

# Benjamin W. Dunham Papers

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1898-1907

1 box (0.5 linear ft.)

**Call no.:** MS 573

## Read collection overview [Collection overview](#)

Situated on a hill overlooking Quabbin Lake, the Quabbin Inn was a well-known resort near Greenwich, Mass. During its peak years during the turn of the twentieth century, the Inn was owned by Otis Dunham, but figured prominently in the lives of the entire Dunham family.

The Dunham papers contain family correspondence addressed to Benjamin W. Dunham during his service as a machinist with the U.S. Navy. In addition to discussions of the business of the Quabbin Inn, the collection includes news and gossip from the town of Greenwich, the attempted suicide and subsequent hospitalization of Benjamin's brother Asa, and the migration west of another brother, Herbert.

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## Background on Benjamin W. Dunham

Benjamin West Dunham was born in Greenwich, Massachusetts, the son of Thomas H. and Helen M. Dunham. Dunham entered the military as an engineer during the Spanish-American War in 1898 and remained in the service as a Navy machinist for several years afterwards, including a berth aboard the *Wilkes* (1903-1905), when he was based at the Reserve Torpedo Flotilla in Norfolk, Virginia. He remained on duty in Norfolk until December 1906, when he returned to Holyoke and finally, to his hometown in Greenwich in Nov. 1907.

The Dunham family farm produced fresh vegetables, poultry, and milk, and was operated by the entire family, including at

various points all four of Benjamin's brothers -- Herbert, Otis, Larkin, and Asa -- although like Benjamin, the brothers left the Quabbin region for a variety of reasons as they grew into adulthood. Otis relocated to Boston in 1898 to become an attorney, and two years later, Herbert moved to Texas, where he was married and worked on a farm owned by his father-in-law. Larkin Dunham began his career as a carpenter, working in various cities in eastern Massachusetts. The youngest son, Asa, worked on the farm and at the Inn as a youngster, however while still in his teens, he attempted suicide. While his mother speculated that Asa's emotional breakdown was triggered by a breakup with a girlfriend, Florence, the condition was both serious and long-lasting. Asa spent the remainder of his life as a patient in state asylums at Northampton and Gardner before dying in 1943.

Otis Dunham, the most financially successful member of the family, purchased the Quabbin Inn in Greenwich on June 22, 1903, and soon built it into one of the area's premier tourist destinations. Perched on a hillside overlooking Quabbin Lake, the Inn flourished. After Thomas and Helen moved to Needham, Mass., in Nov. 1906, to assist Otis in his new law firm, and bought a farm there and small hotel, Otis began to hire outside the family to staff his hotel, able to afford the expense having seen his salary increased between \$1200-1500 per year.

The Inn remained in Dunham family hands through at least 1907, but was later sold off, probably before 1910. It was operated by Robert L. Flanders for several years through at least 1920, and was later said to have been used as a YMCA summer camp.

## Scope of collection

The Dunham papers include about 125 letters written to Benjamin W. Dunham him while he was an Engineer at Mount Holyoke College and later while he was on duty at the Navy Shipyard in Norfolk, Va. The letters reveal a caring mother who deeply misses her son and a father proud of his son's service to his country while in the Navy. Helen's letters nearly always begin with an expression of thanks for the money Benjamin sent home, and most include discussions of day to day domestic life: family matters, the weather, and the gossip and news from their Greenwich neighborhood.

Approximately eighty letters were written by Benjamin's mother, Helen (September 1898-February 1907); fourteen by his

father Thomas (September 1905-February 1907); sixteen by his brother, Otis (October 1898-April 1907); and eight by his brother, Larkin (April 1899-July 1907). The collection includes a handful of letters from friends and colleagues, as well as some from Benjamin's nieces, Helen H. and Lois Rogers, along with a few newspaper clippings relating Greenwich news.

## Collection inventory

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Letters: Brazeale, Dora	1900	Box 1: 1
Letters: Dunham, Asa	1903	Box 1: 2
Letters: Dunham, Gaac	1904	Box 1: 3
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1898	Box 1: 4
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1898	Box 1: 5
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1898	Box 1: 6
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1900	Box 1: 7
Letters and Clippings: Dunham, Helen	1900	Box 1: 8
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1903	Box 1: 9
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1903	Box 1: 10
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1903	Box 1: 11
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1903-1904	Box 1: 12
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1904	Box 1: 13
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1904	Box 1: 14
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1904	Box 1: 15
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1904	Box 1: 16
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1904	Box 1: 17
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1904	Box 1: 18
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1905	Box 1: 19
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1905	Box 1: 20
Letters and Clippings: Dunham, Helen	1905	Box 1: 21
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1906	Box 1: 22
Letters: Dunham, Helen	1906-1907	Box 1: 23
Letters: Dunham, Herbert	1898	Box 1: 24
Letters: Dunham, Larkin	1899-1905	Box 1: 25
Letters: Dunham, Larkin	1905-1907	Box 1: 26
Letters: Dunham, Otis	1898-1903	Box 1: 27
Letters: Dunham, Otis	1903-1904	Box 1: 28
Letters: Dunham, Otis	1905	Box 1: 29
Letters: Dunham, Otis	1906-1907	Box 1: 30
Letters: Dunham, Thomas	1905	Box 1: 31

Letters: Dunham, Thomas	1906	Box 1: 32
Letters: Dunham, Thomas	1907	Box 1: 33
Letters: Heminghaun, J.R.	1905	Box 1: 34
Letters: Hermany, Gus	1903-1904	Box 1: 35
Letters: Holder, J.M.	1898	Box 1: 36
Letters: O'Neil, Gertrude	1898	Box 1: 37
Letters: O'Netting, Mary	1898	Box 1: 38
Letters: Overn, Charlotte	1903	Box 1: 39
Letters: Reed, J.T.	1898	Box 1: 40
Letters: Rogers, Helen and Lois	1907	Box 1: 41
Letters: Rogers, Mina	1903-1905	Box 1: 42
Letters: Scottie	1903	Box 1: 43
Letters: Unsigned Correspondents	1899-1904	Box 1: 44

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Steve Finer, Oct. 2008 (2008-250).

### Processing Information

Processed by H. D. Smith, 2017.

### Language:

English

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## Search terms

### Subjects

- Greenwich (Mass.)--Social life and customs
- Machinists--Massachusetts
- Quabbin Reservoir Region (Mass.)--History
- Spanish-American War, 1898
- Summer resorts--Massachusetts--Greenwich

- Dunham, Helen M.
- Dunham, Larkin H.
- Dunham, Otis
- Dunham, Thomas H.
- Quabbin Inn (Greenwich, Mass.)

### Genre terms

- [United States. Navy](#)

- [Correspondence](#)

Names

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