

**Isaac Jackson Letterbooks**  
**1839-1843**  
**Mss.B.J134**

American Philosophical Society  
2/2003  
105 South Fifth Street  
Philadelphia, PA, 19106  
215-440-3400  
[manuscripts@amphilsoc.org](mailto:manuscripts@amphilsoc.org)

## Table of Contents

---

Summary Information .....	3
Background note .....	5
Scope & content .....	6
Arrangement .....	7
Administrative Information .....	8
Related Materials .....	8
Indexing Terms .....	8
Other Descriptive Information .....	10
Other Descriptive Information .....	10
Bibliography .....	10
Collection Inventory .....	11
Isaac Jackson Letterbooks.....	11

---

## Summary Information

---

<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Jackson, Isaac
<b>Title</b>	Isaac Jackson Letterbooks
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1839-1843
<b>Call number</b>	Mss.B.J134
<b>Extent</b>	3.0 Volume(s)
<b>Extent</b>	3 vols., ca.575p.
<b>Location</b>	LH-MV-E-2
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Isaac Jackson managed several estates in northern Jamaica during the years of transition from slavery to free labor. Based in Hanover Parish, County of Cornwall, Jackson oversaw the interests of as many as a dozen estates engaged in the production of sugar and other crops, rum, and cattle during the 1830s and 1840s.</p> <p>Jackson's letterbooks contain approximately 825 letters pertaining to the daily management of Jamaican plantations. Beginning just a year after the end of apprenticeship, the mostly formulaic letters addressed to absentee British landowners, their attorneys, ship captains, and other estate managers touch on sugar and rum production and crop yields and cattle husbandry, but more importantly, they map out the course of the hard-edged negotiations between landowners and laborers as they struggled to shape the new labor regime.</p>

**Preferred Citation**

Cite as: Isaac Jackson Letterbooks, American Philosophical Society.

## Background note

---

In 1833, Thomas Buxton presented a bill in Parliament that was the culmination of fifty years of abolitionist agitation, enacting an end to slavery in all territories under British dominion. Although passed in August 1833 for implementation one year later, the bill mandated that full emancipation would wait. While enslaved children were to be freed immediately, adults were required to serve out a four year "apprenticeship" under their former masters in order, as the act's supporters suggested, to compensate the masters for lost property, to encourage "the industry of the manumitted slaves" and ensure the continuity of the labor supply, and to prevent social disorder.

In Jamaica in particular, the years following apprenticeship were marked by a protracted struggle between former slaves seeking more control over the lives and labor and plantation owners seeking more control over their labor force. During this critical period, Isaac Jackson was engaged as resident manager for the business affairs of as many as a dozen estates in northwestern Jamaica, most of which were engaged in the production of sugar, rum, and cattle.

## Scope & content

---

The letterbooks of Isaac Jackson contain approximately 825 letters documenting the years of transition from slavery to a free labor economy in Jamaica. Beginning in August 1839, a bit more than one year after the end of apprenticeship, the mostly formulaic letters to absentee landowners, their attorneys, ship captains, and other estate managers touch on sugar and rum production, crop yields and cattle husbandry, but more importantly, they map out the course of the hard-edged negotiations between landowners and laborers over the shape of the new labor regime. The three surviving letterbooks represent only part of what was once a more extensive archive, with an eleven month gap separating volumes 1 and 2. At one time, there were undoubtedly earlier and later volumes as well.

Although there is a routine quality to much of the correspondence, Jackson's letterbooks provide valuable detail on estate operations during the post-apprenticeship adjustment, and particularly on the efforts of the plantation owners and emancipated slaves to assert their interests. Clearly unhappy with the end of slavery, Jackson adopted a variety of measures to coerce his labor force to work on his terms and was often met with a determination on their part not to submit. Jackson's letters provide rich documentation of the strategies adopted by both parties, offering intriguing hints at differences between men and women and, later, between Africans and creoles.

