

Guide to the Alexander Metcalf Fisher Papers

GEN MSS 1473



By Ève Bourbeau-Allard

May 2018

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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 |
| Processing Information | 4 |
| Separated Materials | 4 |
| Biographical / Historical | 5 |
| Scope and Contents | 5 |
| Arrangement | 5 |
| Collection Contents | 6 |
| Series I: Correspondence, 1809–1825 | 6 |
| Series II: Writings, 1803–1822 | 7 |
| Diaries, 1813–1820 | 7 |
| Scientific Articles, 1818–1821 | 7 |
| Lecture Scripts, circa 1818–1822 | 8 |
| Notes and Learning Exercises, 1803–1822 | 8 |
| Other Writings, 1820 and undated | 10 |
| Series III: Personal and Family Papers, 1813–1898 | 11 |
| Selected Search Terms | 13 |

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 1473

CREATOR: Fisher, Alexander Metcalf, 1794-1822

TITLE: Alexander Metcalf Fisher Papers

DATES: 1803-1898, 1803-1898

BULK DATES: 1809-1822, 1809-1822

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 5.8 linear feet (16 boxes + 1 art)

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 5.8 linear feet (16 boxes + 1 art)

LANGUAGE: In English.

SUMMARY: The Alexander Metcalf Fisher papers consist of correspondence, scientific and personal writings, school notes, eulogies, and other material by or about the Yale College student (Class of 1813) and Yale professor. Drafts and calculations for articles on mathematics, physics, astronomy, and other subjects published between 1817 and 1822, as well as scripts for forty lectures in natural philosophy, illustrate Fisher's academic career in the context of contemporary scientific learning. Documenting the social, economic, religious, and emotional life of a young man living in New England during the Early Republic are extensive correspondence written by Fisher to his parents from 1809-1821, and eight personal and travel diaries. Correspondents also include other relatives, the Fisher family's pastor Nathanael Emmons, and Yale affiliates. Also contained in the collection is a portrait of Fisher engraved on copper by Simeon Smith Jocelyn.

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

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.fisheram>.

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

Gift of Willard J. Fisher, 1921.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Alexander Metcalf Fisher Papers 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

Alexander Metcalf Fisher Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

These materials have been arranged and described according to national and local standards. For more information, please refer to the Beinecke Manuscript Unit Processing Manual.

Former call numbers: MS Vault Fisher AM, MS Vault Section 5 Drawer 3, Z150.

The collection was first inventoried and verified in 1921-1922, and received partial arrangement and file description circa 1966 and 2015. Notes in typescript created circa 1966 were left in the folders with the material they describe. A collection file containing the original collection inventory can be found in Box 1.

Printed materials listed in the original inventory or legacy catalog records not found as of April 2018: *Works of Virgil* ("2 volumes bound together, London, 1794"), *American Journal of Science and Arts* (unspecified issues), and *Catalogue of the members of the Connecticut Alpha of [the Phi Beta Kappa...]* (1813).

Separated Materials

Thirteen printed items received with the collection, consisting largely of sermons, religious pamphlets, eulogies, and scientific texts, were removed for separate cataloging in April 2018. In the library's online catalog, those items are identified by the local note "From the Alexander Metcalf Fisher Papers", and the subject heading "Fisher, Alexander Metcalf, 1794-1822 -- Ownership". They can be found in the catalog by searching the phrase "Fisher, Alexander Metcalf" in the Special Collections Subject field.

Biographical / Historical

Alexander Metcalf Fisher was born in 1794 in Franklin, Massachusetts, to Caleb Fisher (1768-1862) and Sarah Cushing Fisher (1771-1835). Fisher studied at Yale College from 1809-1813, and at the Andover Theological Seminary in 1814, before returning to Yale in 1815 to serve as a tutor. He was later promoted to Adjunct Professor (1817) and Full Professor (1819) of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. Before his premature death in the wreck of the ship Albion on 1822 April 22, Fisher was engaged to women's education advocate Catharine Esther Beecher (1800-1878).

