

Yale University Library
Yale Divinity Library

Guide to the Isaac Backus Papers

RG 280



Staff of Andover Newton Theological School Library and Yale Divinity Library

2017

409 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT 06511
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<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Yale Divinity Library
409 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT 06511
divinity.library@yale.edu
<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

CALL NUMBER: RG 280

CREATOR: Backus, Isaac, 1724-1806

TITLE: Isaac Backus papers

DATES: 1660-1806

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 8 linear feet (20 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Personal papers of Backus document his professional work and include diaries, travel journals, autobiographical statements, sermons, published and unpublished writings, and extracts from readings. Collected papers include correspondence and narratives chronicling the Separate Baptist struggle for religious freedom, gathered by Backus.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.280>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.280>.

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

b. box

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

From the Andover Newton Theological School collection, transferred in 2017

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

Preferred Citation

Isaac Backus Papers (RG 280), Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.

Biographical / Historical

Isaac Backus was born in Norwich, Connecticut, January 9, 1724. Little is known of his childhood. In "An account of the life of Isaac Backus" (completed to 1756), he provides genealogical information and then begins a detailed chronicle of events leading to his religious conversion and his life after that point.

In response to preaching of the Great Awakening, in 1741 Backus joined the Standing church in Norwich. The Norwich minister was distressed that the converts caused too much agitation and after a few years refused to invite itinerant New Lights, so in 1746 Backus and several other church members withdrew and formed a New Light church. In 1748 Backus became minister of a New Light church in Middleborough, Massachusetts; he continued his association with the New Lights until 1756, when he withdrew because of his opposition to infant baptism. He organized a Separate Baptist church in Middleborough and remained as minister there until his death.

Backus published a large number of tracts and a 3-volume history of the Baptist denomination. His two major concerns are reflected in these works: unification of the Separate Baptists and the struggle against religious taxation as part of efforts to achieve religious freedom. Throughout his professional career Backus travelled extensively in New England, helping to organize churches and settle disputes among various Baptist groups. The Warren Baptist Association was established in 1767; Backus was a member of the Grievance Committee formed to work toward elimination of persecution by civil authorities. As an agent of the Committee he worked to keep the issue of separation of church and state before the general public; and in 1774 he travelled to Philadelphia with other Baptists to seek assistance from the First Continental Congress.

In his later years, Backus continued to be a spokesman for Baptists. He argued for ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1790, convinced that in effect it stood for separation of church and state by prohibiting any religious test for officeholders. In 1796 he published the third volume of his History, and in 1803 an Abridgement. Backus died in Middleborough, November 20, 1806.

Scope and Contents

The Isaac Backus Papers, 1660-1806, consist of two major components: personal papers and collected papers. The Personal Papers (1746-1806) of Series I document the professional work of Backus and are arranged according to the following categories: diaries, travel journals, autobiographical statements, ordination booklet, sermons, publications, unpublished manuscripts, and extracts from readings. A card index, prepared by Brown University personnel, provides main entry access to the diary. The diary and index are published: William G. McLaughlin, ed., *The Diary of Isaac Backus*, 3 vols. (Providence: Brown University Press, 1979)

The Collected Papers (1660-1806) of Series II are primarily correspondence and narratives chronicling the Separate Baptist struggle for religious freedom, gathered by Backus. This section also includes all correspondence of Backus and extant records of the Warren Baptist Association. A card index, prepared by Brown University personnel, provides main entry access to the Collected Papers. The index is divided into three general categories: Baptist History, Letters, Warren Association. The following usage notes may be helpful in working with individual indexes: 1) Baptist History -- The scope of the index is self-explanatory. IB references include letters of IB to others and IB as the subject of a specific document. 2) Letters -- The index includes letters of others to IB. 3) Warren Association -- The index includes annual letters of individual churches to the association and correspondence dealing with business related to the annual meeting. The index also provides subject access to the unpublished manuscript, "History of the Warren Association."

The third series includes additional documents, fragile originals, and a set of lantern slides related to Backus. These materials are not described in detail in the finding aid that was received with the collection from Andover Newton Theological School. The lantern slides are stored onsite with restricted oversize material due to their fragile nature. Series IV consists of microfilm of the Backus collection, reels 804-818,

which were received from Andover Newton Theological School when the papers were transferred to the Divinity Library. These microfilm reflect the order of the original Backus finding aid.

