

Yale University Library
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Guide to the Henry David Thoreau Collection

YCAL MSS 203



by Michael L. Forstrom

April 2005

P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 203

CREATOR: Thoreau, Henry David, 1817-1862

TITLE: Henry David Thoreau collection

DATES: 1841–1949

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.13 linear feet (2 boxes + 2 art, 1 broadside, 1 roll)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The Thoreau collection contains correspondence, writings, photographs, and objects relating to Henry David Thoreau. There are several original manuscripts, including notes on insects, weather, and natural phenomena, and drafts of poems, an untitled essay, the article "The Discovery of America, and Researches in Central Africa," and the concluding paragraphs to Walden. There is also an essay on Thoreau by Francis Sheldon and George Shiras with photographs by Roland Wells Robbins and Edwin Way Teale. There are photographs of Thoreau's residences in Massachusetts, including his childhood home in Concord and the site of his cabin at Walden Pond. Objects include pieces of wood and nails from Thoreau's cabin and pencils manufactured by his father's company, J. Thoreau & Co.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.thoreau>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.thoreau>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Henry David Thoreau Collection was acquired through various gifts and purchases dating from 1911.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

There are two cut film negatives corresponding to prints in the collection. The negatives are restricted and may only be seen with permission of the appropriate curator. Reference photographs have also been substituted in the main files for material stored separately.

Conditions Governing Use

The Henry David Thoreau Collection is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Henry David Thoreau Collection. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

This material was formerly classed as Uncat Za Thoreau.

Scope and Contents

The Henry David Thoreau Collection consists of letters, manuscripts, photographs, and objects documenting the life and work of Henry David Thoreau. The collection spans the years 1841-1949.

The collection is housed in two boxes and organized into three series according to provenance: *Owen Franklin Aldis Gift*, *Henry Seidel Canby Gift*, and *Material from Other Sources*. Box 2 contains *Oversize* material.

[Series I, *Owen Franklin Aldis Gift*](#), consists of one letter, a brief ALS from Thoreau to the Harvard College librarian, and several holograph manuscripts. The writings include notes and drafts for poems, an article, and the concluding paragraphs to *Walden*. There are notes on insects for the years 1851-54 and on weather and other "general" conditions for the months of April, October, and December, with detailed charts for October and December for the years 1852-61 and 1850-61 respectively. The Aldis gift also includes the May 1852 survey Thoreau conducted for the "Noah & Joshua Brooks Farm" in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

[Series II, *Henry Seidel Canby Gift*](#), consists of one holograph manuscript, photographs, and objects, and is organized into subseries for Writings and Other Material. The gift includes a heavily corrected manuscript for "General Phenomena for November" which, like the manuscripts in Series I, contains notes on weather and natural phenomena. The Other Material subseries includes photographs of a sketch of Thoreau and two sections of a stud(s), as well as two nails, from Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond. The stud sections and nails are stored separately and reference photographs are provided in the main files.

[Series III, *Material from Other Sources*](#), is organized into subseries for Writings and Other Material. Writings include a holograph manuscript for an untitled essay by Thoreau, with a typed copy, and an article on Thoreau by Francis D. Sheldon and G. Peter Shiras. The article by Sheldon and Shiras documents the history of Thoreau's "hut" on Walden Pond and includes photographs by Roland Welles Robbins and Edwin Way Teale. The Other Material subseries includes a pencil box and pencils produced by Thoreau's father's firm, J. Thoreau & Co.

[Oversize](#) material, housed in box 2, contains material from Series I and Series III.

Collection Contents

Series I: Owen Franklin Aldis Gift, 1841-1864

7 Folders

Gift of Owen Franklin Aldis, 1911

Series I, *Owen Franklin Aldis Gift*, is organized into three subseries: Correspondence, Writings, and Other Papers.