Scope and Contents

The Alexander Metcalf Fisher papers consist of correspondence, scientific and personal writings, school notes, eulogies, and other material by or about the Yale College student (Class of 1813) and Yale professor. Drafts and calculations for articles on mathematics, physics, astronomy, and other subjects published between 1817 and 1822, as well as scripts for forty lectures in natural philosophy, illustrate Fisher's academic career in the context of contemporary scientific learning. Documenting the social, economic, religious, and emotional life of a young man living in New England during the Early Republic are extensive correspondence written by Fisher to his parents from 1809-1821, and eight personal and travel diaries. Correspondents also include other relatives, the Fisher family's pastor Nathanael Emmons, and Yale affiliates. Also contained in the collection is a portrait of Fisher engraved on copper by Simeon Smith Jocelyn.

Arrangement

Organized into three series: I. Correspondence, 1809-1825. II. Writings, 1803-1822. III. Personal and Family Papers, 1813-1898.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1809–1825

0.42 linear feet (1 box)

Series I. comprises correspondence to and from Fisher, family members, friends, and Yale affiliates. The bulk of the correspondence consists of letters sent by Fisher to his parents Caleb and Sarah over a period of thirteen years. Other correspondents include Fisher's siblings Nancy and Willard; Congregational minister Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840); theologian Edward Beecher (1803-1895), brother to Fisher's fiancée; President of Yale College Jeremiah Day (1773-1867); and Yale College Professor James Luce Kingsley (1778-1852). Most of the third-party correspondence documents the aftermath of Fisher's loss at sea in April 1822.

Arranged alphabetically by sender.

| | | |
|---------------|---|-------------------|
| b. 1, f. 1 | Beecher, Edward to Caleb Fisher Two letters regarding the settlement of Alexander Metcalf Fisher's estate, particularly the sale of his books. | 1822 |
| b. 1, f. 2 | Beecher, Edward to Willard Fisher Three letters written during Beecher's studies in Andover discussing Willard Fisher's religious feelings, and personal and family news. | 1824–1825 |
| b. 1, f. 3 | Day, Jeremiah to Nathanael Emmons | 1822 May 29 |
| b. 1, f. 4 | Day, Jeremiah to Caleb Fisher | 1822 June 11 |
| b. 1, f. 5 | Emmons, Nathanael to Alexander Metcalf Fisher Letter of advice for Fisher's conduct at Yale. | 1811 January 2 |
| b. 1, f. 6 | Fisher, Alexander Metcalf to Jeremiah Day | 1815 September 22 |
| b. 1, f. 7-18 | Fisher, Alexander Metcalf to Caleb and Sarah Fisher Fifty-seven letters sent to his parents from New Haven, Connecticut, and from Andover, Massachusetts, discussing his education, work as tutor and professor, health, financial needs, and family news. | 1809–1821 |
| b. 1, f. 19 | Fisher, Alexander Metcalf to Nancy Fisher Seven letters to his sister regarding her education, reading, and letter writing. | 1818–1821 |
| b. 1, f. 20 | Fisher, Alexander Metcalf to James Luce Kingsley Includes a letter from aboard ship Albion, possibly Fisher's last extant correspondence. | 1815, 1822 |
| b. 1, f. 21 | Fisher, Alexander Metcalf to Princeton University Letter draft regarding a position offer at Princeton. | 1821 October 19 |
| b. 1, f. 22 | Fisher, Alexander Metcalf to unidentified editors, drafts | undated |
| b. 1, f. 23 | Fisher, Alexander Metcalf to unidentified correspondent | 1820 March 23 |
| b. 1, f. 24 | Kingsley, James Luce to Caleb Fisher Two letters, including a transcription of a witness account of the Albion shipwreck. | 1822 |

Series II: Writings, 1803–1822*3.5 linear feet (13 boxes)*

Series II. contains holograph texts documenting Fisher's personal life, education, and academic work, in the form of diaries, article drafts, notebooks, commonplace books, lecture scripts, learning exercises, and school essays compiled during his primary schooling, collegiate education, and tenure as a Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at Yale College.

Groupings of unbound writings established by previous owners of the collection or library staff have been kept together during processing in 2018. Fragile volumes with deteriorated leather bindings are stored in separate boxes.

