

James A. Bancker papers, 1842-1849
1842-1849
Mss.B.B22

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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Bancker, James A.
Title	James A. Bancker papers, 1842-1849
Date [inclusive]	1842-1849
Call number	Mss.B.B22
Extent	0.25 Linear feet
Extent	46 items.
Location	LH-MV-C-1
Language	English
Container	1
Abstract	Written from China to his family, the letters of James Bancker contain descriptions of the social life of the Americans and English in China, of Hong Kong after the British acquisition of that place, and of anti-British riots in Canton. A long letter describes the outward voyage from New York to Canton; several letters given an account of a visit to the Philippines; and there is a partial journal of Bancker's return home through the Red Sea.

Background note

James Bancker was a member of a prominent Philadelphia family. His father, Charles Nicoll Bancker, established the Franklin Insurance Company. The Banckers had a long history of business and merchant endeavors dating to the colonial era.

James Bancker was educated at the University of Pennsylvania. He later assisted his father at the Franklin Insurance company, working from their offices on Wall Street in New York City. In the 1840s, he left for China to explore trading opportunities. He returned to the United States in 1850 and continued working as a merchant. He died in 1897 in New York City.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

Provenance

Acquisition Information

Gift from Sarah B. Mortimer and accessioned, 11/--/1962 (1962 2289ms).

Indexing Terms

Genre(s)

- Business Records and Accounts
- Family Correspondence
- General Correspondence

Geographic Name(s)

- China -- Foreign relations -- 1644-1912.
- Great Britain -- Colonies -- Asia.
- Hong Kong (China) -- Colonization.
- Philippines -- Description and travel.

Occupation(s)

- Merchants - United States

Subject(s)

- Americans -- China -- Social life and customs.
- Americans Abroad
- Beyond Early America
- British -- China -- Social life and customs -- 1644-1912.
- Business and Skilled Trades
- International Trade.
- International Travel
- Marriage and Family Life
- Trade
- Travel
- Voyages and travels.

Other Descriptive Information

As a merchant in the China trade, Bancker was witness to the early efforts of the United States Navy to project its power into east Asia, especially in Macao, Canton, and Hong Kong.

Other Descriptive Information

This collection of letters (40+) consists primarily of James Bancker writing to his family from Asia in the 1840s. The collection offers a vivid depiction of an American's life abroad in the nineteenth century. The letters convey quotidian information, such as the type of food he is eating, to more remarkable events, such as witnessing a comet. Bancker also witnessed a number of significant political events while in China, including the acquisition of Hong Kong by Great Britain and resistance to this takeover from the Hong Kong residents (1842-1843). These events, the rioting in particular, are recounted in his often long and detailed correspondence to his Philadelphia-based family. Bancker spent much of his time in Canton, but he also described visits to the Philippines and voyage to and from China. Combined, the collection provides a lens in the experiences of a wealthy American traveling abroad in the midst of the nineteenth century.