Anthony Benezet Papers, 1750-1936

Ms. Coll. 852

ca. 60 items (24 folders in 1 box)

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Biographical background

Prominent Friend, philanthropist and educator.

Anthony Benezet (1713-1784) was a native of France who became a Quaker at age fourteen. In 1731 he came to Philadelphia and in 1736 married Joyce Marriott. He was a teacher for most of his life and was active in promoting an end to slavery and the slave trade. He wrote and distributed many papers and tracts dealing with slavery, American Indians and education.

(Source for biographical information: Dictionary of Quaker Biography)

Links to images

The following brings together all of the image links found within this finding aid. (Link to digitized letters)

Page 1 of ALS of Anthony Benezet, 7 mo. 1783, Philadelphia, to George Dillwyn of Burlington, NJ. Benezet expresses his interest in the situation of the Indians and his desire to do what he can to remove mistaken prejudices against them. He encloses his "Observations on Indians" which he is planning to publish. Page 2 | Page 3 | Page 4 (each 137k)

Summary of collection

Letters (ALS and AL), also typed and handwritten transcripts, photocopies and other papers.

Many letters relate to Benezet's views on slavery and his work to end the slave trade. Other topics discussed are: the use of taxes to pay for war; the condition of American Indians; Benezet's school and thoughts on teaching.

Includes references to various Quaker publications, including Benezet's "The plain path to Christian perfection ....," "Some observations on the situation ... of the Indian natives" and "The Pennsylvania spelling book: or Youth's friendly instructor ....," publication of an Elizabeth Webb letter and Samuel Smith’s "History of New Jersey."

In addition to general news of other Friends, the letters contain religious reflections on friendship, the importance of peace, wealthy Quakers, intolerance and inconsistency among Christians.

The bulk of the letters are addressed to George Dillwyn (1738-1820) of Burlington, N.J.; other recipients of letters are Samuel Allinson (1739-1791), Moses Brown (1738-1836), Edward Cathrall, Queen Charlotte of Great Britain (1744-1818), John Fothergill (1712-1780), Samuel Fothergill (1715-1782), Selina Hastings (Countess of Huntingdon) (1707-1791), Israel Pemberton (1715-1779), Joseph Phips (1708-1787), Robert Pleasant (1723-1801), John Smith (1722-1771), Samuel Smith (1720-1776), Jonah Thompson (1702 or 3-1780) and Caspar Wistar (1761-1818).

Also a few illustrations and receipts.

Related collections

Additional Anthony Benezet material may be found in: William Penn Charter School Archives, 1666-1981 (Ms. Coll. 1115); George Vaux Collection of correspondence and documents, 1659-1914 (Ms. Coll. 1167); Allinson family papers, 1702-1949 (Ms. Coll. 968).

Arrangement and description of collection

All letters (with noted exceptions) are by Benezet and are arranged alphabetically by recipient in 22 folders. There is also a folder of graphics and another of receipts. A brief notation is included as a guide to topics discussed in the material.

Note: for annotated transcripts of these letters, see "Friend Anthony Benezet " by George S. Brookes (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1937).

Contents of folders follows:

1. Allinson, Samuel (1739-1791)
   typed extracts from 1 letter dated Nov. 22, 1936
letter is from Henry J. Cadbury to Thomas E. Drake re: letter of AB to Samuel Allinson; also 1 p. of Argosy Book store advertisement with S. Allinson material listed
(Note: letter of AB referred to in above letter of Henry J. Cadbury not in folder as of Sept. 1991)
2. Benezet, Anthony - Graphics
   (2 items)
   Illustration of AB’s house
   photograph of “Benezet instructing colored children” [from Historical poetical and pictorial American scenes / by J.W. Barber, 1850.]
3. Brown, Moses (1738-1836)
   3 letters (ms. copies and photocopies) 1773-1780
   o slavery
   o taxes used for the military
4. Cathrall, Edward
   1 ALS dated 11 mo. 25, 1764
   o AB sending EC waterlily seed as medicine
5. Charlotte, Queen (1744-1818)
   4 ms. copies of letter dated 8 mo. 25, 1783
   o slavery