Organized into five subseries: Diaries, Scientific Articles, Lecture Scripts, Notes and Learning Exercises, and Other Writings. Files within subseries are arranged alphabetically.

| | | |
|----------------|--|------------------|
| | Diaries | 1813–1820 |
| b. 2, f. 25 | "Brief heads of the plans begun & accomplished during 4 days past" Short diary recorded in September 1815, followed by a twenty-four page commentary added in May 1817 on his mental health state during the recording of the original entry two years prior. | 1815–1817 |
| b. 2, f. 26 | Personal notes Formerly identified by owners of the collection or library staff as "Papers written during derangement". | circa 1815 |
| b. 2, f. 27-29 | Religious diaries <i>3 Volumes</i> | 1815–1819 |
| b. 2, f. 30 | Travel diary through Vermont | 1813 October 4 |
| b. 2, f. 31 | Travel diary from Litchfield, Connecticut, to Schenectady, New York | 1818 September |
| b. 2, f. 32 | Travel diary through Rhode Island and Connecticut | circa 1818 |
| b. 2, f. 33 | Travel diary "Journal to Philadelphia" | circa 1820 |
| | Scientific Articles | 1818–1821 |
| b. 3, f. 34 | Annotations to the article "The Compressibility of Water" by Jacob Perkins Published in the <i>American Journal of Science and Arts</i> 3, no.2 (May 1821). | 1821 |
| b. 3, f. 35-37 | "Essay on musical temperament" Published in the <i>American Journal of Science and Arts</i> 1 (1819). | circa 1818 |
| b. 3, f. 38 | Letters to the editors of <i>The Microscope</i> | 1820 and undated |
| b. 12 | Notebook containing reviews and other texts Bound manuscript containing solutions to mathematical problems published in contemporary journals, commentaries on the Gospels, solar eclipse calculations, notes titled "An improved method for solving some cases of maxima and minima" possibly relating to Fisher's published article on function extrema, and reviews of Jeremiah Day's <i>A course of mathematics</i> (published in <i>Analectic Magazine</i> IX (June 1817)) and of <i>Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Science</i> . | circa 1817-1821 |

Scientific Articles (continued)

| | | |
|----------------|---|-----------------|
| b. 3, f. 39 | "Observations con[cerning] the management of algebraical problems" Accompanied by a letter to Yale professor and editor of the <i>American Journal of Science and Arts</i> Benjamin Silliman, in Fisher's hand, forwarding a Diophantine problem solution by professor Theodore Strong of Hamilton College, and by various mathematical equations. | undated |
| b. 3, f. 40 | "Observations on the comet of 1819" | [1819] |
| b. 3, f. 41 | "On maxima & minima of functions of two variable quantities" Published in the <i>American Journal of Science and Arts</i> 5, no. 1 (1822). | 1818 August |
| b. 3, f. 42 | "On some recent improvements in the construction of the printing press" Published in the <i>American Journal of Science and Arts</i> 3, no.2 (1821). | circa 1821 |
| b. 3, f. 43 | "Remarks on Dr. Enfield's Institutes of Natural Philosophy" Published in the <i>American Journal of Science and Arts</i> 3, no.1 (1821). | circa 1820 |
| b. 3, f. 44 | Review of William Tudor's <i>Letters on the Eastern States</i> | circa 1821 |
| | Lecture Scripts The lectures in natural philosophy comprise forty sequential volumes, each containing the script of a lecture on the recto, with citations on the verso. Topics covered include gravitation, motion, pneumatics, electricity, optics, and magnetism. | circa 1818-1822 |
| b. 3, f. 45 | Addresses to the Connecticut Academy [of Arts and Science] and to the Yale College junior class | 1818 |
| b. 3, f. 46 | "Lectures on magnetism etc" | undated |
| b. 4, f. 47-59 | Lectures in natural philosophy, no. I-XIII | circa 1818-1822 |
| b. 5, f. 60-74 | Lectures in natural philosophy, no. XIV-XXVIII | circa 1818-1822 |
| b. 6, f. 75-86 | Lectures in natural philosophy, no. XXIX-XL | circa 1818-1822 |
| | Notes and Learning Exercises Topical groupings may include notes from lectures, sermons, and publications; calculations; and short essays in response to question prompts. Arranged alphabetically by title, when present, or by discipline. | 1803-1822 |
| b. 6, f. 87 | Astronomy | undated |
| b. 6, f. 88 | Bibliographies of scientific publications | circa 1822 |
| b. 13 | Chemistry (1 of 2) First of two volumes covering 113 lectures attended by Fisher starting in 1812. | circa 1812-1814 |
| b. 14 | Chemistry (2 of 2) Second of two volumes covering 113 lectures attended by Fisher starting in 1812. The second volume also contains transcriptions of Timothy Dwight's farewell address to the senior class of Yale College (circa 1814) and of remarks by Dwight on William Paley's philosophy. | circa 1812-1814 |

