James Prendergast Family Correspondence
1840-1850

MS1986-141

Last updated: January 19, 2010
COLLECTION OVERVIEW:

MAIN ENTRY: Prendergast Family

SOURCE: Unknown
ACCESSION NO: MS1986-141
ACCESSION DATE: January 2, 1986

QUANTITY: Approximately 1.5 linear feet (2 boxes; 48 letters and 1 document)

LOCATION: Level 2, Irish & Irish-American; Room 114

INVENTORIED BY: Shelley Barber, 2003

LANGUAGE(S): English

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ABSTRACT: The collection consists mainly of correspondence from James and Elizabeth Prendergast in Milltown, County Kerry, Ireland to their children in Boston, Massachusetts. It also includes letters from other members of the family in Ireland to their relatives in Boston. Much of the correspondence concerns life in Ireland.

PREFERRED CITATION: Identification of item, Box number, Folder number, James Prendergast Family Correspondence, MS1986-141, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

PROCESSING NOTE: For organizational purposes, the original letters have been numbered individually. These numbers correspond to the number of the folder in which each letter is housed. For this reason, the letter numbers have not been included in the descriptions given in the inventory and container list.
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

The Prendergast family lived in Milltown, County Kerry, Ireland. James and Elizabeth Prendergast were the parents of Julia, John, Maurice, Michael, Thomas, and Jeffrey. In May, 1840, Thomas and Jeffrey arrived in New York and then came to Boston. They either emigrated with their sister Julia and her husband Cornelius Riordan, or joined the couple already in Boston.

John, Maurice, and Michael each were married and remained in County Kerry near their parents. John died in 1847, leaving a widow and one young daughter. In 1847 Michael emigrated to America – sailing from Cork to St. John, New Brunswick – then joined his siblings in Boston. James Prendergast died in December, 1848. Maurice's son, James Maurice, was brought to Boston by his uncles. He was there by November, 1849.

In 1850 Elizabeth Prendergast, accompanied by John's orphan Elizabeth, age 8, and Cornelius "Con" Riordan's brother Florence, sailed from Cork to Liverpool and from there to New York on the ship Niobe, with the intention to reunite with her children in Boston.

Milltown, where the Prendergast family originated, is near the Dingle peninsula and was a market town 14 miles south of Tralee. Lewis' Topographical Dictionary of Ireland gives Milltown's population as 1,427 in its 1837 edition, and the number of houses as 260 in 1831. In its 1848 edition it gives a population of 797 and the number of houses in 1841 as 150.
The 48 letters written over a 10-year span (1840-1850) from Prendergast family members in Ireland to those who had come to America offer an intimate look into the lives of both groups. The writers of these letters express the range of emotional experience of emigration. The stories of whether, when, and how Michael, James Maurice, Elizabeth and her granddaughter should go to America are among those told in this correspondence. The letters give accounts of the health – and illness – of family members. Births, marriages, and deaths are announced. Many of the letters give information about extended family and neighbors. Information is requested of the Prendergasts in Boston about others who emigrated from County Kerry. Over one hundred individuals, other than immediate family members, are mentioned in the correspondence.

The children in Boston provided the financial support to sustain their family members in Ireland through the famine years, regularly sending money and assisting them to emigrate. The letters mention the receipt of remittances of £5 - £15 at a time. Prices of produce, livestock, and rent in Ireland are mentioned. Details of garden planting and harvest, and weather conditions occur, along with descriptions of the potato blight during the famine years.

The variety of subjects touched upon in these letters informs the reader about life outside the family circle as well. Events in County Kerry in the 1840s, including accounts of famine relief efforts by the government, the campaign for Repeal of the Union, and Daniel O'Connell's trial are included.

Though James Prendergast signed his own name - and occasionally wrote a few words - the bulk of the letters were dictated to scriveners, including school teacher Daniel Connell, and land surveyor Patrick Mahoney.

The earliest letter in the collection is a letter of reference for Thomas Prendergast from his employer, Dr. Agar, in Ireland, dated April 20, 1840. The remaining letters were written by members of the family in Ireland to their kin in Boston. The final letter in the collection is from Elizabeth in Liverpool as she anxiously waits for the Niobe to set sail. It is postmarked September 20, 1850. The letters were written to a number of different addresses in Boston. Most are in the area once known as "Fort Hill," now downtown Boston.