CORRESPONDENCE

b. 1, f. 1	Harvard College Library	1858 Dec 19
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WRITINGS

	"An[nual] Phenomena for December" notes, holograph manuscript Stored in: Oversize, Box 2, folder 17	1850-61
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b. 1, f. 2	["April weather..."], notes, holograph manuscript	[1860?]
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b. 1, f. 3	["The discovery of America, and researches in central Africa"], holograph manuscript, corrected	n.d.
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	"General Phenomena for October," notes, holograph Stored in: Oversize, Box 2, folder 18	1852-61
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b. 1, f. 4	"Independence," poem, holograph	1841 Jul 30
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	[On insects], notes, holograph Stored in: Oversize, Box 2, folder 19	1851-54
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b. 1, f. 5	"Travelling," poem, holograph, corrected Includes text on verso	n.d.
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b. 1, f. 6	Walden, draft of concluding paragraphs, holograph	1864 Jun 17
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OTHER PAPERS

b. BSD, folder 7	"Plan of the Noah & Joshua Brooks Farm..." holograph	1852 May
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b. 3 (Art)	Tube for "Thoreau's Plan of a Farm, 1852"	undated
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Series II: Henry Seidel Canby Gift, 1845-1846*3 Folders*

Gift of Henry Seidel Canby, 1940

Series II, *Henry Seidel Canby Gift*, is organized into two subseries: Writings and Other Material.

WRITINGS

b. 1, f. 8	"General Phenomena for November," notes, holograph, corrected	n.d.
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OTHER MATERIAL

b. ART, f. 9	Stud sections and nails from Thoreau's cabin at Walden pond <i>Stud sections measure 21 x 8 x 11 cm., and 22.5 x 9 x 11 cm.</i> Includes letter, dated April 14, 1932, from Henry Seidel Canby	[ca. 1845-46]
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b. 1, f. 10	Pencil sketch of Thoreau by D. Ricketson, photographic copy	n.d.
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Series III: Material from Other Sources, 1850-1949

6 Folders

Acquired by gift or purchase from various sources. Sources indicated on individual folders.

Series III, *Material from Other Sources*, is organized into two subseries: Writings and Other Material.

WRITINGS

Writings of Henry David Thoreau
["The great story of the night..."]

b. 1, f. 11	Holograph	[1851 Aug?]
b. 1, f. 12	Typed version, corrected in unidentified hand	n.d.

Writings of Others
Sheldon, Francis D. and G. Peter Shiras

b. 1, f. 13	"A House Which I Had Myself Built," essay, typescript, corrected Also stored in: Oversize, Box 2, folder 20 Includes photographs by Roland Wells Robbins and Edwin Way Teale	1949
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OTHER MATERIAL

b. ART, f. 14	Pencils and pencil box from J. Thoreau & Co.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 15	Printed ephemera Also stored in: Oversize, Box 2, folder 21	1938, n.d.
b. 1, f. 16	Surveyor's certificate in Thoreau's hand	1850 Aug 15

Nitrate negatives

Original nitrate negatives were discarded in 2023 in accordance with Yale University policy. Digital surrogates are available, as well as contemporary prints (in folders 10 and 20 in Series III).

Oversize, 1850-1949*0.92 linear feet (1 box)*

b. 2, f. 17	Holograph manuscript for "An[nual] Phenomena for December" (In Series I)	1850-61
b. 2, f. 18	Holograph manuscript for "General Phenomena for October" (In Series I)	1852-61
b. 2, f. 19	Holograph manuscript [On insects] (In Series I)	1851-54
b. 2, f. 20	Photographs from "A House From Which I Had Myself Built" (In Series III)	1949
b. 2, f. 21	Reproduction of sketch by D. C. Sturges (In Series III)	1938

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.

Subjects

American literature -- 19th century
Authors, American -- 19th century -- Archives
Natural history -- Massachusetts

Geographic Names

Concord (Mass.)
Walden Pond (Middlesex County, Mass.)

Genres / Formats

Artifacts (object genre)
Nails (fasteners) -- United States -- 19th century
Pencils (drawing and writing equipment) -- United States -- 19th century
Photographic prints

Occupations

Authors

Names

Robbins, Roland Wells, 1908-1987
Sheldon, Francis
Shiras, George
Teale, Edwin Way, 1899-1980
Thoreau, Henry David, 1817-1862

Corporate Body

J. Thoreau & Co

Contributors

Thoreau, Henry David, 1817-1862
Sheldon, Francis
Shiras, George