The original PDF finding aid created by Andover Newton Theological School staff, which contains more detailed description of the collection, is linked to from <https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton>.

Arrangement

The papers are arranged in four series:

Series I.	Personal Papers
Series II.	Collected Papers
Series III.	Addendum and Fragile Originals
Series IV.	Microfilm of Backus Papers

Collection Contents

Series I: Personal Papers

Diaries		
b.1	volume 2	1751 July 29– 1752 July 25
b.1	volume 3	1752 July 26– 1755 April 13
b.1	volume 4	1755 April 20– 1759 June 28
b.1	volume 6	1763 July 20– 1767 October 11
b.1	volume 7	1767 October 13–1771 October 23
b.1	volume 8	1771 October 25–1775 December 31
b.1	volume 9	1776 January 7– 1780 July 27
b.1	volume 10	1780 July 28– 1784 December 31
b.1	volume 12	1789 June 21– 1796 December 28
b.1	volume 13	1797 January 1– 1802 December 31
b.1	volume 14	1803 January 2– 1806 March 16
Travel journals		
b.2	List of journeys	1748–1802
b.2	Account of journeys Bound with list of journeys	1746 September 27–1747 December 3
b.2	Account of journeys	1749 November 9–1774 November 19
Autobiographical statements		
b.2	Reasons of separation	Undated

Autobiographical statements (continued)

b. 2	Some brief account of my travels and experiences	1746-1750
b. 2	A few things concerning marriage	1748-1749
b. 2	Some particular account of my conversion	1751
b. 2	Some particular account of my settling into ministry in ye joining borders of Bridgewater and Middleborough	1752
b. 2	Reasons of my withdrawing communion with Paedobaptists, which I once stood with	1756
b. 2	An account of the life of Isaac Backus (completed to January 1, 1756)	1756
b. 2	Day book	1760-1769
Ordination booklet		
b. 2	An account of ordinations	1746 February- 1895 September
Sermons		
b. 2	Account of texts preacht from, September 13, 1757 - April 6, 1777	1777
b. 2	Undated sermons On the following texts: Genesis 42:36; Job 34:21; Psalm 49:20; Proverbs 13: 10; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Ecclesiastes 7:16; Hosea 13:6; Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 7:9; Romans 10:2; Romans 11: 7; 2 Corinthians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Ephesians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Hebrews 8: 8-11; James 1:25; James 3: 1; 2 Peter 2:19; Revelation 11: 3 and and two fragments	Undated
b. 2	Ezekiel 33:7	1749 February 23
b. 2	Hebrews 11:39 Bound with 23 February 1749	1749 October 29
b. 2	Acts 13:36	1749 November 29
b. 2	John 9:4 Bound with 23 February 1749	1750 March 5
b. 2	Proverbs 13:20	1750 March 17
b. 2	Hosea 4:17 Bound with 17 March 1750	1750 March 24
b. 2	Matthew 7:26-27 Bound with undated sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:17	1751 January 2
b. 2	1 John 3:7 Bound with undated sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:17	1751 February 4
b. 2	Ephesians 4:30 Bound with undated sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:17	1751 February 17

Sermons (continued)

b. 2	Proverbs 26:20 Bound with undated sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:17	1751 September 22
b. 2	James 1:18 Bound with undated sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:17	1755 August 10
b. 2	Psalms 119:111	1756 December 26
b. 2	Proverbs 6:6-8	1757 January 9
b. 2	Proverbs 13:15	1757 January 23
b. 2	Job 36:2	1759 February 25
b. 2	Ezekiel 1:5	1761 July 26
b. 2	Micah 4:11	1765 February 10
b. 2	Revelation 2:1	1765 September 11
b. 2	Deuteronomy 32:2 Bound with undated sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:17	1766 February 23
b. 2	1 Peter 1:7	1766 May 25
b. 2	Matthew 9:38	1766 May 25
b. 2	Proverbs 21:16	1766 June 29
b. 2	Galatians 5:13	1766 July 24
b. 2	Genesis 17:1	1766 October 19
b. 2	John 6:32	1766 October 19
b. 2	Habakkuk 2:13	1768 October 2
b. 2	Romans 5:14	1768 December 25
b. 2	1 Peter 2:11	1769 January 8
b. 2	1 Thessalonians 5:21	1769 March 3
b. 2	Acts 17:26-27	1769 April 16
b. 2	Romans 7:1	1769 April 30
b. 2	1 John 5:3	1769 July 30
b. 2	Genesis 8:21	1770 January 7
b. 2	Romans 12:2	1770 January 30
b. 2	Proverbs 23:14	1770 February 20

