brown Francis
Six-page political letter. "If Mr. Potter should now go to Washington, he never could have the confidence, respect, or esteem of the President, or Mr. Vanburen. He could render our state no service, and could effect nothing in behalf of any friend he has." Possibly re Elisha R. Potter Sr.’s campaign for U.S. senate.

David Putnam of Marietta, OH to John Brown Francis
Re James Brown's Ohio lands.

Box 1, Folder 9

MSS 426 Item 9, Correspondence undated

Copy of stock transfer from Rhode Island Union Bank 1836 Jun 25

Vice President Martin Van Buren to John Brown Francis 1836 Sep 10
Election campaigning; may not be able to visit Rhode Island this season.

Dutee J. Pearce to John Brown Francis 1836 Sep 17
Politics; discusses effect of new canal on property values

George F. Man to John Brown Francis 1837 Jul 08
Discusses politics and meeting with President Van Buren and Secretary of Treasury Levi Woodbury.

Elisha R. Potter Jr. to John Brown Francis 1837 Oct 12
Politics, mostly re bank legislation.

[Dutee J. Pearce] to John Brown Francis 1837 Oct 14
First four pages only of political letter.

N. Bullock and Joseph M. Blake to John Brown Francis 1837 Oct 29
Asks for help in securing appointment of Dr. John J. DeWolf as commercial agent in "Sidney" (Australia or Nova Scotia?)

President Martin Van Buren to John Brown Francis 1838 Nov 26
Election results; "Mr. Webster will be obliged to make way for Mr. Clay. Genl.
Harrison will certainly be drop't in a few weeks."

Aunt Sarah (Brown) Herreshoff to John Brown Francis 1846 Jun 20

Family news.

Series 5, Ann Brown (Carter) Francis (1795-1828), first wife of John Brown Francis,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 10</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 10, Diary</td>
<td>1823-1828</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extracts:

Content is largely religious, including both spiritual musings and reflections on sermons. The pastor Mr. Crocker is frequently praised. Cheerful thoughts on Christmas Eve: "The thought of death frequently engrosses me entirely. Am I prepared for this great & fearful change. One after another of those who had as good reason as I have to expect length of days as I have fall around me on every side. Will it not be my turn next?" [12/24/1824] "I have great reason to bless the Giver of all good for his tender mercies towards me, an ungrateful worm of the dust." [1/1/1825] Closing words in weeks before death: "I feel a sweet peace of mind in life or death I pray for divine acceptance & all the gifts of my heavenly Father it is my fevered desire that He will purify and accept through the blood of my Redeemer." [4/20/1828]

Re death of grandmother Sarah Smith Brown: "In the evening at seven o'clock
our aged relative & kind friend fell asleep in the arms of death without a struggle or a groan. Night dews fall not more gently nor weary worn out winds expire so soft.” [2/1825]

Just after birth of first child: "What a responsibility is attached to the character & relation of a Parent & how few fulfil the duties that belong to them. I feel this responsibility more & more every day. When my head is low in the ground she may read these papers, but she can never know, half the anxiety of my heart.” [2/8/1824]

Fire at Spring Green: "I have a signal instance to record of the merciful interference of our Heavenly Father in preserving us from fire during the past week. Our kitchen mantelpiece took fire on Thursday A.M. early... I did not know the extent of the danger till it was past." [4/13/1828]

Folder 11, MSS 426 Item 11, Three letters from cousin Anna Herreshoff (two in verse form).

Series 6, Elizabeth Francis (1833-1901), daughter of John Brown Francis,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 12</td>
<td>MSS 426 Item 12, Miscellaneous</td>
<td>undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>Receipt</td>
<td>1876 May 03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author/Recipient</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887 Jul 24</td>
<td>Amasa M. Eaton (cousin) to Elizabeth Francis</td>
<td>Letter written in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887 Sep 09</td>
<td>E. Carlile of Kingston, R.I. to Elizabeth Francis</td>
<td>Re death of Anna Herreshoff and memories of her life at the John Brown House.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891 Feb 12</td>
<td>Amasa M. Eaton (cousin) to Elizabeth Francis</td>
<td>Letter written in Santa Barbara, C.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899 Aug 14</td>
<td>Amasa M. Eaton (cousin) to Elizabeth Francis</td>
<td>Letter written in Providence, inquiring about family legends of John Brown's gunpowder sales to the Revolutionary army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901 May 02</td>
<td>Eulogy from the Women's Exchange Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>