

Finding aid for the John Ball papers Collection 044

Finding aid prepared by Bruce Lee Siebers

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

April 1987

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Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Title	John Ball papers
Date [inclusive]	1831-1878
Extent	19.79 Linear feet 46 boxes plus flat file maps
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The John Ball papers include the working files of this early pioneer of Western Michigan, who was a land speculator, political leader, lawyer and teacher. Included are correspondence, telegrams, certificates, circulars, diaries, legal papers, deeds, contracts, leases, account books, account sheets, memorandums, meteorology records, speeches and various other materials. Ball was a traveler, and his diaries and correspondences provide detailed information about his trip through the Northwest Territory, and his years in Michigan. Magazine and journal articles relate to Northwest Territory exploration, and western emigration. In Oregon he was one of the first farmers and teachers. Correspondences, deeds, contracts, account books and sheets pertain to his days as an explorer, land speculator and lawyer.</p>

Biographical/Historical note

John Ball was born November 12, 1794 at Hebron, New Hampshire, near Newfoundland Lake. He received a common school education, and in 1816 entered Dartmouth College, from which he graduated in 1820. After graduation, he went to Lansingburgh, New York, to study law and in 1824 was admitted to the New York bar. In 1827 he was elected to the office of justice of the peace of Utica, New York.

On January 1, 1832, Ball left Baltimore by way of the Ohio River and a trip west. Reaching Independence, Missouri, he joined a party of eighty men with a caravan of three hundred horses and mules. He went through the South Pass ten years before John C. Fremont, and after four months landed at Fort Vancouver, ninety miles from the mouth of the Columbia River, where he met Dr. McLaughlin. Ball taught school to Indian children and was the first white teacher in what afterwards became the state of Oregon. In the spring of 1833 he moved to Portland, Oregon and farmed sixteen acres of wheat.

He sold his wheat and used the proceeds to return to New York, by way of San Francisco, then to the Sandwich Islands (now the Hawaiian Islands) where he met some American friends, then around Cape Horn, reaching his hometown 2.5 years after he left.

In 1836 he came to Michigan via canal boat to Buffalo, lake vessel to Detroit, and on to Grand Rapids by horseback. He returned to New York the same year very much impressed with the possibilities of Grand Rapids. In 1837 he returned to Grand Rapids with \$10,000 to invest for friends.

In his business life he was associated with such well known pioneers as Louis Campau, A.D. Rathbone, Rix Robinson, Louis Lyon, S.C. Withey and many others. Always interested in the welfare of his neighbors, his home was the gathering place for many social functions, where school, economic and political matters were discussed. In January 1838 he was appointed to the House of Representatives of the Grand River District, including Ottawa, Kent, Ionia, and Clinton Counties. In politics he was a conservative Democrat and cast his first vote for General Jackson.

In 1841, the United States Congress having granted 500,000 acres of land to Michigan for internal improvements, Ball was chosen by Governor Barry to make the selection. The majority of these lands were selected and purchased near Grand Rapids, and since land warrants could be bought for about forty cents on the dollar, a speedy settlement of the Grand River Valley resulted.

Ball was interested in schools, geology, lyceums and local enterprises. He opened a law office and had as partners at various times, George Martin, formerly Chief Justice of Michigan, and Solomon L. Withey, late United States District Judge. From 1852 until his death, February 5, 1884, he was the senior member of the firm of Ball & McKee.

In 1852 Ball married Mary T. Webster, of Plymouth, New Hampshire, they had ten children.

Scope and Contents note

The collection consists of 18 series: Correspondences, Business Records, Certificates, Charts, Circulars, Diaries, Legal Records, Magazine and Journal Articles, Manuscripts, Maps, Memoranda, Meteorology Records, Notes, Papers, Speeches, Telegrams, Miscellaneous and Portraits.

The correspondences, diaries, meteorology records, notes, and speeches pertain to his Oregon trip. Correspondences are valuable in providing description of the territory, battle with the Blackfeet Indians, and Fort Vancouver. There are also correspondences regarding his family, friends, education, Grand Rapids and Michigan, politics, the Mexican War, and Indians. Business Records detail land speculation and law practice.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department April 1987

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Lucy Ball, accession numbers 1985.004, 1986.229, 1986.251 (unprocessed), 2002.093; 00.[2588].1, 2005.090 (unprocessed)

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Born to Wander : Autobiography of John Ball, 1794-1884 / compiled by his daughters, Kate Ball Powers, Flora Ball Hopkins, Lucy Ball. c.1994, 1925.

