Walt Whitman Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2013
Revised 2016 April

Contact information:
http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact

Additional search options available at:
http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms005001

LC Online Catalog record:
http://lccn.loc.gov/mm82077909

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Collection Summary

Title: Walt Whitman Papers
Span Dates: 1837-1957
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1840-1891)
ID No.: MSS77909
Creator: Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892
Extent: 150 items ; 2 containers plus 1 artifact ; 1.2 linear feet ; 2 microfilm reels
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Summary: Poet. Correspondence, family papers, holograph drafts of Whitman's poetry and prose, printed matter, and miscellany. Includes a printed copy of *O Captain! My Captain!* with Whitman's handwritten corrections and letters exchanged with Abraham Leech, Whitman's earliest known correspondence.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People
Diggins, E. F. E.F. Diggins plaster bust of Walt Whitman. 1939.
Furness, Clifton Joseph, 1898-1946. Clifton Joseph Furness notebook. 1941.
Heyde, Hannah Louisa Whitman, 1823-1908--Correspondence.
Heyde, Hannah Louisa Whitman, 1823-1908--Correspondence.
Leach family--Genealogy.
Leech, Abraham. Abraham Leech correspondence and diary. 1837-circa 1881.
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Death and burial.
Van Buren, Martin, 1782-1862.
Whitman family.
Whitman, Louisa Van Velsor, 1795-1873--Correspondence.
Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892--Statues.
Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892.
Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892. O captain! My captain! reprint with comments by the author. 1888 February 9.

Organizations
Democratic Party (U.S.)

Subjects
American literature.
American poetry.
American prose literature.
Busts.
City and town life.
Education--New York (State)--Long Island.
Poetry.
Presidents--United States--Election--1840.
Sculpture.

Places
Long Island (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.
United States--Politics and government--1815-1861.

Occupations
Poets.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Walt Whitman, poet, were acquired by the Library of Congress through gift, transfer, and purchase, 1927-2013. The collection contains items described in the Library's publication *Walt Whitman: A Catalog Based upon the Collections of the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1955), as well as more recent acquisitions unrelated to other collections of Whitman's papers in the Library.

Processing History

The papers of Walt Whitman were processed in 1981 and revised and expanded in 1997. Additional material received 1997-2001 was processed in 2003. Materials received in 2012 and 2013 were interfiled in the collection.

Additional Guides

The Library's publication *Walt Whitman: A Catalog Based upon the Collections of the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1955) includes items from the collection.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Walt Whitman is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Walt Whitman are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on one reel. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Online Content

The papers of Walt Whitman are available on the Library of Congress Web site at http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000040. A reprint of Walt Whitman's *O Captain, My Captain!* with comments by the author, 1888 February 9, is also available through the Library of Congress Web site at http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.msmcc055.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Walt Whitman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Walt Whitman (1819-1892) span the years 1837-1957 with the bulk concentrated in the period 1840-1891. Included are examples of the poet's original correspondence and literary manuscripts, photocopies and transcripts of similar Whitman material, and printed matter and miscellaneous items relating to Whitman. Although the collection contains only a small sampling of the types of items found in the Library's larger collections of Whitman material, most notably those of Thomas Biggs Harned and Charles E. Feinberg, it includes Whitman's correspondence with Abraham P. Leech and a printed copy of Whitman's poem *O Captain! My Captain!* containing the poet's handwritten corrections. A small selection of family correspondence, including Whitman's mother, Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, and his sister, Hannah Louisa Whitman Heyde describing domestic routines and expressing personal sentiments, is also included.

Whitman's letters to Abraham Leech, 1840-1841, the poet's earliest known correspondence, describe his life as a schoolteacher in the towns of Woodbury and Whitestone, Long Island, New York. The letters relate his distaste as a young man for teaching at Woodbury and portray his general dislike for small-town life at that time. Whitman also expressed his

support for the Democratic party and its candidate for the 1840 presidential election, Martin Van Buren, despite Leech's adherence to the Whig party candidate, William Henry Harrison. The file also contains copies of letters from Leech to Whitman, genealogical notes of the Leech family, a small diary kept by Abraham Leech, 1838-1844, and other miscellaneous fragments and items.

