

**THE TRUSTEES OF RESERVATIONS  
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**Guide to**

**Col. Ashley House, Inc. Archive, 1930-1972**

**AH.MS.Coll. I**

**by Kaitlin Bliss, Intern  
From Simmons College,  
Graduate School of Library and Information Science**

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Archives & Research Center  
27 Everett Street, Sharon, MA 02067  
[www.thetrustees.org](http://www.thetrustees.org)  
[arc@ttor.org](mailto:arc@ttor.org)  
781-784-8200

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## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

### **PROVENANCE**

Acquired with the purchase of the Colonel John Ashley House from the Col. Ashley House, Inc., 1972.

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### **CITE AS**

Col. Ashley House, Inc. Archive. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center.

### **RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS**

This collection is open for research. Preservation photocopies for reference use have been substituted in the main files.

## **HISTORY OF COL. ASHLEY HOUSE, INC.**

Col. Ashley House, Inc. was a non-profit corporation founded in 1959 with the sole purpose of purchasing the Col. John Ashley House, located in Sheffield, MA, and maintaining it as a museum. After buying the property in 1960, they ran it as a museum until 1972 when they sold it to The Trustees of Reservations.

Col. John Ashley (1709-1802) was one of Sheffield's first settlers and served in various local and state positions, including judge of the county court. After marrying Hannah Hogeboom he built what is now known as the Col. Ashley House in 1735. In 1773 Ashley was involved in the drafting of the Sheffield Declaration which made a statement against British tyranny and for individual rights.

In 1781 two of Ashley's slaves, Mum Bett and Brom, sued Ashley for their freedom under the new state constitution. Defended by attorney Theodore Sedgwick (1746-1813), Mum Bett and Brom won their case. Now a free woman, Mum Bett changed her name to Elizabeth Freeman and worked as a paid employee for the Sedgwicks until her death in 1829.

The Ashley House was bought in 1929 by Harry and Mary Brigham. In 1930 they moved the house from its original location to Cooper Hill Road where it sits today. They also built an extension onto the back of the house as well as undertook extensive restoration work on the original structure. After Harry Brigham's death in 1941, Mary sold the property to Edward and Beulah Brewer in 1945. Throughout his time there in the 1940s and 1950s Brewer gave tours of the house. Brewer died in 1964 several years after the sale of the Ashley House.

In 1958 a group of local residents met to discuss the logistics of establishing an organization or society for the Ashley House. On March 17, 1959 they became a recognized non-profit corporation by the name of Col. John Ashley House, Inc. That September the name was officially changed to simply Col. Ashley House, Inc. The first elected President of the organization was Willard C. French, librarian of the Bushnell-Sage Library in Sheffield from 1929 to 1973. He would remain President until resigning the office in 1970, though remaining active as a director and later as Secretary. Other officers elected at the first meeting were Gelaston Hardy as Vice President (another extremely active member who would remain so even after The Trustee's acquisition of the property), Richard S. Combes as Treasurer, and Margaret Beattie as Secretary.

The bulk of 1959 and 1960 were spent raising awareness of the organization and soliciting funds for the purchase of the Ashley House. While the organization received moderate donations, the purchase of the house, which occurred on November 1, 1960, was due entirely to a loan of \$25,000 acquired with the assistance of Lawrence and Donald Miller of the Berkshire Eagle. The subsequent years, 1961 to 1972, were chiefly spent attempting to raise the funds needed to pay this loan back, which stipulated full repayment within five years. Failure of Col. Ashley House, Inc. to accumulate this sum led to the eventual sale of the property to The Trustees of Reservations and the organization's consequent dissolution.

Prior to the actual sale of the property in 1972, Col. Ashley House, Inc. approached The Trustees of Reservations on several occasions. In 1966 a Standing Committee was formed to consider the acquisition, but ultimately declined. In 1968 Donald Miller began corresponding with The Trustees to once again try and broker an arrangement. Willard C. French also wrote to them in 1969 proposing the sale of part of the Col. Ashley House land located near Bartholomew's Cobble, another of The Trustees properties.