Autobiography of John Ball / compiled by His Daughters, Kate Ball Powers, Flora Ball Hopkins, Lucy Ball. Grand Rapids, Mi. : Dean-Hicks Co., 1925. 231 pp.

John Ball : Member of the Wyeth Expedition to the Pacific Northwest, 1832, and Pioneer in the Old northwest : autobiography / compiled by his daughters, Kate Ball Powers, Flora Ball Hopkins, and Lucy Ball. Glendale, Calif. : Clark, 1925. 231 pp.

Other collections pertaining to John Ball are located at the Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, and at the Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

Journal of Science XXV, 351-353 and XXVIII, are articles by John Ball about western geology published by his Dartmouth professor, Amos Eaton, and there are books regarding the exploration of the Northwest Territory.

Coll. 054-22-30 contains some photographs of John Ball and other Ball family members.

Controlled Access Headings

Genre(s)

- personal papers

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History -- 19th Century

Personal Name(s)

- Ball, John, 1794-1884

Subject(s)

- Land settlement -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Overland journeys to the Pacific

Series I. Correspondence

Collection Inventory**Series I. Correspondence****Scope and Contents note**

Arranged alphabetically and chronologically.

An old card index to the letters has been found, and added to the collection, in many cases giving fuller descriptions than the entry in the finding aid. [11/2002]

Letters to and from family and relatives, friends, politicians, eastern capitalists, law partners and clients, government officials, and others. Subjects include: land purchasing, the Land Grant of 1842, Bounty Land Act, 1850, Oregon trip, Fort Vancouver, Blackfeet Indian Battle, 1833, Mexican War, 1847, Indian Policy (1877), etc. Some of the more interesting are:

John Ball to Nathaniel Ball Jr. (his brother), July 15, 1832: Provides an account of his trip west after leaving Missouri.

John Ball to N. Ball Jr., March 4, 1833: the Ft. Vancouver territory and travels since the Blackfeet Indian skirmish.

John Ball to his sister, January 1, 1834: describing the Wahoo, Sandwich Islands, and his farm and the neighbors in Willamette, Oregon

Charles D. Smith to John Ball, December 2, 1831, February 2, 1831: the trip to Oregon.

J.S. Whiting to John Ball, March 6, 1832: Ball's trip west with Captain Wyeth's Company.

John Ball to parents, July 13, 1832, February 23, 1833: tells of living conditions and dealings with Indians.

Dr. T.C. Brinmode from John Ball, July 15, 1832, January 1, 1833: describes his travels and skirmish with the Blackfeet Indians.

Card Index to Letters

Thomas Ferry from John Ball, October 8-12, 1877: describes Indians in the Northwest and Michigan, and comments to President Hayes on the Indian Policy.

E. Backus to John Ball, June 24, 1847: describes the Mexican War at Vera Cruz.

John S. Barry to and from Ball, February 7 -April 11, 1842, regarding Land Grant of 1842.

John R. Bennet to John Ball, November 5, 1853, December 18, 1853: genealogical history of the Ball Family.

Wm. M. Ferry to Ball, November 23, 1843: immigrants and the type of land they were looking for in Michigan.

G.W. Francis to Ball, July 8, 1840: regarding boarding schools.

Henry Barnard from Ball, December 1852: asks help in getting a principal for Union School in Grand Rapids, describes school building, district, and town.

Wm. A. Richmond to John Ball, March 11, 1838: state politics and internal improvement system.

John T. Neely to John Ball, 1850: printed copy of the bounty land act of 1850 granting land to United States soldiers of wars since 1812 to present.

Alexander Walsh from John Ball, 1839: provides an extensive description of Michigan.

C.J. Walker from John Ball, January 30, 1838: describes a flood in Grand Rapids due to an ice jam in the river.

