

The series holds several letters from other clergymen or divines, as they were called at the time, which is indicative of their celebrity stature in nineteenth-century America. Like other collectors, McAllister sought out their autographs, and they wrote to him, prompted by his gifts of church photographs manufactured by the McAllister firm, or photographic portraits of bishops and other figures. Some of the letters and sermons he acquired are now in the Episcopal Clergy Manuscripts Collection (McA MSS 029).

There are also, however, some folders with multiple letters from men with whom McAllister shared deeper interests. Though most of the topics covered relate to collecting and collections, the letters reveal that John A. McAllister seems to have formed a few complex relationships through the mail. For instance, there are four letters by the Boston physician John S.H. Fogg (1826-1892), in which Fogg describes parts of his collection, offers broadside ballads (which he had stopped collecting) and duplicate envelopes (of which he owned 3700) for trade, and asks McAllister to gather sermons for him. There are forty-nine letters from Baltimore collector Brantz Mayer (dating from 1857 to 1876) which stay quite focused on collection matters, from wants to acquisitions to deaccessions. The seven letters from Henry Reed Stiles (1832-1909) discuss trading issues. Stiles served as the librarian for the Long Island Historical Society in Brooklyn, and exchanged duplicate "Rebellioniana" from that institution's collection with McAllister. He also went around Brooklyn and found other locally printed material to send along. Stiles' letters describe his multifaceted and exhausting responsibilities at the society, some of which lead to his resignation in the spring of 1865.

The largest group of letters, though, is from Benson J. Lossing (1813-1891), the Poughkeepsie, NY, historian and author of a number of illustrated studies of American wars, presidents, and heroes, among other subjects. McAllister saved more than 180 of Lossing's letters, and Lossing's papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania hold eighty-six letters from McAllister. The three-decade span of their correspondence demonstrates their relationship's evolution from a formal greeting of "Dear Sir" to "My dear McAllister" and "My excellent friend." Lossing's topics are generally about history and research as he was nearly always working on a project. McAllister's replies show him finding requested information and illustrations, but also posing his own history questions to Lossing. The scope of their letters, however, regularly widened out to encompass regional and family news such as weddings, births, illnesses, and travels, as well as observations on a variety of issues and people. The letters have an important added dimension: they provide some of the only non-family insight available on the personal lives of John and Annette McAllister. The families hosted each other at their respective homes and at vacation spots at the New Jersey shore, the wives became friends, and the two men had so many mutual interests that their circles of colleagues quite naturally overlapped.

One of the more interesting comments in Lossing's letters is his suggestion that McAllister mimic in Philadelphia his ground-breaking fundraising success: the history room at the Dutchess County & Poughkeepsie Sanitary Fair, an event mounted by local citizens to raise money for the United States Sanitary Commission. In his letter of March 17, 1864, Lossing