John Dunbar was born on March 7, 1804 and reared in Palmer, Massachusetts. He graduated from Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts in 1832 and from Auburn Theological Seminary, Auburn, New York in 1834. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister at Ithaca, New York on May 1, 1834. Four days later Rev. Dunbar accompanied by Rev. Samuel Parker and Mr. Samuel Allis began a tour of the far west to locate a site for a mission under the auspices of the American Board of Missions for Foreign Missions. In St. Louis the plan was changed and Parker returned to New England while Dunbar and Allis went to Bellevue, Sarpy County, Nebraska, to begin a twelve year mission to the Pawnee Indians. Dunbar divided his time between Bellevue and traveling with the Grand band on their biannual buffalo hunts until the fall of 1836. He then went to Hadley, Massachusetts where he married Esther Smith on January 12, 1837.

The Dunbars lived in Bellevue until April 30, 1841 when they and other lay missionaries moved to the Pawnee villages near present Fullerton (Nance County). The Pawnee's polite but stubborn resistance to Christianity and the increasing hostility by the Lakota led to the abandonment of the mission on April 17, 1846. The Dunbars moved to Andrew County and then Holt County, Missouri. In 1856 they moved to Brown County, Kansas where Rev. Dunbar died on November 1, 1857.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of four series: 1) Correspondence, 1839-1909; 2) Records of the Pawnee Mission Church, 1836-1847; 3) Manuscripts, undated; and 4) Miscellaneous. The materials relate to the Pawnee Mission Church, established near Bellevue, Nebraska, in 1836 by Rev. John Dunbar. Also mentioned are Moses and Eliza Merrill, Cantonment Leavenworth, and the life and culture of the Pawnees. Included are manuscripts by John B. Dunbar, son of Rev. John Dunbar.

DESCRIPTION

Series 1 - Correspondence

Box 1
Folder 1

1839, John Dunbar to Major Joseph J. Hamilton, with sketch of new site of Pawnee village. [3 copies]
1909?, B.S. Dunbar to C.S. Paine with reminiscences of the old Pawnee Mission [original, 3
RG4302.AM: Dunbar, John, 1804-1857

copies]
1909?, B.S. Dunbar to C.S. Paine, more on the Pawnee Mission [original, 1 copy]
Series 2 - Records of the Pawnee Mission Church, 1836-1847

Folder 2

Records of the Pawnee Mission Church, 1836-1847 [typescript copy of original]
Confession of Faith, and Covenant, Pawnee Mission Church, 1836 [photocopy]

Folder 3 (RESTRICTED FOR PRESERVATION)

Records of the Pawnee Mission Church, 1836-1847 [original in the hand of John Dunbar]
Confession of Faith, and Covenant, Pawnee Mission Church, 1836 [original]

Series 3 - Manuscripts

Folder 4

"Manuscript of John Dunbar Missionary to the Indians," undated [typescript copy, printed in the
Kansas Historical Collections, see f. 6 below]
Reminiscences of John. B. Dunbar of his early life among the Pawnee, undated [original]

Folder 5

"The Indian Scare," by John B. Dunbar, "written prior to 1900" according to his son, Louis
Dunbar [original]

Series 4 - Miscellaneous

Folder 6

2 biographical items on John Dunbar
Printed "Appendix. The Pawnee Language," by John B. Dunbar ["appendix to Grinnell's Pawnee
Hero Stories and Folk Tales."]
Excerpt from the Kansas Historical Collections, "The Presbyterian Mission Among the Pawnee

Folder 7

Chronology of the Dunbar-Allis Pawnee Mission
Bibliography, Dunbar Pawnee Mission
Excerpt from Travels in North America During the Years 1834, 1835, & 1836..., Charles
Augustus Murray
Subject headings:

Bellevue (Neb.)
Clergy -- Nebraska
Dunbar, John, 1804-1857
Dunbar, John Brown, 1841-
Frontier and pioneer life -- Nebraska
Indians of North America -- Culture
Missionaries -- Nebraska
Pawnee Indians -- Missions
Pioneers -- Nebraska
Reminiscences
Sarpy County (Neb.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Related materials can be found in the Samuel Allis collection [RG2628.AM].

Various references and articles by/about John Dunbar can be found in Nebraska History magazine and earlier Nebraska State Historical Society publications. Check the Nebraska History index or ask the Reference Staff for assistance.