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J.E. Whipple, 1841-54.	17	464
J.W. Whitall, N.H. White, Samuel White, Timothy W. White, Wm. C. White, 1844-54.	17	465
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Thomas W. White, Timothy White, J.S. Whiting, B.C. Whittemore, 1842-53.	17	467
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E.H. Whitney, Oliver Whitney, 1852-3.	18	478
Oliver Whitney, G.O. Whitmore, George Wilcox, Horace Wilcox, Wiley Bros. & Co., 1839-54.	18	479
A.S. Wilkinson, R. A. Wilkinson, B. Willard, Alfred Williams, Evan Williams, Henry Williams, J.R. Williams, Stephen Williams, 1844-53.	18	480
A. Williams, A.L. Williams, H. Williams, J. Williams, Willson, Wilson, B. Winson, J. Winson, Withey, H. Wood, R. Wood, 1845-54.	18	481
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Series II. Business Records**Scope and Contents note**

Plaster Mines

Divided into the following sub-series: General Records, Account Sheets, Account Books, Bonds, Insurance Policies, and Receipts. Arranged chronologically

General Records- receipted bills for ammunition and supplies for the trip west, and business records regarding clients and friends. Also includes a record pertaining to the costs of building a tavern, and handwritten deeds.

Account Sheets- from Ball's business clients, Plaster Mill, and Grinnel, Minturn & Company, showing debits and credits. valuable are records showing the cost and the number of acres of land owned by settlers or clients.

Account Books- Provides a listing of lands owned by various people, from September 1848 to August 1852. There is an account book providing statements of cash advanced by Ball to Barnard Courtney to excavate for plaster on land in S34 T7N R12W, 1853, 1857. Moreover, there are account books, 1837-50, regarding Ball accounts with the Grand River Land Office, Ionia Land Office, Ottawa County, Kent County, Village of Grandville, Western Addition, Ionia County, George Campau.

Bonds consisting of school bonds, and bonds of Dennis and Marshall Porter, Deborah Powers, and H.P. Yale.

Insurance policies 1839, 1853

Receipts regarding mortgages and bonds, and taxes on land.

Plaster Mines**Box**

Plaster Mines, 1851-1857.

20

Box**Folder**

December 26, 1831-50.

25

498-500

Application for Land Patent, 1852.

25

501

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Bernard Courtney, 1853-7.	25	502
Estimate of Building Tavern	25	503
Foster and Parry, Hilton and White, 1849-50.	25	504
Caleb Mix Land List	25	505
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Isaac Van Fleet, 1851-3.	25	507
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Co. & Individual, 1851-63.

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Ball & Withey, 1845-50.	34	592
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Dr. F.B. Leonard, 1850.	34	594
P.B. Potter & Co., 1858-67.	34	595
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Bonds

Southwick & Co., 1846.	34	597
Bonds		
		Box
1854-1874.		29
Insurance Policies		
		Box
Stephen Higginson & John Wendell, 1839, W.S. Gunn, 1853, J.D. Winsor, 1846.		29
Receipts		
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Black Ball Line, C.P. Calkins, F.W. Godfrey, H. Leonard, Wm. H. McConnell.	25	522
Brintale, 1844-1851.	25	523
Pennoyer, Sterneborg, Seelye, Stearns, Eastman, Elliott, 1851-4.	25	524
J.H. Hatch.	25	525
Law Business Receipts.	25	526

Series III. Certificates

Parsons & Lawrence, Shepard, White.	25	527
B. Smith and W.P. Mills.	25	528
Samuel Tilton, 1841-55.	25	529
Laurau E. Van Allen, 1846-52.	25	530
John Wendell, 1853.	25	531
Whipple & Brinsmade, 1847-56.	25	532
Miscellaneous.	25	533
Balcorn, Barns, 1851.	34	598
J. Gordon, B. Noble, J. M. Squires, 1843-5.	34	599
Southwick, 1847-53.	34	600
Wood & Nelson, 1848.	34	601

Series III. Certificates**Scope and Contents note**

Consisting of a 1831 certificate from the American Society pertaining to his \$20.00 endorsement for the settlement of the Oregon territory, and an 1860 certificate from Sheriff Charles C. Rood

Series IV. Charts

	Box	Folder
American Society, September 15, 1831.	26	534
Sheriff's Certificate-Charles C. Rood, 1860.	26	535
Internal Revenue License, 1863-6.	33	602
		Box
John Anderson of Monroe County Michigan, land grant certificate from President John Quincy Adams, May 10, 1826.		33

Series IV. Charts**Scope and Contents note**

Consists of a mileage chart regarding his trip west, Gives distance traveled daily, direction traveled, and comments on the course.