Sermons (continued)

b. 2	Isaiah 61:2	1770 February 25
b. 2	Numbers 11:20	1770 April 2
b. 2	Colossians 2:19	1770 May 3
b. 2	Hebrews 4:2	1770 July 8
b. 2	Galatians 5:16	1770 August 19
b. 2	1 Corinthians	1770 August 26
b. 2	1 Peter 2:24	1770 September 2
b. 2	Proverbs 21:2	1770 November 18
b. 2	Deuteronomy 18:15	1771 March 17
b. 2	Deuteronomy 8:5	1771 July 23
b. 2	Matthew 25:8-9	1771 July 28
b. 2	Mark 4:26-28	1771 August 4
b. 2	Luke 9:23	1771 August 29
b. 2	Psalms 27:10	1771 September 21
b. 2	Isaiah 26:19	1771 September 22
b. 2	Isaiah 29:24	1771 September 22
b. 2	Philemon 1:18	1771 October 2
b. 2	Psalms 112:7	1772 January 29
b. 2	Isaiah 66:2	1772 February
b. 2	Psalms 125:5	1772 February 16
b. 2	Psalms 116:15	1772 February 23
b. 2	2 Peter 3:5	1772 April 2
b. 2	Hebrews 13:17	1772 April 12
b. 2	Galatians 3:27	1772 September 6
b. 2	John 16:33	1773 April 25
b. 2	Leviticus 10:3	1779 March 2

Sermons (continued)

b. 2	Acts 10:34	1779 August 8
b. 2	2 Kings 4:6	1779 August 22
b. 2	Hosea 13:13	1780 January 16
b. 2	Esther 4:13	1780 February 20
b. 2	Isaiah 44:22	1800 June 17
b. 2	Philemon 3:13-14	1800 June 29

Publications

b. 3	All true ministers of the gospel are called into that work by the special influences of the holy spirit 2 copies	1754
b. 3	An appeal to the public for religious liberty, against the oppressions of the present day	1773
b. 3	The atonement of Christ, explained and vindicated against late attempts to exclude it out of the world	1787
b. 3	A discourse concerning the materials, the manner of building, and power of organizing of the church of Christ	1773
b. 3	The doctrine of sovereign grace opened and vindicated: and also The consistency and duty of declaring divine sovereignty, and mens impotency while yet we address their consciences with the warnings of truth, and calls of the gospel	1771
b. 3	A door opened for equal Christian liberty, and no man can shut it 2 copies	1783
b. 3	Evangelical ministers described, and distinguished from legalists	1772
b. 3	Family prayer not to be neglected	1766
b. 3	A fish caught in his own net. An examination of nine sermons, from Matt. 16.18, published last year, by Mr. Joseph Fish of Stonington Incomplete manuscript and two copies of published work	1768
b. 3	Gospel comfort for mourners Second edition; 2 copies	1803
b. 3	Gospel comfort, under heavy tidings	1769
b. 3	Government and liberty described, and ecclesiastical tyranny exposed	1778
b. 4	A great faith described and inculcated Manuscript and 3 copies of published work	1805