O Captain! My Captain!, considered by many to be Whitman's most popular poem, was widely anthologized during his lifetime. The collection contains a copy of the poem formerly described as a proof sheet in the Library's publication *Walt Whitman: A Catalog Based upon the Collections of the Library of Congress*. It is instead a printed page torn from volume thirty-two of the Riverside Literature Series, corrected in Whitman's hand, and returned to Riverside Press. A short letter to the printer remarking on the errors and noting Whitman's accompanying corrections is included on the verso of the page.

Many of the items in the collection are identified in the catalog, which contains an annotated bibliographic listing of Whitman items located within the collections of various divisions in the Library of Congress. Identification numbers tagged to specific entries in the catalog are noted on the folders containing those items. This catalog should be consulted for the fullest description of the material.

A microfilm edition of original Whitman materials at other repositories compiled by Roy Basler in 1962, and a plaster bust donated to the Library's poetry office by sculptor E. F. Diggins were added to the collection in 2012. A fragment of prose, "Idea of Piece [Peace] in a Storm," and a photograph of Whitman were interfiled in the collection in 2013.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Container List

Container	*Contents*
BOX 1	Correspondence
	General, 1852 , 1863 , 1871-1872 , 1882 , 1888-1891
	Digital content available
	Leech, Abraham P., 1837-1844 , circa 1881 , undated
	Digital content available
	Family papers
	Whitman, Louisa Van Velsor (mother), 1872-1873
	Digital content available
	Whitman family letters, 1848 , 1863 , 1870-1873 , 1889-1891 , undated
	Digital content available
	Literary file
	Poetry
	Ah Poverties, Wincings, and Sulky Retreats, broadside, undated
	Digital content available
	"Death of General Grant," signed draft, 1885
	Digital content available
	"Funeral Interpolations," signed draft, circa 1888
	Digital content available
	O Captain! My Captain! printed copy with corrections, 1888
	Digital content available
	Prose
	"American National Literature," draft, circa 1891
	Digital content available
	American poets, draft, undated
	Digital content available
	"As to nationality in our literature," draft (first line), undated
	Digital content available
	"A Gap now of over a Year," draft, undated
	Digital content available
	"The great themes of the literatus," draft (first line), undated
	Digital content available
	"Idea of Piece [Peace] in a Storm," fragment, circa 1865
	Digital content available
	"An Indian Bureau Reminiscence," signed draft, circa 1883
	Digital content available
	Modesty, draft, undated
	Digital content available
	Miscellany
	Chronological file, 1881-1885 , 1896-1899 , 1912-1917 , 1929-1931 , 1940 , 1955-1957, undated
	Digital content available
	Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, exhibit, 1956
	Digital content available

Container	*Contents*
	Photograph of Whitman by Frank Pearsall, copy, 1869
	Digital content available
	Printed matter
	1870 , 1887
	Digital content available
BOX 2	1892-1915
	Digital content available
	1935-1939 , 1954
	Digital content available
	Reproductions
	Photocopies
	Burroughs, John, "Work and Wait," 1856
	Digital content available
	Correspondence, 1880-1881, undated
	Digital content available
	Diary notes, undated
	Digital content available
	Furness, Clifton Joseph, notebook, 1940
	Digital content available
	Interior Department, dismissal from, 1865
	Digital content available
	National Archives and Records Administration, records, 1864-1874
	Digital content available
	Poetry and prose, 1861, undated
	Digital content available
	Microfilm of originals at other repositories, compiled by Roy Basler, 1962 *Shelf no. 112,608*
	Digital content available
	Transcripts
	Correspondence, 1876
	Digital content available
	Poetry and prose, undated
	Digital content available
BOX VA 1	Artifact
	Plaster bust of Walt Whitman by E. F. Diggins, 1939
	Digital content available