	Box	Folder
Mileage Chart, May 12 to October 18, 1832.	26	536

Series V. Circulars**Scope and Contents note**

A printed leaflet advertising the services of McCrea & Ball (1849) and J.R. Mills & Co. (1869).

	Box	Folder
McCrea & Bell, 1849; J.R. Mills & Co., 1869.	26	537

Series VI. Diaries**Series VI. Diaries****Scope and Contents note**

Diaries containing information pertaining to his trip from Willamette to the Sandwich Islands, his trip from Troy to Oregon, Geneva, Switzerland (September 19, November 6, 1871), and Europe from 1871-3. Personal diary covering a time period from 1866-77. Arranged chronologically

	Box	Folder
Diary of John Ball.	26	538-9
1833, Willamette to the Sandwich Islands trip.	26	540
1834-description of the trip around Cape Horn.	26	541
1832	26	542
1833	26	543
Journal, 1836-1852 [Typed transcript, given to library by Sophie D.M. Campau Chapter, D.A.R.; location of original unknown, 4/26/2001] Formerly M92.B20	26	543.5
1872 Switzerland.	26	544

Series VII. Legal Records**Scope and Contents note**

Legal Papers and Documents

Divided among the following subseries: Legal Papers & Documents, Leases, Deeds, and Contracts. Leases regarding the renting of land or property for a period of time to settlers. They contained information on the cost, and dimensions of the property. There are legal documents regarding subpoenas and summons, and provisions of the bounty land and pension laws. Arranged chronologically and alphabetically.

Legal Papers and Documents

	Box	Folder
1842-1850.	26	545-6
April 7, 1852.	26	547
John Ball-Walke & Sons Agreement.	26	548
Dudly Beebe to John Ball, March 29, 1843.	26	549
Luther Beebe's Estate: Debt and Credit.	26	550
Brintale & Caleb Mix Estate.	26	551
Austin Granger, May 13, 1841.	26	552
Sarah Pettibone, 1851-6.	26	553
Subpoenas and Summons, 1839, 1863.	26	554

Leases

Synopsis of the Provisions of the Most Important Bounty Land and Pension Laws.	26	555
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Laurau E. Van Allen, 1846-50.	26	556
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Isaac Van Fleet, 1851; Robt. Hilton, 1844.	26	557
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L.P. Waldo, September 11-16, 1854.	26	558
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Alexander Walsh, 1847-56.	26	559
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Leases

	Box	Folder
March 26, 1845-November 2, 1847.	26	560-64a

Henry Brintnale with Hugh Hardy, H. Brintnale with Wm. Thornton, April-May 1844.	26	565
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Deeds

	Box
Joseph Bailey-Wm. P. Weesson, 1839-1872.	27

John Ball-Charles Hammond, 1837-1863.	28
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Ball & McKee, 1847-95.	
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Contracts

	Box
Mixed Materials	31
	Box
Mixed materials	32
Contracts	

Box

29

Ball thru Young, 1846-54.

Series VIII. Magazine and Journal Articles**Scope and Contents note**

Articles by Ball such as "Remarks Upon The Geology and Physical Features Of The Country West Of The Rocky Mountains," "On the Great Lava Flood of the Northwest, and on the Structure and Age of the Cascade Mountains."

Box**Folder**

26

566

Remarks upon the Geology, and physical features of the country west of the Rocky Mts., with miscellaneous facts." American Journal of Science and Arts Vol. 28- July, 1835. B7:A9.11 (One original, one photocopy of article)

26

567

On the Great Lava-Flood of the Northwest, and on the structure and age of Cascade Mountains" / Joseph Le Conte. From the Proceedings of the California Academy of Science, December 15, 1873. B7:A1.2772

Series IX. Manuscripts

“Geology and Meteorology west of the Rocky Mountains.” American Journal of Science and Arts Vol. 25- January, 1834. (two copies)	26	567a
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Series IX. Manuscripts**Scope and Contents note**

Manuscripts basis of an autobiography on John Ball. Note: pages 27 & 28, and 222, 230 are missing. The manuscripts were compiled by his daughters, beginning in 1874.

