Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer was a medical doctor from Boston. He was married to Rachel Ellis, and they had two children, Ellen Corinna Ayer and Joseph Cullen Ayer, (often called “Cullen”), the latter of whom was born in 1839. In 1846, Dr. Ayer died and Rachel was made legal guardian of the children. She later remarried to Joshua Washburn. Her daughter Ellen Corinna married Charles H. Wheeler. Her son Cullen attended Harvard College and went on to enlist in the United States Army on August 20, 1861. He achieved the rank of First Lieutenant in the 18th Massachusetts Infantry and worked as an ambulance officer. While still in the service, he married Carolyn Elizabeth Roberts (referred to as “Carrie”), and the couple spent much of their early marriage apart due to the war. Cullen finally resigned from the Army on December 17, 1863. He worked as a land speculator in Tennessee and later as a businessman in Boston. He and Carrie had two sons, Joseph Cullen Ayer, Jr. and John L. Ayer. Joseph, Jr. married Cora Julia, and the couple had two children, Richard G. L. Ayer and Carolyn E. Ayer.

Apparently Cullen and Carrie Ayer had a very unhappy marriage from the beginning. Only a few years into their marriage she accused him of being “uncommunicative, selfish, and indifferent to her feelings,” and on another occasion she cited his “vindictiveness against her family.” In 1876, Cullen had “left her with no clue to his whereabouts.” By the early 1880's he obviously was not living with the family any longer, and Carrie had apparently given up hope of maintaining a home with him. Letters from her became brief and curt as the two battled over the schooling and custody of their children. In the winter of 1883 Cullen and Carrie were living separately in Boston, he apparently not knowing that she was there.

Some confusion may arise as to who is being referred to by the name “Joseph Cullen Ayer” as this same name is found in three successive generations. To clarify, Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer, the patriarch of the family, is referred to by his medical title throughout the collection.
son, Joseph Cullen Ayer (husband of Carrie (Roberts) Ayer) is referred to either with his military
title of Lieutenant preceding his name or simply by the name “Cullen.” His son, Joseph Cullen
Ayer, always used “Jr.” after his name to distinguish himself from his father.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer Family Collection is housed in one document box, one
oversized folder, and one photograph folder, and is arranged into the following four categories:
Correspondence, Financial Material, Legal Material, and Miscellaneous Material. The collection
contains the papers and associated materials of the immediate family of Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer,
his wife, Rachel Ellis Ayer Washburn (remarried), and their son, Joseph Cullen Ayer, dating
between 1836 and 1918.

The section entitled Correspondence contains letters, primarily from Carolyn “Carrie”
(Roberts) Ayer to her husband, Joseph Cullen Ayer, dating between 1859 and 1891; Joseph spent
a great deal of his time living apart from his family. None of his letters of reply to which Carrie
refers are present in this collection. The Correspondence section also contains several
miscellaneous letters to and from members of the Ayer family and close business associates.
When more than one letter appears within a single folder, the number of letters for that folder can
be found in parentheses to the right of the range of dates for those letters.

The section entitled Financial Material contains several records of the debts of Dr. John
Cullen Ayer as well as an appraisal of his estate. Also included are miscellaneous receipts of
business conducted by Rachel Ayer Washburn.

The section entitled Miscellaneous Material includes the report books of Cullen & Carrie
Ayer’s grandchildren Caroline and Richard, Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer’s medical thesis entitled
“Nephritis,” three military instructional and drill books that belonged to Lieutenant Ayer (Cullen)
while he was enlisted in the Army, and some poetry composed by Cullen.

The Legal Material has been separated from the collection and is contained in one
oversized folder designated OC 1999.4. The Legal Material contains mostly quit-claim deeds
and probate papers associated with Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer, his wife Rachel Washburn, and their
son Joseph Cullen Ayer.

One photograph, perhaps of Cullen, has been designated PC 1999.4 and is separated from
the collection in a folder housed with the Dickinson College photo collection.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

BOX 1 - MC 1999.4

CORRESPONDENCE

Ayer?, Addie
Folder 01) Letter to her cousin, Joseph Cullen Ayer - Mar. 4, 1863

Ayer, Carolyn Elizabeth (Roberts)
Folder 02) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Aug. - Oct.1859 (3)
Folder 03) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Mar. - Nov.1860 (9)
BOX 1 - MC 1999.4 (cont.)

