



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the Robert Mills Family Letters,  
1813-1847, in the Archives of American Art

Erin Corley

Funding for the processing and digitization of this collection  
was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Robert Mills family letters
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.millfami
<b>Date:</b>	1813-1827
<b>Extent:</b>	0.2 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	Mills Family
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	This small collection of Robert Mills family letters date from 1813 to 1847 and measure 0.2 linear feet. Found here are 38 letters between architect Robert Mills and his wife Eliza, two letters to Mills from other family, and nine letters to Mills from business acquaintances, including architect John Skirving and engineer Louis Wernwag. Also found are six letters to Mills' daughter Anna from various family members.

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## Administrative Information

### Provenance

These letters were purchased from Robert S. Gamble of the Alabama Historical Society in 1985.

### Related Material

Additional Robert Mills papers are available at the South Carolina Historical Society and the Library of Congress. Also available are the Records of the Robert Mills Paper Project at the Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

### Alternative Forms Available

The letters of the **Robert Mills Family** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2009, and total 187 images.

### Processing Information

The collection was microfilmed upon receipt on reel 3612. The collection was fully processed, arranged, and described by Erin Corley in 2008 and digitized in 2009 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

### Preferred Citation

Robert Mills family letters, 1813-1847. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions on Access

Use of the original papers requires an appointment.

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## Biographical Note

Robert Mills (1781-1855) was born in 1781 in Charleston, South Carolina. As a teenager he studied pattern-books and learned the basics of drafting, and in 1800 he moved to Washington, DC, to work in the office of architect James Hoban. There he met President Thomas Jefferson who recommended Mills to Benjamin Latrobe. He was a pupil and assistant to Latrobe in Philadelphia until 1808, working on many architectural and engineering projects.

In 1808 Mills married Eliza Barnwell Smith and established his architectural practice in Philadelphia, receiving many major commissions. From 1815 to 1819 Mills lived with his family in Baltimore, Maryland, overseeing the construction of his commission for the Washington Monument in Baltimore. He also worked on several engineering projects in the city. After construction halted in 1819 due to an economic depression, he moved to South Carolina to become the Acting Commissioner of the Board of Public Works. In 1823 his position was abolished due to rising project costs, but he continued to work on individual commissions, and also published several books and pamphlets on South Carolina and engineering.

In 1830 Mills and his family moved to Washington, DC. There he directed alterations and restorations of the White House, Executive Offices, and the Capitol. After establishing himself with these projects he received many more commissions and was appointed Architect of the Federal Buildings. During this time his design for the Treasury Building was adopted, and he oversaw the construction of the U. S. Patent Office - now the Smithsonian Institution's Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture - and the Old Post Office, among other projects. His federal office was abolished in 1842, but Mills continued to work on independent building projects. In 1845 his plan for the Washington Monument in Washington, DC, which he had designed in 1833, was adopted and construction began in 1848. He lived in Washington, DC, until his death in 1855.

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## Scope and Content Note

This small collection of Robert Mills family letters date from 1813 to 1847 and measure 0.2 linear feet. Found here are 38 letters between architect Robert Mills and his wife Eliza, the majority of which were written between 1813 and 1819, and generally discuss family news and health, his travels, finances, and their affection for each other. Also found are a fragment of a letter to Mills from his sister, Sarah, a letter to Mills from his mother-in-law, Ann Smith, and nine letters to Mills from business acquaintances, including architect John Skirving and engineer Louis Wernwag, regarding building projects. The collection also includes six letters to Mills' daughter Anna from her mother, Eliza, and cousins.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 1 series:

- Series 1: Robert Mills Family Letters, 1813-1847 (Box 1; 12 folders)

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Names:

Mills, Eliza Barnwell Smith, 1784-1865

Mills, Robert, 1781-1855

Skirving, John

Wernwag, Louis

Occupations:

Architects -- Maryland -- Baltimore

Architects -- South Carolina

Architects -- Washington (D.C.)

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Robert Mills Family Letters, 1813-1847

#### *12 Folders (Box 1)*

Found here are 38 letters between architect Robert Mills and his wife Eliza, the majority of which were written between 1813 and 1819, while Mills was working on projects in Baltimore and Richmond. These letters generally discuss family news and health, his travels, finances, and their affection for each other. Also found are a fragment of a letter to Mills from his sister, Sarah, a letter to Mills from his mother-in-law, Ann Smith, and nine letters to Mills from business acquaintances. Letters are from architect John Skirving and engineer Louis Wernwag and others. Wernwag's letter to Mills requests his help in finding work. Also of note is a letter from William Steuart regarding the commission of Steuart to do the marble work for the Washington Monument in Baltimore. The collection also includes six letters to Mills' daughter Anna from her mother, Eliza, and cousins.

Correspondence is arranged in chronological order.

Box 1, Folder 1	Correspondence between Robert Mills and Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills, 1813 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	Correspondence between Robert Mills and Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills, 1813-1814 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence between Robert Mills and Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills, 1815-1817 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	Correspondence between Robert Mills and Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills, 1818-1824 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence between Robert Mills and Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills, 1827-1830 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 6	Correspondence between Robert Mills and Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills, Undated Letters, circa 1813-1830 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 7	Correspondence between Robert Mills and Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills, Undated Letters, circa 1813-1830 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 8	Letter to Robert Mills from his sister, Sarah, circa 1815

*(Letter Fragment)*

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 9

Letter to Robert Mills from Ann Smith, circa 1815

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 10

Letters to Robert Mills from John Skirving, 1840-1841

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 11

Miscellaneous Letters to Robert Mills, 1821-1847

[Image\(s\)](#)

(Letters are from Mr. Butcher, Crocker Bros. & Co., Mitchell Hinmary?, Edward Stabler, William Steuart, and Louis Wernwag)

Box 1, Folder 12

Miscellaneous Letters to Anna Mills, circa 1836-1841

[Image\(s\)](#)

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