

**Collection #**  
**SC 2359**

**ROBERT DALE OWEN**  
**LETTERS, 1867–1869**

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Processed by:  
Charles Latham  
24 February 1993  
Updated 13 May 2004

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department  
William Henry Smith Memorial Library  
Indiana Historical Society  
450 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

[www.indianahistory.org](http://www.indianahistory.org)

**COLLECTION INFORMATION**

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 15 items

COLLECTION DATES: 1867-1869

PROVENANCE: M S Rare Books, P. O. Box 2574, Eastside Station, Providence, R. I., 20 November 1992

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RELATED HOLDINGS: (on Robert Dale Owen)  
F 277 -- 6 volumes of music  
BV 830-835-- music that belonged to Owen family

SC 2270-- letter, 1860

M 219-- New Harmony-- Box 1 Folders 9-15, esp. 14

ACCESSION NUMBER: 93.0069

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

**Mary Elizabeth Mapes Dodge** (1831-1905) was born in New York City, the daughter of a scientist and inventor whose house was frequented by William Cullen Bryant and Horace Greeley. She was educated by tutors.

In 1851 she married William Dodge, a lawyer. Upon his death seven years later, she began writing, working a regular routine. In 1864 she published *Irvington Stories*, and the following years *Hans Brinker; or The Silver Skates*. A succession of other children's books followed, along with articles in *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and *Century* Magazines. In 1870 she became associate editor of the Century Company's Hearth and Home, and in 1873 editor of the newly founded *St\_Nicholas*. As her successor wrote, she was "the recognized leader in juvenile literature for almost a third of a century."

**Robert Dale Owen** (1801-1877) was the eldest son of Robert Owen, social reformer and founder of New Harmony. After being educated by private tutors and at a progressive school in Switzerland, he ran the schools at his father's factory at New Lanark and then at New Harmony. When Robert Owen left New Harmony shortly after its founding, he left Robert Dale in charge. After the failure of New Harmony, Robert Dale worked in various progressive circles, with Frances Wright, with his father, and with a group in New York called "The Free Enquirers."

Robert Dale Owen served in the Indiana General Assembly 1836-1838, 1851), and was an active and useful member of the Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1850.

Owen served in the national House of Representatives from 1843 to 1847. While there he sponsored the bill setting up the Smithsonian Institution; later he was chairman of the Smithsonian building committee. In the 1850s he served as a diplomat in Italy, and embraced spiritualism.

During the Civil War Owen was an influential advocate, first of emancipation and then of the rights of freedmen, but he opposed immediate enfranchisement of the Negro. He wrote several books as well as an autobiography. At the time of the letters in this collection, he was working on a novel, *Beyond the Breakers*.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection contains fifteen letters (several incomplete) written by Robert Dale Owen to Mary Elizabeth Mapes Dodge between 25 February 1867 and 22 April 1869. One letter makes it clear that the correspondence began in mid-1866. The first letter is addressed to "Mrs. Dodge," but the salutation soon changes to "Dearest Lizzie." Owen writes both from New York and from the various cities where he is giving lectures, and makes frequent references to his visits to Mrs. Dodge and her family at "Mapleridge," her farmhouse in New Jersey.

The subject matter of the letters is mainly literary. Owen apparently used Mrs. Dodge as a critic of both his lectures and the novel he was writing, *Beyond the Breakers*, and there are references to curtailments and improvements she had suggested to both. His most frequent lectures at the time were "The Law of Kindness" and one on spiritualism (which she advised him to give in two parts). He frequently advises her not to give too much time to her work at *Hearth and Home*. He mentions editing a book by his wife, but she apparently was not a part of this short-lived but intimate literary friendship.

Though Owen was a progressive thinker in many areas, he made this comment on the poems of Adelaide Proctor: "...a

morbid state of mind...indications of a heart over-taxed...

Sad, to utter dreariness, [her life] seems to have been. The tempest must have been pitiless that drove her into the Catholic Church. Adversity cracked her." (8-27-1867)

## **CATALOGING INFORMATION**

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, SC 2359).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.