Folders 6-13 are letters to George Dillwyn, arranged chronologically; note: most letters to GD have typed transcripts and abstracts, letters are labeled from “Evans collection”
6. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
   4 ALS dated 4 mo. 1767 to 11 mo. 1769
   o slave trade
   o AB’s school and size of it
7. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
   4 ALS dated 5,6, or 7 mo. 1770 to 8 mo. 5, 1773
   o AB asks for GD’s help correcting book about to publish
   o AB advises GD to go into printing business
   o Isaac Collins to print 1000 copies of Sewel’s History for the Meeting for Sufferings
   o value of friendship
   o religious reflections on how to live
   o “Murray the Preacher”
8. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
   1 ALS with enclosure dated 2 mo. 15, 1774
   o religious discussion
   o refers to publication of John Woolman’s writings
   o includes extract of letter by Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua
9. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
   5 ALS dated 8 mo. 4, 1779 to 10 mo. 1779
   o explains how AB teaches accounting and math
   o Samuel Wetherill controversy
   o importance of Friends peace testimony
   o AB’s essay on Friends
10. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
    4 ALS dated 4 mo. 1780 to 8 mo. 6, 1780
    o religious discussion
    o disapproval of wealthy Quakers
    o mention of Conrad Weiser traveling with Indians
    o sends pamphlets
    o AB wants to publish Elizabeth Webb letter
    o re-publication of AB’s The plain path to Christian perfection ...
    o AB’s eye accident
    o AB quotes Moses Brown’s letter on taxes and war
    o thoughts on grammar
11. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
    4 ALS dated 5 mo. 1781 to 2 mo. 1782
    o Elizabeth Webb’s letter published
    o discusses intolerance and inconsistency of professing Christians
    o educational matters
12. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
    4 ALS dated 1783 to 9 mo. 14, 1783
    o importance of bringing slave trade before Parliament
    o education
    o extracts from Abbe Reynal
    o letter of Elizabeth Webb and difficulty of printing
    o interest in the Indians and AB’s desire to remove mistaken prejudices against them, encloses his “Observations on Indians” (see image below)
    o concerning AB’s “Observations on Indians” in form of letter to GD (see image below)
    o AB’s proposed history of the Indians (see image below)
the situation of the Indians and his desire to do what he can to remove mistaken prejudices against them. He encloses his "Observations on Indians" which he is planning to publish. Page 2 | Page 3 | Page 4 (each 137k)

13. Dillwyn, George (1738-1820)
   2 ALS (dated 1st day and undated)
   ○ "little book" proposes to reprint
   ○ approval of Christian education of youth and sends books related to same
14. Fothergill, John (1712-1780)
   ms. copy dated 4 mo. 28, 1773
   ○ AB's views on slavery and wants to keep it from spreading
15. Fothergill, Samuel (1715-1772)
   2 letters (ms. copy and typed transcript) 1757-1771 (folder labeled Roberts Coll.)
   ○ slavery
16. Huntingdon, Selina Hastings, Countess of (1707-1791)
   2 letters (photocopy of ms. copy, photocopy of ALS) 1774-1775
   ○ slavery
17. Pemberton, Israel (1715-1779)
   typed transcript of letter dated 1 mo. 1778
   letter addressed to Israel Pemberton and others
18. Phipps, Joseph (1708-1787)
   ms. copy of letter dated 5 mo. 28, 1763
   ○ slavery and the slave trade
19. Pleasants, Robert (1723-1801)
   5 letters (ALS, typed transcripts) 1765-1781
   ○ slavery and slave trade legislation in Pa.
   ○ future danger of slaves revolting
   ○ sending pamphlets on Friends and their principles
   ○ comments on Patrick Henry and sends him books
   ○ refers to his Pennsylvania spelling book
   ○ financial difficulties of John Hunt
   ○ discusses pro-slavery publication by a Carolina merchant
   ○ education of blacks and his desire to head school for same
20. Receipts
   2 typed transcripts of receipts for teaching 1750, 1780
21. Smith, John (1722-1771)
   4 letters (ALS, AL, typed transcript) 1758-1760
   ○ publishing project with John Pemberton
   ○ slave trade
   ○ memorials of deceased ministers and elders (mention of Michael Lightfoot)
   ○ general news of acquaintances
22. Smith, Samuel (1720-1776)
   ALS dated 5 mo. 17, 1765
   ○ publication of Smith's "History" [of New Jersey?], AB wishes it to include testimony against war (Friends, Mennonites, Schwenkfelders)
23. Thompson, Jonah (1702 or 3-1780)
   ALS dated 4 mo. 24, 1756
   ○ present unrest and possibility of France declaring war
   ○ visit of Samuel Fothergill, Mary Peisley and Catharine Payton
24. Wistar, Caspar (1761-1818)
   ALS dated 4 mo. 25, 1784
   ○ sends pamphlets
   ○ AB's "Observations on Indians"
   ○ importance of new immigrants to America knowing about the Indians
25. Wistar, Caspar (1801-1867)
   ALS dated Nov. 22, 1839
   letter from CW to Dr. Reynall Coates re: their friendship

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Contact Diana Franzusoff Peterson (dfpeters@haverford.edu or 610-896-1284) for more information about this collection. Please include the manuscript collection number in your request.

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