

(1905 edition) as “rich in works of all kinds.” Twenty-five years later, and nearing the end of his life, John McAllister Jr. created a detailed eighty-six-page manuscript catalogue of his holdings inscribed “Memorandum for my children,” a book, in his words, “suggesting a mode of Division for my personal effects” (the volume is in the Library Company’s collection, though not part of the McAllister Collection). With twenty-one separate classifications, there are sections including: “Books; Bibles; New Testaments; Coins and Medals; Family Portraits; Prints Paintings &c in Frames; Furniture and Plate; Prints, Photographs &c not Framed; Copperplates; Autographs in Books; Autographs – loose; etc.,” with a special category for the ancestral “Books which had belonged to J. Mc Senior.” He assigned each item in the catalog to one of his children or grandchildren.

A memorial published at John McAllister Jr.’s death described his “collection of ancient pamphlets, newspapers, maps, and manuscripts being large and well-arranged” and his methodical inventory, begun in 1860 and updated through 1867, would seem to support that view. While the “Memorandum” specified the many items meant for John A. McAllister, it is unclear whether and when he was given anything prior to his father’s 1876 will, which specified that his collection was to be divided equally among his five living children, as directed by his executors William and Agnes. The actual disposition of the material is unrecorded but for one document written in John A. McAllister’s hand, and now in the McAllister Family Papers (Coll. 2139) at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Dated January 10, 1880, it is a receipt in which he acknowledged that his brother William had paid him “Two Thousand Dollars for my interest in the Books, papers, medals & coins & curiosities of the Estate of my Father J. McAllister jr.” Five years later, in a letter to the librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia who was seeking some pamphlets once own by John McAllister Jr., John A. McAllister suggests that he ask William for them, then added “don’t mention my name however—” (Smith Family Papers, Library Company).

The John A. McAllister Collection held by the Library Company has many thousands of items encompassing some of the same classifications as his father’s collection, but few with a provenance to connect them to John McAllister Jr. and his famous library. Part of John A. McAllister’s acquisition efforts is documented in his papers, particularly in Series I, but it is primarily that of his Civil War-related material. His pencil annotations (generally name recognition notes) are on many of the pieces in the McAllister Collection, principally the manuscript letters. Without autobiographical writings—or even contemporary biographical memorials such as those earned by his father—it is not possible to know what drove McAllister to acquire, and to keep, what he did. It is not hard to imagine, though, that he would have aspired to be included among the great antiquarian collectors in Philadelphia during his time, joining men such as Ferdinand Dreer (1812-1902), Frank M. Etting (1833-1890), Simon Gratz (1840-1925), and Charles A. Poulson (1789-1866). His extant papers prove that he was in touch with important collectors on the national level such as Lyman Copeland Draper (1815-1891), Thomas Addis Emmet (1828-1919), John S.H. Fogg (1826-1892), Brantz Mayer (1809-1879),