

Burwell-Clark-Glenny Family Fonds, 1817-1878, n.d.

Brock University Archives

RG 668

- Creator:** Burwell, Clark and Glenny families
- Extent:** 6 cm of textual records
- Abstract:** Fonds consists of materials relating to the Burwell, Clark and Glenny families of Buffalo, New York. Most of the material is correspondence, with some land documents, manuscripts and genealogical information. One of the more notable items is a letter describing the events around Navy Island during the aftermath of William Lyon McKenzie's failed rebellion in Upper Canada, when the rebels retreated to Navy Island in the Niagara River. One of the manuscripts included is a travel log describing the writer's attendance at the Free Soil convention in Buffalo in 1848. He describes in detail his travels, including a two-page account of his trip to Niagara Falls. Other letters describe the growth and development of Buffalo, comment on events of the American Civil War, and provide commentary on the Franco-Prussian War.
- Materials:** Correspondence, manuscripts, land documents, and family records.
- Repository:** Brock University Archives
- Processed by:** Chantal Cameron
- Last updated:** December 2018

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- Preferred citation:** RG 668, Burwell-Clark-Glenny family fonds, 1817-1878, n.d. Brock University Archives, Brock University.

Acquisition info.: Material was purchased in 2018.

Scope and Content:

Fonds contains material relating to the Burwell, Clark and Glenny families of Buffalo, New York. Most of the material is correspondence, consisting of 210 letters. Most of the letters are addressed to William Glenny and Bryant Burwell. Others are written by William Glenny, or addressed to members of the Burwell family including Ann and George. A few letters are addressed to Esther or Bryant Glenny. Some land documents, manuscripts and genealogical information is included. One of the more notable items is a letter describing the events around Navy Island during the aftermath of William Lyon Mackenzie's failed rebellion in Upper Canada, when the rebels retreated to Navy Island in the Niagara River. One of the manuscripts included is a travel log describing the writer's attendance at the Free Soil convention in Buffalo in 1848. He describes in detail his travels, including a two-page account of his trip to Niagara Falls. Other letters describe the growth and development of Buffalo, comment on events of the American Civil War, and provide commentary on the Franco-Prussian War.

Biographical sketch:

John Whipple Clark (1799-1872) was born in the Village of Newport, Herkimer County, New York. He graduated from Fairfield Medical College in 1822 and moved to Buffalo the following year. In addition to practicing as a doctor, Clark was also a businessman and public servant, serving as a village trustee and alderman. He became partners with Dr. Cyrenius Chapin, but left the practice in order to work in the real estate business full time. He became prosperous but lost his fortune in the Panic of 1837. He never married.

Clark's sister Ann married Dr. Bryant Burwell (1796-1861) in 1817 and the couple resided in Buffalo, where Burwell formed a partnership with Dr. Cyrenius Chapin after the departure of John Whipple Clark. They had three children, George N. Burwell, Esther A. Burwell Glenny (who married William Henry Glenny, Sr.) and Anna C. Burwell Rathbone. The Burwells also suffered significant financial losses in the Panic of 1837, and Bryant struggled to support his family with his medical practice. After the death of his wife Ann and his financial losses, Bryant became depressed, but improved after marrying Mary Cleary in 1844. He gradually withdrew from his medical practice and brought in his son George, a recent medical school graduate. His depression returned in the 1850s and he died in 1861, after a general decline in health.

Esther Burwell, the daughter of Bryant Burwell and Ann Clark, married William H. Glenny (1818-1882). Glenny was an immigrant from Ireland who came to Buffalo in 1836. In 1840 he founded a small crockery store, which grew to become a leading importer of fine china, glass and other

merchandise. In 1877, Glenny hired renowned architect Richard A. Waite to design a new store on Main Street in Buffalo, which became known as “Glenny Block”. The couple had several children, including Bryant, John, George, and William.

Organization:

The fonds was organized into four series:

Series I: Correspondence, 1817-1878

Series II: Manuscripts, 1848, n.d.

Series III: Family Record, 1768-1852

Series IV: Land Documents, 1826-1833

Inventory:

Series I: Correspondence, 1817-1878, n.d.

- 1.1 A letter addressed to B. Burwell, M.D., Buffalo, from J.W. Clark, dated January 15, 1838. The letter describes the events around Navy Island during the aftermath of William Lyon McKenzie’s failed rebellion in Upper Canada, when the rebels retreated to Navy Island in the Niagara River.