Publications (continued)

b. 4	A history of New England; with particular reference to the people called Baptists Proposal for printing by subscription and list of subscribers; fragments of draft of work; draft of index; proposal for volume 2 and manuscript of volume 2 (incomplete); manuscript of Abridgement	Undated
b. 5	The infinite importance of the obedience of faith, and of a separation from the world, opened and demonstrated	1791
b. 5	A letter to a gentleman in the Massachusetts General Assembly, concerning taxes to support religious worship	1771
b. 5	A letter to the Reverend Mr. Benjamin Lord, of Norwich; occasioned by some harsh things which he has lately published against those who have dissented from his sentiments about the ministry, the church, and baptism	1764
b. 5	The liberal support of gospel ministers, opened and inculcated Manuscript and 4 copies of published work	1790
b. 5	A reply to a piece wrote last year, by Mr. Israel Holly, ... , entitled "The New-Testament interpretation of the Old, relative to infant baptism" wherein another short attempt is made toward bringing that controversy to a happy issue	1772
b. 5	A seasonable plea for liberty of conscience, against some late oppressive proceedings; particularly in the town of Berwick, in the county of York Manuscript and copy of published work	1770
b. 5	A short description of the difference between the bond-woman and the free as they are the two covenants	1770
b. 5	Spiritual ignorance causeth men to counter-act their doctrinal knowledge Manuscript and copy of published work	1763
b. 5	The substance of an address to an Assembly in Bridgewater, March 10, 1779 previous to the administration of baptism	1779
b. 5	The testimony of the two witnesses, explained and vindicated, with a few remarks upon the late writings of Dr. Hemmenway and Dr. Lathrop	1793
b. 5	True faith will produce good works	1767
b. 5	Truth is great, and will prevail	1781
Unpublished manuscripts		
b. 5	Fragments (6) Some of these unidentified manuscripts might be extracts from Isaac Backus's readings.	Undated
b. 5	History of Warren Association to 1785, with sketches of member churches to 1791	1791
The kingdom of God, described by his word, with its infinite benefits to human society (incomplete)		

Extracts from Isaac Backus's readings

Extracts from Isaac Backus's readings (continued)

b. 5	Civil records: Connecticut	Undated
b. 6	Civil records: Massachusetts	Undated
b. 6	Civil records: Rhode Island	Undated
b. 6	Civil records: United Colonies	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Connecticut	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Boston/First Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Boston/Second Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Middleborough/First Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Middleborough/Third Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Rehoboth/First Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Rehoboth/Second Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/South Brimfield/Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Swansea/Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Massachusetts/Swansea/Second Baptist Church (in booklet Rehoboth/Second Baptist Church)	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Rhode Island/Newport/First Baptist Church	Undated
b. 6	Church records: Rhode Island/Newport/Second Baptist Church (in' booklet Rehoboth/Second Baptist Church)	Undated
b. 6	Authors and various subjects: booklet Includes extracts on the following: baptism; Cotton Mather; [Charles] Rollin's History; Edes & Gill's Gazette (3/1/1773); Boston Gazette (n.d.); [Joseph] Bellamy; Bishop [Benjamin] Hoadley; Boston Evening Post (5/9/1774); [John] Owen; Life of Hanserd Knollys; Ancient records of Plymouth Colony; Experience Mayhew; [Thomas] Prince; [William] Hubbard's Election Sermon; Massachusetts Colony Law Book (1642); A short account of some of the proceedings of the deputies and committee appointed to take care of the civil affairs of dissenters; [Joseph] Phipps, Remarks on the committee's arguments used to support ecclesiastical impositions in our nation; Quakers; [George] Fox and [John] Burnyeat; Stephen Watt, Essay upon moral agency; Cotton Mather, Magnalia	Undated

Extracts from Isaac Backus's readings (continued)

b. 6	Authors and various subjects: booklet Includes extracts on the following : Cotton Mather; Increase Mather; Boston Newsletter (8/27/1761); [John] Gill's Exposition of Revelation; [Isaac] Watt's Logick; Boston Newsletter (4/29/1762); [John H.] Hervey's Letters; Bishop Burnet's translation of History of Persecutions; William Warburton, Sermon preached before the SPG 1766; Massachusetts Gazette (5/28/1767); [Charles] Chauncey, Discourse on the death of Jonathan Mayhew; Hooker, Doubting Christians drawn to Christ; Mayhew, Sermons on striving to be entering at the strait gate; Cotton Mather, Life of John Eliot; Chauncey, Sermon on the validity of Presbyterian ordination; Stoddard, The defects of preachers; Benjamin Church, History of Philip's War; Boston Evening Post (12/26/1768); Ebenezer Frothingham, A key to unlock the door to the religious constitution in Connecticut; Josephus' Antiquities; Benjamin Wallin, Sermon at an ordination in London 1766	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: Morgan Edwards, Materials for a history of Baptists in Rhode Island	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: Governor Winthrop's Journal	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: America Dissected	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: Paul Bunyan, Prison Meditations	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: Roger Williams, The fox digged out of his burrows	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: Spectator, vol.2, #126	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: Letters of Roger Williams and Samuel Hubbard	Undated
b. 6	Individual manuscripts: Diary of John Comer	Undated
Genealogical information		
b. 6	"Backus Memorial" by H. E. McElvaine	1885

