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MacDonald Family correspondence and ledger7746977

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Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Butler Library, 6th Floor
Columbia University, Mail Code 1127
535 W. 114th St.
New York, NY 10027

Business Number: (212) 854-5153

Fax Number: (212) 854-1365

rbml@libraries.cul.columbia.edu

URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/rbml/index.html>

Table of Contents

Summary Information	3
Biographical / Historical	3
Summary	4
Administrative Information	4
Controlled Access Headings	5
Collection Inventory	5
Series I: Correspondence	5
Series II: Daily Ledger of Expences	6

Summary Information

Repository:	Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Creator:	MacDonald Family
Title:	MacDonald Family correspondence and ledger
ID:	7746977
ID:	MS#1535
Date [inclusive]:	1841-1930
Physical Description:	0.75 linear feet 1 box and 1 cmi box
Language of the Material:	English .

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); MacDonald Family Correspondence and Ledger; Box and Folder; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Biographical / Historical

James MacDonald (1803-1849) was a pioneer in the treatment of the mentally ill in America. He served as physician of the Bloomingdale Lunatic Asylum in New York City from 1825 to 1837. In partnership with his brother Allan, he then operated his own private asylum from 1841 until his death, first in the Murray Hill neighborhood and then after 1845 at Sanford Hall in Flushing, Long Island. The institution remained in family control after his death, and operated through the 1920s.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Summary

This family archive includes numerous letters which shed light on MacDonald's career and the operation of the Sanford Hall asylum: 4 letters from James MacDonald to brother Allan MacDonald concerning the operation of their asylum, 1842-48, including one concerning admission of the widow of John Delmonico, the famous restaurateur, 22 March 1843: "They are respectable folks and want everything done for the comfort and advantage of Ms. D." * 7 letters of introduction and other documents relating to Dr. MacDonald's tour of European asylums, 1831-2 * Letter from Dr. MacDonald to his wife, who was apparently running the Murray Hill asylum briefly in his absence: "I hope you will have a more quiet afternoon than yesterday. Pray do all you can to keep the place quiet, particularly in front of the house." 17 June [1841?] * Letter from James MacDonald to Dr. Ranny of Blackwell's Island, referring a patient, 30 April 1849 (shortly before his death) * 18 letters from Dr. Josiah W. Barstow (superintendent of Sanford Hall) to widow Eliza H. MacDonald, circa 1857-60, most concerning the asylum * One long letter from C.M. Kittredge to Dr. Barstow, 1870, concerning a new Sanford Hall patient, B.B. Colah, a Parsi from India * Letter from Dr. Pliny Earle to widow Eliza MacDonald, 1857, researching Dr. MacDonald's use of restraints in the 1830s, with her draft response * plus more than a hundred family letters and receipts.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

Created a box and folder list containing edited and enhanced description. cml 2021-02-26

Restrictions on Access

This collection is located off-site. You will need to request this material at least three business days in advance to use the collection in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library reading room.

The Ledger of Daily Expences is located on-site.

Restrictions on Access

This collection has no restrictions.

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchase, 2009-2010. Swann Auction Gallery.

Accruals

Materials may have been added to the collection since this finding aid was prepared. Contact rbml@columbia.edu for more information.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Controlled Access Headings

- Mental illness
- Correspondence
- Macdonald, James, 1803-1849
- Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane

Collection Inventory

Series I: Correspondence

Title/Description	Instances
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Dr. J.W. Barstow to MacDonald Family, 1857-1870	box 1
Allan MacDonald to Mary Maclean, 1853-1861	box 1
Eliza MacDonald--Letters--to and from, 1857-1883	box 1
John M. MacDonald	
to Allan MacDonald, 1842-1850	box 1
to Allan MacDonald, Eliza MacDonald, and Dr. Ranny, 1842-1849	box 1
European trip, 1831-1832	box 1
MacDonald Family Receipts, 1858-1867	box 1
Miller Family--Correspondence, 1825-1859	box 1
Mitchell Family, 1879-1930	box 1
Miscellaneous, 1851-1886, undated	box 1
Notes, undated	box 1

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series II: Daily Ledger of Expences

Title/Description	Instances
Ledger for a private mental asylum established at Murray Hill by Dr. James Macdonald with the aid of his wife, Eliza, and his brother, Allan Macdonald.	cmibox Ledger (Box 2)
Scope and Contents	
<p>Eliza appears to have managed the household as well as the bookkeeping, as she occasionally issues small sums "to myself" in the ledger (e.g., Dec. 28, 1842, "Box for Eliza (myself)". Dr. Macdonald, who also appears in occasional ledger entries, usually for "lent" sums, was a longtime physician for the mentally ill, having worked for 10 years (1825-1830 and 1832-1837) at the Bloomingdale Asylum in New York City and touring European asylums as an observer for the better part of 1831. His Murray Hill asylum was a "long cherished design" ("James Macdonald, M.D.", <i>The American Journal of Insanity</i>, Vols. 5-6, p. 85), and was located in two secluded houses in what were then the suburbs of Manhattan, opening its doors to patients on June 1, 1841. Having outgrown these accommodations within a few short years, it was then relocated to Sanford Hall, in Flushing, Queens, where it stayed in operation at least until its founder's death in May 1849.</p>	

The ledger begins with an entry dated only 1841: "This Book cost -- \$.75 | Bottle of Ink - 12-1/2 [cents]". The entry immediately following is March 27, 1841 (the purchase of a horse, for \$90), and for the next three months, through the beginning of July, Eliza records the numerous purchases necessary to outfit and ready the houses for patients, including everything from carpeting and a carriage to a silver tea set, mirrors, a tin bath, a skillet, tables, hardware, buckles, "lynch-pins" for a wagon, and so on, as well as the hiring and paying (and feeding) of household staff and getting a circular printed. The first patient may have been admitted on July 14: noted here as "Albert Rogers, of Brooklyn, credit, 3 mos. Board of wife". The cost, \$110, indicates that the asylum's clientele had to have been upper class. Several other "boarders" are added to the books in subsequent entries, although it is not until September 17, 1841, that one, Timothy Courow(?), is directly noted as being a patient. Naturally, as more and more boarders and/or patients become residents, the amount of food and other sundries needed increases exponentially, with vast quantities of eggs, bread, blackberries, peaches, oysters, and cakes noted in the ledger.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)