### **Officers of Col. Ashley House, Inc.**

#### *President*

Willard C. French, 1959-1970

William P. Clark, 1970-1972

#### *Vice President*

Gelaston Hardy, 1959-1960

Earle Gilligan, 1960-1966

Jesse T. O'Hara, 1966-1972

#### *Treasurer*

Richard S. Combes, 1959-1961

J. Wesley Warren, 1961-1972

*Secretary*

Margaret Beattie, 1959  
Michael Rose, 1959-1960  
Donald S. Kelsey, 1960-1970  
Jinny Moskowitz, 1971  
Willard C. French, 1971-1972

**Directors of Col. Ashley House, Inc.**

Willard C. French, 1959-1972  
Gelaston Hardy, 1959-1972  
Sidney Q. Curtiss, 1959-1972  
Earle Gilligan, 1959-1972  
J. Wesley Warren, 1959-1972  
Angus R. MacDonald, 1959-1965  
Howard L. Bessette, 1959-1962  
Walter G. Abriel, 1959-1960  
Richard S. Combes, 1960-1972  
Lawrence K. Miller, 1960-1972  
Rodney W. Williams, 1960-1972  
Donald S. Kelsey, 1960-1970  
Edward Salling, 1960-1962  
Ruth R. Berridge, 1962-1972  
William P. Clark, 1962-1972  
Malcolm B. Miller, 1962-1965  
Howard T. Bain, 1963-1972  
Jesse T. O'Hara, 1963-1972  
Donald B. Miller, 1965-1972  
Lucille Howard, 1966-1967  
Kenneth H. Ward, 1968-1972

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS**

The Col. Ashley House, Inc. Archive contains correspondence, administrative and legal papers, newspaper clippings, magazines, pamphlets, and photographs which document the proceedings of the Col. Ashley House, Inc. organization as well as their efforts to acquire and then maintain the Ashley House on Cooper Hill Road in Sheffield. The papers, which span the years 1930 to 1972, emphasize the organization's attempts to garner financial support both locally and regionally; the bulk of the material is from 1959 to 1972. The papers are organized into four series: Correspondence, Administrative Documents, Printed Media, and Photographs.

Series I, Correspondence, contains letters, notecards and postcards to and from the officers and directors of Col. Ashley House, Inc. regarding the organization's efforts to obtain the Ashley House property and maintain it. The bulk of the correspondence is to or from William C. French and Gelaston Hardy.

Some notable letters include:

- a collection of submissions to Col. Ashley House, Inc. for a **switchel** recipe contest from February of 1959
- two letters from **Silvio O. Conte**, United States Representatives from the First District of Massachusetts from 1959
- a letter from prominent businessman **Frederick W. Beinecke** from January 1962
- correspondence with **The Trustees of Reservations**, chiefly with Loring Conant from 1960, 1963, 1966, and 1969
- correspondence with director **Rodney Williams** from 1961-1962 and 1964-1965
- several letters written by Gelaston Hardy in 1963 to **ESSO, Shell Oil, and Texaco** requesting the Ashley House be added to their maps
- letters from the **Shaker Community, Inc.** proposing a collaboration with Col. Ashley House, Inc. from 1963-1964
- correspondence regarding the increase in interest on the **mortgage** on the Ashley House and its ramifications from 1967-1970
- correspondence regarding the discovery that Col. Ashley House, Inc. had failed to officially establish themselves as **tax exempt** from 1969-1970
- correspondence with **Harold W. Felton**, author of *Mumbet: The Story of Elizabeth Freeman* from 1969-1970
- correspondence from 1969 with **State University College** in New York regarding the loan of items from the Ashley House
- a letter from the **Berkshire County Historical Society** regarding the loan of items from the Ashley House from 1969
- a collection of letters from **Center School's** third-grade class after a visit to the Ashley House from October 1970

Letters expressly written as a means of making donations can be found in Series II, Administrative Documents, within the first subseries, Corporate Affairs, in the folder Donations and Fundraising.

Series II, Administrative Documents, is organized into two subseries: Corporate Affairs; and Col. Ashley and House. The first subseries, Corporate Affairs, contains records of Col. Ashley House, Inc.'s dealings as an organization, such as their by-laws, meeting minutes, lists of members, and legal documents.

The second subseries, Col. Ashley and House, contains information gathered regarding Colonel John Ashley and the house. This includes several inventories of items in the house, which were used to determine what could be sold to raise funds.

Series III, Printed Media, contains newspaper clippings, magazines and informational pamphlets regarding Col. Ashley; the Ashley House and past owners; Col. Ashley House, Inc.; and, more generally, historic preservation as well as the Berkshires region of Massachusetts. Included in this series is a transcript of a local radio program that Willard C. French and Gelaston Hardy went on in 1959 to raise support.

Series IV, Photographs, contains photographs from various photographers of the exterior and interior of the Ashley House. For many, the photographer or the date is not known. The largest set is that taken by William Tague of *The Berkshire Eagle* in 1959.

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Series I. Correspondence</b>			
0.25" (2 boxes)			
Dates: 1958-1972			
Series I, Correspondence, is arranged chronologically.			
1	1	General Correspondence	1958-1959 Apr
1	2	General Correspondence	1959 May-Dec
1	3	General Correspondence	1960
1	4	General Correspondence	1961
1	5	General Correspondence	1962-1964
1	6	General Correspondence	1965-1967
1	7	General Correspondence	1968-1969
2	1	General Correspondence	1970-1972

## **Series II. Administrative Documents**

0.50" (1 box)  
 Dates: 1959-1972

Series II, Administrative Documents, is organized into two subseries: Corporate Affairs; and Col. Ashley and House.

