

NATHANIEL LORD BRITTON PAPERS

A Special Collection in

The Archives and Library of

THE STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM

75 Stuyvesant Place, Staten Island, New York 10301

Arranged and Described by

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NATIONAL HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS & RECORDS COMMISSION

Grant Number 79-124

PROVENANCE:

Miss Harriet Louise Britton donated the bulk of the collection after Dr. Britton's death in 1934 (Acc. No. 2900). Added to the collection because of their relationship are the Cubberly papers donated by J. Herbert Cubberly in 1915 (Acc. No. 867). These have bearing on the Britton-Cubberly house and are filed in folders 10A and 10B.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Nathaniel Lord Britton was born at New Dorp, Staten Island, January 15, 1859. He graduated from the School of Mines of Columbia College in 1879. He became associated with Arthur Hollick, who was also a student at Columbia, in 1876 and with William T. Davis in 1878. In 1881, he suggested that a scientific association be formed on Staten Island, which resulted in the founding of the Natural Science Association, the predecessor of the present Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. In 1896 he became the first director-in-chief of the New York Botanical Garden at which post he remained for 23 years. He was personally responsible for its founding and helped to build it into one of the largest institutions of its kind in the world. During these years, Dr. Britton contributed many articles to the Proceedings of the Association and Institute and was its benefactor in many other ways, the most well-known of his gifts being that of the Britton Cottage (presented in 1915). He left a bequest of \$39,000 to the museum at the time of his death.

In 1885, he married Miss Elizabeth Gertrude Knight, a bryologist, who worked at the Garden during his time there. She also participated in identifying the flora of Staten Island. She died on February 25, 1934. Dr. Britton died in 1934 at his home in the Bronx at the age of 75.

He and Arthur Hollick and Elizabeth Knight Britton prepared a manuscript on the Flora of Staten Island in 1929. This was never published and the manuscript has been set up as a separate special collection, Code: 32:F1.

The William T. Davis Collection holds many letters received by Mr. Davis from Nathaniel Lord Britton and Elizabeth Knight Britton, which may be seen in 26.wtD:L+C: Britton.

SCOPE & CONTENT:

The collection comprises three cubic-foot boxes, in box 1/3 of which can be found the genealogical investigations indulged in by Dr. Britton, as well as by Charles Leng, Edward Delavan, Mabel Abbott and others. The Britton family was traced back to 1628 and records were compiled regarding other important family connections: Brittain, Britton, Casier, Belleville, Stillwell, Lord, Vanderbilt, Cubberly, LaGrange, Poillon, Holmes, and others. Box 2/3 contains a partial manuscript in Dr. Britton's hand which was discovered roughly wrapped in a folder labeled "Australian Plants." This manuscript is not published as far as I have been able to ascertain. It has been stated categorically by one who knew Dr. Britton that he never travelled to Australia.

The third box includes personally annotated ephemera received with the gifts.

Note: Dr. Britton's papers relative to his years at the Botanical Garden and Mrs. Britton's Travel Journals are in the archives of the New York Botanical Garden, the Bronx, New York.

Oversized materials are filed in the document print boxes and map case. Appropriate separation sheets are filed in the boxes. Including oversized materials, the collection accounts for 4 cubic feet.

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Box Inventories:

Box 1/3

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|------------------|--|-----------|
| Folders 1a-20 | Genealogical materials re: Britton, Cubberly, LaGrange, Poillon | 1635-1951 |
| 21-28 | Letters: Britton, Cubberly Elizabeth Knight Britton, et al | 1917-1934 |
| 29-38 | Bequest of NL Britton; Britton College | 1677-1934 |

Box 2/3

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|----------------|--|------|
| Folders 1-7 | Annotated manuscript: "Australian Plants" | n.d. |
|----------------|--|------|

Box 3/3

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| Folders 1-14 | Ephemerae | 1878-1934 |
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