Letter transcription:

Saturday, Niagara Falls, 9 o’clock a.m.

Dear Sir,

I wrote a line yesterday in great haste to Lucy saying that we were home too late for the Lockport cars & would be detained a day—I also stated that the rumor was that the Navy Islanders would attempt an invasion of Canada last night—You will have heard all about the nights transaction ere this arrives.

I walked with the Commissary General all the way to Schlosser last evening – It was a beautiful evening & we had a good view of the cannonading at Chippewa upon Navy Island. The General says it was the most brisk firing that has happened since the war began. We could see the shells issue from the guns & trace them all the way in their curvature until they struck & exploded in the air or on the island. The round shot whistled merrily among the trees & skipped upon the waters. There were some hundred or more wagons assembled at Schlosser & the teamster folks were mute on the subject of their business.

Van Rensselaer declared to his friends here that he expected steamboats down from Buffalo in which he intended to embark his munitions of War & that the men would land & ride up the River probably to make a landing some where up the river ...

I think it is all for the best however: as it will show to the world that our people will support the laws & with the disappointment & failure & the brisk charge from Canada I hope will bring the Islanders to their senses & perhaps all will now be settled without bloodshed & without incurring the awful retaliatory consequences of an invasion of Canada & a probable defeat &c &c – Volunteers continue to arrive for the Island from great distances – But the true affairs on the Island are discouraging & many are disposed to get out of the scrape. ...

You can readily conceive how weak the plan was of departing last night – Brave soldiers to require wagons to carry them a few miles & incur the liability of such a requisition in publishing their plan – which Chippewa was prepared to take advantage of - & then again their exposure to our troops on this side when separated from their arms - & the exposure of those boats to the cannon on both sides in the rapids at Black Rock.

I have just talked with a man & his wife from Toronto day before yesterday – They were obliged to leave because the man would not take up arms. They talk hard about the tories in Canada & hope McKenzie will succeed – They think the war is not begun yet. They think there are forces enough at home to revolutionize without the help of the states people also that the tories swear vengeance on Buffalo &c &c ...”

- 1.2 Letters addressed to Dr. Bryant Burwell, 1824-1845. Contains 35 letters addressed to Dr. Bryant Burwell. Most of the letters are addressed to Buffalo, New York, but some are addressed to Philadelphia, PA. Some of the correspondents are J.W. Clark (Bryant Burwell's brother-in-law); Susan Burwell (Bryant Burwell's sister); Sally Clark (J.W. Clark's mother); Angeline Clark, D. [Dudley] Burwell; A [Ann] Burwell (Bryant's sister); and George [Glenny]. Many of the letters contain family news. Others are written by colleagues and business associates. One letter dated October 20, 1826 and signed "J. Jameson", Fairfield Medical College, states that "the inhabitants are about over with their fright that the Typhus was raging here...the doctors would learn what is Typhus fever if the doctors should be in Buffalo serving the prevalence of bilious fevers and see thirty or forty different cases in the course of the day, what would they think or say?". He adds that "I am trying to write [a] thesis on the principal diseases that was incident to the Indians before they became acquainted with the white man".

A letter dated August 14, 1825 from Bryant Burwell's brother Dudley comments on the position and development of Buffalo, noting that "Buffalo at this time must be a busy place, and no doubt one of much prospective importance in point of business, population & commercial enterprise but be you not decide it will not increase after a

few years, it can never rise beyond a retail village & a store house, the western world will pass it as Albany is left now with prices below the New York market”.

A letter dated from J.W. Clark, dated August 15, 1828 also comments on Buffalo’s development and speculates about the future of the city. Clark writes that “...in observing Albany & New York & their progress I think I may safely anticipate that 20 years will make a great place of Buffalo & that the Harbor above Pratts will be in use & very valuable—it’s not exaggerating to say it will be equal in that time to the [profit] of Albany & if so the land which I am engaged in will be worth a million. I have made particular enquires about lots and rents in every place & find that our lands in Buffalo are offered lower than any that I have seen in any place. It is false the stories many tell about Buffalo lots being higher than any where else. Here I am among 200,000 people & amusements & business & bustle confounding but Buffalo is my hobby & I shall stick to it & endeavor to succeed in my undertakings in general & ever have an eye to the improvement & beautifying the place & establishment of all good institutions & c & c....” Another letter from Clark dated August 21, 1828 notes that “I attended the first opening of the New Bowery Theatre last evening for the first theatre I have attended. It was magnificently splendid—I am getting many useful ideas relative to architecture, streets, pavements & a thousand city regulations which I wish to see in practice in Buffalo”.