	Box	Folder
Autobiography of John Ball	30	568
Autobiography of John Ball	30	569
Mary Ball diary, 1871.	30	569.5

Series X. Maps**Scope and Contents note**

Consisting of the following maps: the Columbia River for 90 miles from its mouth (1838), Map of North America (1850), Map of the United States of Mexico (1830), Map of the United States Territory of Oregon west of the Rocky Mountains exhibiting the various trading depots or forts occupied by the British Hudson Bay Company (1838), the Missouri River and Nebraska compiled by Charles Preuss (1846), topographical map of the road from Missouri to Oregon (1846), and Tunis railroad map of the United States and Canada (1859).

Box

Series X. Maps

1) Chart of the Columbia River for 90 miles from its mouth / M.C. Ewing (1838)	33
2) Map of North American / J. Calvin Smith, Publ. By J. Disturnell, N.Y., 1850. Including Map of the Gold Region, California.	FF.XV.B
3) A Map of the United States of Mexico / H.S. Tanner, 2nd ed. (1830)	FF.XV.B
4) Map of the United States Territory of Oregon west of the Rocky Mountains exhibiting various trading depots or forts occupied by the British Hudson Bay Company (1838)	FF.XV.B
5) The Missouri River and Nebraska / compiled by Charles Preuss (1846) [DNF 5/21/1999, but may be item 12 described differently]	Box
6) Topographical map of the road from Missouri to Oregon ... In VII Sections. Section I. / from the field notes and journal of Capt. J.C. Fermont, and from sketches and notes made on the ground by his assistant Charles Preuss / compiled by Charles Preuss (1846). Baltimore : E. Weber & Co.	FF.XV.B
7) Tunis' new colored rail road map of the United States and Canadas. Detroit : William E. Tunis, bookseller and stationer, 1859.	33
8) Ottawa Co., Mich. / by J.C. Shalo(?), July 5, 1855.	FF.XV.B
9) T10 NR11 W : map of Solon Township, Kent County, Michigan, n.d.	FF.XV.B
10) I6NR14W (?)	FF.XV.B

Series XI. Memorandum

11) [Fragment] Oregon and Mandan Districts.

FF.XV.B

12) Map ... to illustrate an exploration ... lying between the Missouri River and the Rock ... Nebraska or Platt / by Lieut. J.C. Fremont, of the Corps of Top ..., E. Weber & Co., n.d.

FF.XV.B

13) Plat of the village of Grandville together with the eastern and western additions situated on Grand River, Michigan—top left. I certify that F.W. Worden, Register, Kent co., Mich. ---bottom right. “Copied by W.L. Coffinberry”—right center, with arrow, which may indicate his role on the Eastern Addition, but perhaps not on this map itself. [Coffinberry Association. Fnd. In FF, 6/1999, Added to this collection, but rehoused in FF due to size 8/23/1999 rm]

FF.XV.B

14) The United States from the latest authorities, for Hayword's Gazetteer, Hartford. Folded back of the book map from “A Gazetteer of the United States of America”, which has a John Ball association. Formerly in M912.3.H33 00.[2588].1

FF.IX.D

Series XI. Memorandum**Scope and Contents note**

Memos about his trip to the Northwest, and memos regarding his speeches.

	Box	Folder
April 1833.	30	570
Cargo for the N.W. coast of America.	30	571
Winsor, Dutchman and Son, Surveying, 1849.	30	572

Series XII. Meteorology Records

Grand Haven, G. Reed, Stafford and A. Fuller.	30	573
List of topics to be mention in a lecture.	30	574
Dennis Tolbot to Charles I. Walker.	30	575

Series XII. Meteorology Records**Scope and Contents note**

Weather records during his stay in Lexington, Kentucky (May 7, 1832) and Norfolk Virginia (July 16, 1836). In addition, there are weather records covering his trip from Vancouver to San Francisco, Oahu, Tahiti, around Cape Horn, and Troy, New York.