There is one additional document that is not a letter. It is one page (and an envelope) and contains notes by an unknown author on Thomas and Jeffrey's naturalization.
SERIES LISTING:

I. Prendergast Family Correspondence – Originals
II. Prendergast Family Correspondence – Photocopies and Transcriptions
III. Notes on Thomas & Jeffrey Prendergast's Naturalization – Original
IV. Notes on Thomas & Jeffrey Prendergast's Naturalization – Photocopy

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS:

Series I: Prendergast Family Correspondence – Originals, 1840 April 20-1850 September

This series contains the original correspondence of the Prendergast family and has been arranged chronologically. These are not the use copies.

Series II: Prendergast Family Correspondence – Photocopies and Transcriptions, undated

This series contains preservation photocopies and transcriptions of the correspondence of the Prendergast family. It is arranged chronologically according to the dates of the originals.

Series III: Notes on Thomas & Jeffrey Prendergast’s Naturalization – Original, undated

This series contains original handwritten notes about the naturalization of Thomas and Jeffrey Prendergast. This is not the use copy.

Series IV: Notes on Thomas & Jeffrey Prendergast's Naturalization – Photocopy, undated

This series contains the preservation photocopy of notes about the naturalization of Thomas and Jeffrey Prendergast.
### INVENTORY AND CONTAINER LIST:

**Box Folder**  **Title, Date**

**Series I: Prendergast Family Letters – Originals, 1840 April 20-1850 September**

1 1  Jn. Agar M.D., letter of reference for Thomas Prendergast, 4/20/1840
1 2  James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 2/25/1841
1 3  James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 5/29/1841
1 4  James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 7/27/1841
1 5  James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 9/29/1841
1 6  James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 4/28/1842
1 7  James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 8/20/1842
1 8  James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 10/11/1842
1 9  James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 3/21/1843
1 10 James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 6/12/1843
1 11 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 8/3/1843
1 12 James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 10/13/1843
1 13 Michael Prendergast, to his siblings in Boston, 11/3/1843
1 14 James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 12/3/1843
1 15 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 2/27/1844
1 16 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 5/24/1844
1 17 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 7/18/1844
1 18 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 11/9/1844
1 19 James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 12/6/1844
1 20 James Prendergast, to Jeffrey Prendergast, 1/17/1845
1 21 James Prendergast, to Jeffrey Prendergast, 3/7/1845
1 22 James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 5/21/1845
1 23 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 8/9/1845
1 24 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 8/26/1845
1 25 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 10/1845
1 26 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 12/27/1845
1 27 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 8/11/1846
1 28 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 11/20/1846
1 29 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 4/21/1847
1 30 (unknown) Prendergast, to Michael Prendergast, 6/14/1847
1 31 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 7/25/1847
1 32 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 8/21/1847
1 33 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 9/26/1847
1 34 Ellen Prendergast, to Michael Prendergast, 12/1847
1 35 Maurice Prendergast, to his siblings in Boston, 12/26/1847
1 36 Ellen Prendergast, to Michael Prendergast, 2/4/1848
1 37 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 2/4/1848
1 38 Maurice Prendergast, to Cornelius Riordan, 6/22/1848
1 39 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 10/29/1848
1 40 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 12/15/1848
1 41 Elizabeth Prendergast, to her children in Boston, 12/24/1848
1 42 Elizabeth Prendergast, to her children in Boston, 11/10/1849
1 43 Elizabeth Prendergast, to her children in Boston, 1/21/1850
1 44 Elizabeth Prendergast, to Julia Riordan, 2/23/1850
1 45 Elizabeth Prendergast, to her children in Boston, 7/14/1850
1 46 Elizabeth Prendergast, to her children in Boston, 8/7/1850
1 47 Elizabeth Prendergast, to her children in Boston, 8/19/1850
1 48 Elizabeth Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 9/1850

Series II: Prendergast Family Letters – Photocopies

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2 18 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 11/9/1844
2 19 James Prendergast, to Thomas Prendergast, 12/6/1844
2 20 James Prendergast, to Jeffrey Prendergast, 1/17/1845
2 21 James Prendergast, to Jeffrey Prendergast, 3/7/1845
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2 31 James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 7/25/1847
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
<th>Message</th>
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<td>James Prendergast, to his children in Boston</td>
<td>James Prendergast, to his children in Boston, 8/21/1847</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>12/1847</td>
<td>Ellen Prendergast, to Michael Prendergast</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>12/26/1847</td>
<td>Maurice Prendergast, to his siblings in Boston</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>2/4/1848</td>
<td>Ellen Prendergast, to Michael Prendergast</td>
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<td>Notes on Naturalization of Thomas and Jeffrey Prendergast (Original)</td>
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