

# Guide to the Thomas Clap, President of Yale College, Records

RU 130



compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

October 2004

Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
(203) 432-1735  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	3
Conditions Governing Access .....	3
Preferred Citation .....	4
Processing Information .....	4
Biographical / Historical .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	4
General note .....	5
Arrangement .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
Accession 1935-A-010: Records of Thomas Clap .....	6
Selected Search Terms .....	7

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
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**CALL NUMBER:** RU 130

**CREATOR:** Yale College (1718-1887). President's Office

**TITLE:** Thomas Clap, president of Yale College, records

**DATES:** circa 1720-1765

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 2.08 linear feet (2 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The records consist of correspondence, memoirs, notes, observations, and other writings of Thomas Clap concerning Yale College.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ru.0130>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ru.0130>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html). The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

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

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

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## Preferred Citation

Thomas Clap, President of Yale College, Records (RU 130). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Processing Information

Yale University records are arranged and described at the accession level by the creating office. The University Archives creates collection level descriptive records, but typically does no further arrangement and description at the accession level.

This finding aid was revised in 2024 to reflect research done by the Yale and Slavery Research Project. During that revision, description was added to the collection-level biographical and scope and contents notes and the folder-level note for Box 1, Folder 7 and subject headings were added. Previous versions of this finding aid may be available. Please contact Beinecke Library for details. If you have questions or comments about these revisions, please contact Beinecke Library. For more information on reparative archival description at Yale, see [Yale's Statement on Harmful Language in Archival Description](#).

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## Biographical / Historical

Thomas Clap served as the rector and first president of Yale from 1740 to 1766. Born in Scituate, Massachusetts, in 1703, he graduated from Harvard in 1722 and was installed as the minister in Windham, Connecticut, in 1725. He held that position until he accepted the rectorship of Yale, taking over from his predecessor Elisha Williams.

Known for his religious orthodoxy, Clap led the establishment of a college church and was engaged in various heated theological disputes with the "Old Light" and the "New Light" Congregationalists as well as the Anglicans. Clap is remembered for enacting various reforms in college rules and discipline, for emphasizing the religious aspects of education at Yale, and for broadening the college curriculum, especially in the sciences. Under his leadership, Yale grew in size, issued a new charter in 1745 (under which the rector became the president), and built Connecticut Hall (completed in 1752). Although a strict Congregationalist, Clap's interest in and emphasis on scientific learning led to changes in Yale's curriculum. He assisted in acquiring a printing press for the city and scientific, electrical, and astronomical equipment for the college through his relationship with Benjamin Franklin. He also expanded the college's library. Among his publications is *Annals or History of Yale College*, published in 1766.

Thomas Clap enslaved several people over the course of his life. In 1737, in his record of people in his household, he included the enslaved Pompey, born about 1713; Phillis, born about 1717; and Tamar, born on December 18, 1736. Church records show he baptized Sylva, a Black child enslaved in his household, in 1738. A 1758 advertisement in the *Connecticut Gazette* describes the escape of an enslaved Black man named George, enslaved by Thomas Clap. In addition, a man enslaved to Clap is listed among the workers who built Connecticut Hall; that person has not yet been identified by name.

Clap resigned as president of Yale in 1766 and died in 1767.

Information in this biographical note was drawn in part from [David Blight and the Yale and Slavery Research Project, \*Yale and Slavery: A History\*. Yale University Press, 2024.](#)

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## Scope and Contents

The records consist of correspondence, memoirs, notes, observations, and other writings of Thomas Clap concerning Yale College.

Folder 7, "Account of the Cost of the New College," consists of records documenting the building of Connecticut Hall, which was completed in 1752 and is the oldest surviving building on the Yale campus. The

records include documentation of workers who constructed the building, including information on work done by Jethro Luke and his son Gad Luke, both free Black men living in New Haven, and by five enslaved Black men—Dick (enslaved by Theophilus Munson), Mingo (enslaved by Archibald McNeil), Jack (enslaved by the Reverend Joseph Noyes), and a man enslaved by Thomas Clap whose name is not yet known, and another man, enslaved by a Mr. Bonticou (likely Timothy Bonticou, Sr.), whose name is not yet known.

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## **General note**

Forms part of Yale Record Group 2-A (YRG 2-A), Records of the Yale president's office.

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## **Arrangement**

The records are arranged chronologically.

## Collection Contents

### Accession 1935-A-010: Records of Thomas Clap

b. 1, f. 1	Notes of Sermons and other colleges exercises during his undergraduate course	1720
b. 1, f. 2	Resolutions and Indentures	1739, 1743, 1747
b. 1, f. 3	College Memoirs	1743 (?)
b. 1, f. 4	Correspondence and Writings	1746-1765
b. 2	Investigation of the alleged poisoning of college students in Commons	1764
b. 1, f. 5	Annals of Yale College A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1747
b. 1, f. 6	"Enquiry into the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Obligation"	1748 (?)
b. 1, f. 6	"The Present State of the Colony of Connecticut Considered"	1754
b. 1, f. 7	<a href="#">Account of the Cost of the New College</a> This folder consists of records documenting the building of Connecticut Hall. The records include documentation of workers who constructed the building, including Jethro Luke and his son Gad Luke, both free Black men living in New Haven, and by five enslaved Black men - Dick, Mingo, Jack, and two others whose names were not recorded.	1748-1752
b. 1, f. 8	Sundry accounts and memoranda	1749-1754
b. 1, f. 9	Notes of sermon, Thanksgiving	1754 November 13
b. 1, f. 10	Admissions of Students...	1757-1766
b. 1, f. 11	Letter on the Right of Appeal of Students in College	1764 February 2
b. 1, f. 12	Some observations relating to the Government of Yale College [with 2 typescripts]	1764
b. 1, f. 13	<a href="#">Annals of Yale College</a>	1765
b. 1, f. 14	Memoirs of some remarkable occurences of divine providence... Manuscript recollections of Thomas Clap, including an essay titled "Meditations on the Death of My Wife, August 9, 1736."	undated
b. 1, f. 15	Miscellaneous notes and fragments	undated

## **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**

College presidents  
Educators  
Enslaved persons -- Connecticut -- History  
Slavery -- Connecticut -- History  
Universities and colleges -- Administration  
Universities and colleges -- Connecticut -- New Haven

### **Corporate Bodies**

Yale College (1718-1887). President's Office  
Yale College (1718-1887) -- Administration  
Yale College (1718-1887) -- Presidents  
Yale University -- History

### **Contributors**

Yale College (1718-1887). President's Office  
Clap, Thomas, 1703-1767