### **CORPORATE AFFAIRS**

2	2	By-laws	1959, 1969
2	3	Corporate stationery	[1959-196-]
2	4	Donations and fundraising	1959-1971
2	5	General notes and papers	1959-1972, n.d.
2	6	Legal documents	1959-1969

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
2	7	Meeting agendas, minutes, and reports  Presentation aid, 1959 Jan 21, stored in: General Oversize Box	1959
2	8	Meeting agendas, minutes, and reports	1960-1964
2	9	Meeting agendas, minutes, and reports	1965-1972
2	10	Member lists	1961-1971
2	11	Press releases	1959-1967
<b>COL. ASHLEY AND HOUSE</b>			
2	12	Col. Ashley House guest book	1961-1964
2	13	Col. Ashley House guest book	1964-1967
2	14	Information on Col. John Ashley	n.d
2	15	Inventories of Col. Ashley House	1959-1965

### **Series III. Printed Media**

0.25" (1/2 box)  
Dates: 1930-1969

Series III, Printed Media, is organized alphabetically.

3	1	Assorted clippings, Col. Ashley House	1933-1964, n.d.
3	2	Assorted clippings, local interest	1930-1965, n.d.
3	3	Pamphlets, Col. Ashley House and Berkshires	1959-1967, n.d.
3	4	Pamphlets, outside organizations	1954-1966, n.d.
3	5	Scrapbook	1924-1956
3	6	Scrapbook	1958-1959
3	7	Scrapbook	1960-1965
3	8	Scrapbook	1959, 1967-1969



Box	Folder	Contents	Date
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**Series IV. Photographs**

0.25" (1/2 box)  
 Dates: 1959-1967

Series IV, Photographs, is arranged chronologically where the date is known.

3	9	Women and man in costume at Col. Ashley House Open House, "Please Credit Jay Studios"	1959
3	10	Back of house, "a Kodacolor Print"	1959
3	10	Edward Brewer outside back of house, "a Kodacolor Print"	1959
3	11	Edward Brewer outside house, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Edward Brewer, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Back door of house, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Window pane exterior, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Door latch exterior	1959
3	11	Second floor window exterior, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Edward Brewer at open front door, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Edward Brewer opening front door (4 prints), by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Interior, pottery, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	11	Interior, pottery, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
3	11	Interior, kitchen utensils, by "William Tague, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i> , Pittsfield, Mass."	1959
3	12	Front of house, at distance	[pre-1964]
3	12	Front of house	[pre-1964]
3	12	Side door	[pre-1964]
3	12	Back of house	[pre-1964]
3	12	Back of house with porch	[pre-1964]
3	13	Mike Anderson standing in herb garden, by Betty Anderson	1964 Aug
3	13	Mike Anderson watering herb garden, by Betty Anderson	1964 Aug
3	14	Woman at back of house, "Berk. Week, Lipsky"	1966
3	14	Woman exiting front door, "Berk. Week, Lipsky"	1966
3	14	Woman at side fence, "Berk. Week, Lipsky"	1966
3	15	Open front door, "Taken by Alice Hurlburt"	1967
3	15	Willard French opening front door, "Taken by Alice Hurlburt"	1967
3	16	Front of house from road	[196-]
3	17	Open front door, "Photographs by George B. Hardenbergh, Photographer, Canaan Connecticut"	[196-]
3	17	Closed front door	[196-]
3	17	"Funeral Door"	[196-]
3	17	Interior, front staircase	[196-]
3	17	Interior, fireplace with white mantle	[196-]
3	17	Interior, fireplace with wood mantle	[196-]

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
3	17	Interior, fireplace in second floor study	[196-]
3	17	Interior, paneling in second floor study	[196-]
3	17	Interior, fireplace with adjacent cabinet	[196-]
3	18	Exterior, front and side of house, "Photograph By Walter H. Scott, Stockbridge, Massachusetts 01262"	[196-]
3	19	Snowy creek, house visible through branches	[196-]
3	19	Snowy creek, house in distance	[196-]
3	19	Snowy creek, house in distance (dimmer)	[196-]
3	19	Snowy creek	[196-]
3	19	Snowy creek, fence in distance	[196-]
3	19	Snowy creek, away from house	[196-]
3	19	Snowy creek, stone wall in distance	[196-]

### **Oversize**

I folder in General Oversize Box

#### **General Oversize Box**

Bsd	I	Presentation aid (Series II)	1959 Jan 21
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