Ayer, Carolyn Elizabeth (Roberts)
Folder 04) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Dec.1861 - Oct.1862 (6)
Folder 05) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Mar. - Sept.1863 (2)
Folder 06) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Aug.1864 - Feb.1865 (9)
Folder 07) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - July 1876 - Nov.1891 (6)
Folder 08) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - undated (3)
Folder 09) Letter to Edward Page - Nov. 23, 1860

Ayer, John L.
Folder 10) Letter to his father, Joseph Cullen Ayer - Dec. 18, 1891

Ayer, Joseph Cullen
Folder 11) Letter to Edward Page, Jr. - Feb. 27, 1860
Folder 12) Letter to Charles H. Wheeler – Feb. 27, 1860
Folder 13) Miscellaneous letters received - Dec.1861 - June 1894 (6)

Brown, E.
Folder 14) Letter to Capt. R.A. Bright - Sept. 12, 1900

Copeland, F.
Folder 15) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Nov. - Dec.1864 (2)

Lewis, Winslow, Jr.
Folder 16) Letter to the Boston Dispensary - Mar. 24, 1836

Roberts, Mrs.
Folder 17) Letter to Joseph Cullen Ayer (son-in-law) - Sept. 15, 1865

Roly, Henry C.
Folder 18) Letter to J. E. Dutcher - Dec. 21, 1860

Washburn, Rachel (Ellis) Ayer
Folder 19) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer (son) - May 1865 - June 1883

Wheeler, Charles H.
Folder 20) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Feb.1865 - Nov.1868 (3)

Wheeler, Ellen Corinna (Ayer)
Folder 21) Letters to Joseph Cullen Ayer (brother) - 1869-1894 (3)

FINANCIAL MATERIAL
Ayer, Dr. Joseph Cullen
Folder 22) Records of debts and an estate appraisal - 1834-1841

Washburn, Rachel (Ellis) Ayer
Folder 23) Receipts - 1860-1867

MISCELLANEOUS MATERIAL
Ayer, Caroline Elizabeth
Folder 24) Report Book from Miss Hill’s School for Girls - 1917-1918

Ayer, Dr. Joseph Cullen
Folder 25) Medical Thesis on Nephritis – 1836
BOX 1 - MC 1999.4 (cont.)

Ayer, Joseph Cullen
Folder 26) Original poetry - 1859-1860
Folder 27) “Hardee’s Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics, etc.” New York - 1861
“U.S. Volunteer: A Book of Instructions for Officers and Soldiers, Comprising the Principles of Aiming and Target Practice, etc.” Boston - 1861
“The Zouave Drill Book: French Bayonet Exercise and Skirmisher’s Drill.” Philadelphia - 1861

Ayer, Richard G. L.
Folder 28) Report Book from The Phillip Brooks School - 1912-1913
Report Book from William Penn Charter School - 1917-1918

OVERSIZED - OC 1999.4

LEGAL MATERIAL
Folder 01) Ayer, Dr. Joseph Cullen
Mortgage contract with Uriah Ritchie - Sept. 15, 1835
Ayer, Joseph Cullen
Quit-claim deed to Rachel (Ellis) Ayer - Dec. 21, 1860
Ayer, Luther
Deed of sale to Joseph Cullen Ayer - Sept. 14, 1844
Dawes, Henry
Quit-claim deed to Joseph Cullen Ayer - May 1, 1841
Quit-claim deed to Rachel E. Ayer - Nov. 25, 1846
Emerson, Sally
Bill of Sale to Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer - May 28, 1838
Sibby and Soving
Contract to build two houses - Jan. 14, 1841
Washburn, Rachel (Ellis) Ayer
Bill of Sale to E. Corinna Wheeler - Jan. 5, 1885
Bond agreement (copy) with Caroline E. Roberts - Dec. 1, 1860
Probate papers of the estate of Dr. John Cullen Ayer - Feb. 2, 1846
Wheeler, Charles. H.
Quit-claim deed to Rachel E. Ayer - Dec. 21, 1860.

PHOTOGRAPHS - PC 1999.4

Folder 01) Unknown, possibly Joseph Cullen Ayer

This collection register was prepared by Sarah W. Dunham, March 1999.