- 1.3 Letters addressed to Ann Burwell, 1817-1832. Contains 20 letters, mostly from family members, including her mother Sally Clark, Susan Burwell, Sarah Clark, and sister Angeline [Green].
- 1.4 Letters addressed to George Burwell, 1841-1847. Contains four letters, some from family members, including his father Bryant Burwell and J.W. Clark. A letter from R.G. Snow is also included.
- 1.5 Letters addressed to Esther Glenny, 1845. Contains two letters, both from J.W. Clark.
- 1.6 Letters addressed to Bryant Glenny, 1867-1868. Contains seven letters from family members including his mother (Esther), J.C. Glenny, brother Will, and J.W. Clark.
- 1.7 Letters addressed to William H. Glenny, 1863-1871. Contains 56 letters to William Glenny, mostly from his parents and siblings, including his brothers Bryant and John, and cousin James. Other letters are signed Daniel Marsh, Anna Burwell, James Brown, Ella Coe, Harry Rogers and Ned Wadsworth. Most of the letters contain family news, but some refer to events of the American Civil War (May 16, 1864, May 22, 1864) and the re-election of Abraham Lincoln (Nov. 13, 1864).
- 1.8 Letters from William H. Glenny, 1865-1870. Contains 41 letters written by William Glenny, mostly while he was studying at Yale. Most of the letters are written to his parents, siblings and other family members. He mostly writes about his studies and activities at school. Some letters refer to events of the American Civil War (April 3,

1865, April 10). One letter contains a lengthy passage about the Franco-Prussian War (dated at Dresden, August 28, 1870).

- 1.9 Miscellaneous letters, 1839-1878, n.d. Contains 44 letters assorted letters of the Burwell and Clark families as well as others. Some letters are written by Dr. S.B. Green (the husband of J.W. Clark's sister Angeline), as well as Bryant Burwell, T. Burwell, and P.A. Porter.

Series II: Manuscripts, 1848, n.d.

- 1.10 Travel log dated August 13, 1848 describing the writer's attendance at the Free Soil convention in Buffalo. He describes in detail his travels, including a two-page account of his trip to Niagara Falls, where he landed at Chippawa on "Victoria free soil". From there he travelled to the Falls, where he went to Table Rock, travelled in a steam ferry boat to the suspension bridge, crossed the rapids to Goat Island, and went up [Terrapin] Tower. He writes that "as I stood in the awful place the Table Rock and looked in that deep yawning gulph [gulf] below a beautiful rainbow was seen, as was the case at various other points...next went up to the top of the Tower which stands in the edge of the water near the precipice of the Horseshoe falls. This is indeed a solemn, awful place-- the most interesting place I had visited...I felt that it was the work of an Omnipotent friend." An entry on the last page dated Nov. 7, 1848 describes the creation of a free soil club "by the Free Soilers of this town", adding that "today we have been called upon to vote for electors for president, the result has been for Van Buren 146, Taylor 92, and Cass 52".
- 1.11 Manuscript lecture on temperance by Dr. B. Burwell, n.d. The seven-page lecture addresses the question of "Why do men who have acquired the habit of drinking intoxicating liquor continue still to use them, notwithstanding all the facts and arguments which have been addressed against their use?".

Series III: Family Record, 1768-1852

- 1.12 A 4-page printed family record form for the Burwell family, 1768-1852. Handwritten entries record marriages, births, and deaths.

Series IV: Land Documents, 1826-1833

- 1.13 Indenture between Cyrenius Chapin and Bryant Burwell for land in the Village of Buffalo, December 22, 1826.
- 1.13 Indenture between John W. Clark, Stafford A. Scott, and Bryant Burwell for land in the Village of Buffalo, 1827.

- 1.13 Lease between Jacob A. Barker to Rynear Dumont for land in the Village of Buffalo, January 2, 1830.
- 1.13 Indenture between Bryant and Anna Burwell and Newton Rossiter for land in the Village of Buffalo, March 15, 1832.
- 1.13 Indenture between John W. Clark and Bryant Burwell for land in Buffalo, March 20, 1833.