	Box	Folder
May 7, 1832, Lexington, Kentucky to July 16, 1836, Norfolk, Virginia.	30	576
January 1, 1834 to July 16, 1834.	30	577

Series XIII. Notes.**Scope and Contents note**

Describe his Oregon or northwest territory trip, April - November, 1832. Other notes consist of a schedule of places, dates, latitude and longitude, and remarks of explanation during his trip from 1833-4, starts with Vancouver and ends with Cape Henry. There is a copy of Kipling's list of articles for the Sandwich Islands, and there are listings of ships, containing information regarding brigs, schooners, and whaling ships, with captain names, port of origin and tonnage. In addition, there is a note book

Series XIV. Papers

containing writings, weather notes, diary of a trip through the east, comments on social customs, railroads.

Box **Folder**

Listings of Articles.

30 578

Listing of Ships.

30 579

Schedule of places, dates, latitude and longitude and remarks of explanations, 1833-4, 1857-63.

30 580

Notebook, June 13, 1857-June 17, 1863

30 581

Wilderness ... July 1832.

30 582

Listing of John Ball Correspondents.

30 583

Series XIV. Papers**Scope and Contents note**

"Judge Daley's Address on Fremont and the Mt." contains information on the exploration of the Northwest Territory. "Emigration West" describes settlers and migrants to the West.

Box **Folder**

"Judge Daley's Address on Fremont and the Mountain."

30 584

"Emigration West."

30 585

Series XV. Speeches**Series XV. Speeches****Scope and Contents note**

Addresses 1835-8 describing the trip to Oregon the country, its inhabitants. Arranged chronologically.

	Box	Folder
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1835-1838.	30	586
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Series XVI. Telegram**Scope and Contents note**

Telegram from George S. Seymour of LaPorte via Speed's Erie and Michigan Telegraph Line, 1852.

	Box	Folder
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August 9, 1852. To Ball from Geo. L(?) Seymour.	30	587
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Series XVII. Miscellaneous**Scope and Contents note**

Vote tabulations, notes, and document from the First National Bank of Washington.

	Box	Folder
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John Ball List of Lands	30	588
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Clipping used for correspondence(?)	30	588
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Series XVIII. Image Reproductions.

Flyer. Agency for the Redemption of Mutilated National Bank Notes. 1869.	30	588
Photostat. Petition. John Galbreath of Donnegall in the County of Chester(?) Aug 1726	30	588
[Talley, including center John Ball "18" marks.	30	588
Fragment. "A Bill of Land ... Richard C. Stiles"	30	588
Flyer. Independence Rock, Wyoming (State), 2002, including a quote by John Ball describing the rock as a bowl turned upside down.	30	589.5
		Box
[Invitation] 1839 New-Year's Ball. The Managers Compliments to Mr. John Ball, requesting his attendance at the Grand River Exchange, on Tuesday, the 1st January, 1939, at 5 pm. Added Nov. 23, 1999		SAFE
Watch. Possible John Ball association.		SAFE
Series XVIII. Image Reproductions.		
Scope and Contents note		
Portraits of John Ball as a young and old man.		
Portraits (photocopies, location of originals unknown)		
	Box	Folder

Series XIX. Books & Publications associated to John Ball

John Ball in 1855.	30	590
[John Ball with long beard & fur collared coat]	30	590
[John Ball with long beard & fur collared coat], probably from Chapman's History of Kent County	30	590
Deborah Ball / Kate Ball	30	590
Crutchfield. [young John Ball]	30	590
Series XIX. Books & Publications associated to John Ball		
Scope and Contents note		
Added 3/19/2008		
		Box
Sketches of the Alumni of Dartmouth College from the first graduation in 1771 to the present time, with a brief history of the institution / by Rev. George T. Chapman. Cambridge : Riverside Press, 1867. Ball is listed in the Class of 1820. 00.[5468].1		46
Unprocessed		
		Box
1986.251		46

Unprocessed from Old Collection

Unprocessed

	Box
Mixed materials	41
	Box
Mixed materials	42
	Box
Mixed materials	43
	Box
Mixed materials	45
	Box
Mixed materials	44
