

Guide to the Carpenter Family Papers

MS 911



compiled by Susan Grigg

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Requesting Instructions	3
Administrative Information	4
Immediate Source of Acquisition	4
Conditions Governing Access	4
Conditions Governing Use	4
Preferred Citation	4
Scope and Contents	4
Collection Contents	6
Selected Search Terms	7

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 911

CREATOR: Carpenter family

TITLE: Carpenter family papers

DATES: 1810-1828

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.25 linear feet

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of correspondence among members of a single family: William Carpenter, his wife, Charity, and their nine children. The letters reveal the departure of William Carpenter from his family and his estrangement from his wife ca. 1810. The major subjects of the letters are the children's education and their careers. One son, Walter, attended Yale (1824-1828) and describes student life. Other letters describe the terms of an apprenticeship and a daughter, Philinia, writes of her experiences as a teacher in Connecticut and New York.

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Requesting Instructions

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To order reproductions from this collection, please go to 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

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Hollon A. Farr.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Carpenter Family Papers. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Scope and Contents

The Carpenter Family Papers consist of letters exchanged among members of a family that originated in Huntington (later Monroe), Connecticut. The household originally had eleven members: William Carpenter, his wife Charity, and their children Philinia, Betsy, William, John M. (also called Marcus), Horatio (also called Horace), Walter O. (Y. 1828), Sidney, Milton, and Orville. Shortly after the correspondence begins, however, William, Sr., left the household, and by the time of Charity Carpenter's death in 1821, all the children had left home as well. Most of the letters were written by the children, but there are also a few by the parents and by relatives outside the immediate family.

The most striking feature of the papers is the absence of those conventional expressions of deference and piety that characterize most family correspondence surviving from this period. The children's letters are full of breezy, even impertinent, observations about their own circumstances and those of their employers and acquaintances, and there is much teasing, especially on romantic subjects. Pious statements and veiled demands for deference do, however, become prominent in Philinia's letters in the 1820s, by which time she was the family matriarch, primarily responsible, with her brother Horatio, for the upbringing of the younger brothers. There are also repeated references to several significant themes in the cultural history of the period: spinsterhood, the consciousness of being a Yankee, and the intellectual aspirations of young men as expressed through lending libraries and oratorical societies.

The letters are also exceptional for their treatment of William Carpenter's separation from his wife and children. The immediate cause of his departure is obscure, but certainly there was an estrangement from his wife that brought him into disgrace with her and at least some of their children. Letters exchanged with him and about him between 1815 and 1821 show a restoration of contact and reclamation of authority in relation to the younger sons after several years in which there was no mention of him at all. Notwithstanding the absence of background information, the papers are an important source for the study of domestic relations.

The papers are also notable for tracing the children's education and careers. Philinia's letters document her experiences as a teacher in Westfield (Ct.) Academy and in her own schools in New Haven, Ct., and Newburgh, N.Y., and Baltimore, Md., and letters of other family members outline his subsequent career as a merchant in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Walter's and Philinia's letters describe Walter's academic and financial preparation for Yale and give a few impressions of student life. The letters by and about William, Jr., are part of a long dispute about fulfillment of the terms of his apprenticeship, and other letters offer information about the difficulty of finding places in Connecticut for the other boys. The emphasis throughout is on financial considerations, but the correspondence also gives a good sense of what it was like to grow up in New England in the early national period, whether or not one's parents remained together.

Collection Contents

b.1, f.1 - 23	Correspondence	1810-1828, undated
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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

Business
Domestic relations
Education
Families
Popular culture
Women teachers

Geographic Names

Connecticut -- Social life and customs
Monroe (Conn.)
New Haven (Conn.)

Names

Carpenter, Philinia
Carpenter, Walter O., 1805-1830

Families

Carpenter family

Corporate Bodies

Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1828
Yale University -- Students