In his letters from 1839 and 1840, Jackson appears to have been particularly irate with Baptist and evangelical missionaries for allegedly fomenting unrest, as he struggled to find ways of coercing his recalcitrant workforce. He blamed the Baptists, in particular, after he had demanded a weekly rent to induce his "People" to work, only to discover that the "Negroes" refused to work at all, demanding higher wages instead, and he discovered further that they disdained some of the more odious tasks they had been forced to perform under slavery. To press the issue, Jackson suggested stronger coercion:

I have desired Mr Paterson to discontinue paying for Medical Attendance upon the People [i.e. freedmen] excepting Invalids, who are unable to pay for themselves. I am of opinion that the more the Labourers are thrown upon their own resources the better will they labour, with that view I approve of a heavy Rent to all persons not Labouring for the Property & a moderate one to those Working, hitherto there have been a great many of the former on every Property on account of the great difficulty of obtaining Rents at our Courts. (Sept. 10, 1839)

Jackson informed his British clients that labor unrest was widespread in Jamaica, with strikes taking place on a number of plantations, timed for maximum effect:

The Gibraltar People have dug off a Cane piece & refuse to plant it unless the Overseer come to their exhorbitant Terms -- such Strikes daily occur but not so frequent as last Year at this time -- Lord Seafords properties have long been a receptacle for the disaffected from here and all the neighbourhood & caused great dissatisfaction by giving high Wages for little Work; This I will be able to correct & put my Finger on a few of our Ladies who have been sitting down at

Thistlewood, ever since they were freed, as Lord Seaford has by this packet sent me a Power of Attorney for them. (Oct. 23, 1839)

In later letters, one can see the beginnings of experimentation with imported labor, and throughout the letterbooks contain useful information on supplies needed to maintain the estates and their labor pools, crop schedules and yields, and the minutiae of estate management. Jackson's correspondence with Lord Seaford and Philip Haughton James is particularly revealing.

## **Arrangement**

---

Volume 1	Aug. 1, 1839-July 1840	169p.
Volume 2	June 1, 1841-May 10, 1842	ca.168p.
Volume 3	May 10, 1842-Dec. 21, 1843	ca.240p.

---

---

## **Administrative Information**

---

### **Publication Information**

American Philosophical Society 2/2003

### **Provenance**

---

### **Acquisition Information**

Acquired, 2003.

### **Processing Information**

Cataloged rsc, 2003.

---

## **Related Materials**

---

### **Related Material**

The APS houses several other collections related to sugar production, most notably the microfilms of the Thistlewood Family Papers (16 reels, Film 1461) and the papers of Aemilius Irving (call no. Ms Coll 100), both of Jamaica, and the Records of the Penang Sugar Estates in Malaysia (call no. 664.1 P19).

---

## **Indexing Terms**

---

**Genre(s)**



- Letterbooks

## **Geographic Name(s)**

- Jamaica--History

## **Personal Name(s)**

- Allen, Robert
- Campbell, Alexander
- Dunlap, Alexander
- Gardiner, Edmund
- Hawthorn and Shedden
- Heath, William
- Heaven and Co.
- Hislop, L.
- James, Philip Haughton
- Kembles and Trower
- Knott, William H.
- Kynaston, Roger
- Lyon, David
- McNeil, J.
- Seaford, Charles Rose Ellis, 1st Baron
- Weekes, Rebecca Ann
- Wilson, Frances E.

## **Subject(s)**

- Abolition, emancipation, freedom
- Belvidere (Plantation : Jamaica)
- Beyond Early America
- Campbell's Copse (Plantation : Jamaica)
- Flint River (Plantation : Jamaica)
- Freedmen--Jamaica
- Gibraltar Estates (Plantation : Jamaica)
- Labor--Jamaica
- Montpelier (Plantation : Jamaica)
- Paradise (Plantation : Jamaica)
- Plantations
- Plantations--Jamaica

- Slaves, slavery, slave trade
- Sugar--Jamaica

## Other Descriptive Information

---

A rich source of material on plantation management and the transition from a system of forced labor to free labor.

## Other Descriptive Information

---

This manuscript collection falls outside the geographic scope of the Early American guide (British North America and the United States before 1840). It may be of interest to scholars interested in global history, international relations, imperialism, or the U.S. in the world.

## Bibliography

---

Higman, B.W., *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739-1912*. (Mona, Jamaica, 1998), makes mention of Jackson.

## Isaac Jackson Letterbooks

## Collection Inventory

<b>Isaac Jackson Letterbooks</b>	<b>August 1, 1839 - December 21, 1843</b>	<b>3.0 vol.</b>	<b>Volume 1-3</b>
<b>Jackson, Isaac</b> Volume 1	August 1, 1839 - July 1840	169 p.	Volume 1
<b>Jackson, Isaac</b> Volume 2	June 1, 1841 - May 10, 1842	ca. 168 p.	Volume 2
<b>Jackson, Isaac</b> Volume 3	May 10, 1842 - December 21, 1843	ca. 240 p.	Volume 3