Series II: Collected Papers

b. 6	Fragments and undated papers Includes: fragment: remarks concerning Sarah Thompson statement regarding the Greek word for baptism prayer request of Zulmina Harper and wife; table of contents for Rudiments of North American languages or The young child's grammar.	Undated
b. 6	Undated papers Includes: J.C., Remarks against infant baptism; [John Comer], List of Baptist churches of London ca.1730; A description of Baptist churches and societies	Undated
b. 6	Undated papers Includes: [John Davis], History of First Baptist Church of Boston (incomplete); Some things relative to the First Baptist Church in Boston; Spiritual autobiography (unknown hand); Elizabeth Lord, Statement of conversion; Anna Plimpton, Statement of conversion	Undated
b. 6	Collected papers in Box 6 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1660–1730
b. 7	Collected papers in Box 7 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1731–1758
b. 8	Collected papers in Box 8 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1759–1770 May
b. 9	Collected papers in Box 9 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1770 June–1774 April
b. 10	Collected papers in Box 10 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1774 May–1778 July
b. 11	Collected papers in Box 11 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1778 August–1781 September
b. 12	Collected papers in Box 12 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1781 September–1784
b. 13	Collected papers in Box 13 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1785–1788
b. 14	Collected papers in Box 14 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1789–1794

b. 15	Collected papers in Box 15 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1795–1804
b. 16	Collected papers in Box 16 View listing of papers in the original finding aid for the collection, which is linked to from https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections/andover-newton .	1805–1806

Series III: Addendum and Fragile Originals

b. 16	Backus manuscripts copied by Alvah Hovey in conjunction with research for his work <i>A Memoir of the Life and Times of the Rev. Isaac Backus, A.M.</i>	1752-1806
b. 16	Fragile originals of correspondence Photocopies of these letters are filed chronologically in the previous boxes.	1715-1784
b. 17	Fragile originals of correspondence Photocopies of these letters are filed chronologically in the previous boxes.	1786-1804
b. 17	"Master Photocopies"	1732-1807
b. 17	Labeled folders of photocopies, including: "History of Warren Association" and "Photocopy of Account of Ordination 1745-1805"	
b. 18	Manuscripts of others, including: "IB Memoir" by Alvah Hovey, "Benson's View of Baptism" by Irah Chase, "Ms. Summary of Brown University Theses", miscellaneous unidentified manuscripts	
b. 18	Genealogy of the King family of Raynham, MA (1 folder)	
b. 18	Documents related to Backus monument (3 folders)	
b. 18	Photographs (7 folders)	
b. 18	Pamphlets: "The Mode and Baptism of Subjects Examined in Seven Sermons" by Daniel Merrill, and "The Port Folio", Vol. V. April, 1811, No. 4.	
b. 18	Unidentified notes and "Proposals and Contents of the Baptists Annual Register"	1790
b. 18	Baptist History chronology	
b. 19	Miscellaneous non-Backus manuscript letters and documents received with collection Note in box indicates that many of the manuscript letters relate to the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society.	
b. 20	Lantern slides related to Backus List of slides in box	

Series IV: Microfilm of Backus papers

This series consists of microfilm of the Backus collection, reels 804-818, which were received from Andover Newton Theological School when the papers were transferred to the Divinity Library.

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| b. 21 | Microfilm of Backus papers, reels 804-818 (15 reels) |
| b. 21 | Published guide to the microfilm edition (call number BX6495.B32 J64 2003) |
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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

Baptists -- Clergy
Baptists -- New England
Freedom of religion

Names

Backus, Isaac, 1724-1806

Acquired From

Andover Newton Theological School