Notes and Learning Exercises (continued)

| | | |
|------------------|--|-------------------------|
| b. 6, f. 89 | "A collection of phrases, containing many of the most common idiomatic expressions in the Latin language" | undated |
| b. 15 | "A commonplace book according to Locke's method" | 1817 June |
| b. 6, f. 90 | "Discussions on religion" Includes commentaries on theological works by William Paley and Charles Leslie. | undated |
| b. 6, f. 91 | Eclipse calculations and astronomical observations | circa 1819-1820 |
| b. 6, f. 92 | Education | undated |
| b. 6, f. 93 | Electricity | undated |
| b. 7, f. 94 | "Facts and Sentiments on select topics" | undated |
| b. 7, f. 95 | French grammar | undated |
| b. 7, f. 96 | Geography | undated |
| b. 7, f. 97 | Government and society | 1810, 1811, and undated |
| b. 7, f. 98 | "Heads of directions for accurate and expressive singing" | undated |
| b. 7, f. 99 | "Heads of sermons" Notes on sermons delivered by Mr. Fitch, Mr. Beecher, Mr. Taylor, and Dr. Worcester. | 1818-1819 |
| b. 7, f. 100-102 | Hebrew grammar | circa 1810 |
| b. 7, f. 103 | Italian grammar | undated |
| b. 7, f. 104 | Latin orations | 1812 and undated |
| b. 7, f. 105 | Mathematics | undated |
| b. 7, f. 106 | Mechanics | undated |
| b. 7, f. 107 | "Miscellaneous hints on improvements in the arts" | undated |
| b. 7, f. 108 | "Miscellaneous remarks on Locke's essay" | 1816 October |
| b. 7, f. 109 | Musical theory commonplace book | undated |
| b. 7, f. 110 | Music notations | undated |
| b. 7, f. 111-112 | Natural philosophy | undated |
| b. 7, f. 113 | "Notes from Biot's Magnetism" | undated |
| b. 7, f. 114 | Notes in shorthand | undated |
| b. 7, f. 115 | Notes, miscellaneous | undated |

Notes and Learning Exercises (continued)

| | | |
|------------------|--|------------------|
| b. 16 | Notebook, miscellaneous Containing lecture notes, passages from theological and scholarly works, and other notes, including twenty pages titled "Public lectures on Christian theology by Dr. Woods" (presumably Leonard Woods (1774-1854), professor at Andover Theological Seminary), and "State of the philosophical apparatus of Yale College May 27, 1818", a seven page account of the scientific equipment procured by Yale College between 1769 and 1819 with their prices in pounds. | circa 1814-1819 |
| b. 8, f. 116-118 | "On language" | undated |
| b. 8, f. 119 | "On the origins of springs" | 1812 July |
| b. 8, f. 120 | Optics | undated |
| b. 8, f. 121 | Physical sciences commonplace book | undated |
| b. 8, f. 122-123 | "A practical arithmetic in manuscript" <i>2 Volumes</i> | 1805-1806 |
| b. 17 | "A practical arithmetic in manuscript" | 1807 |
| b. 8, f. 124 | "Remarks on tunes in the Lock Hospital" | undated |
| b. 8, f. 125 | Sketch of laboratory apparatus | undated |
| b. 8, f. 126 | Sunspot calculations | undated |
| b. 8, f. 127-130 | Theology, essays | undated |
| b. 8, f. 131-132 | Theology, notes | undated |
| b. 8, f. 133 | "What are the fundamental rules of interpretation of Scriptures?", thesis for examination | 1815 September |
| b. 8, f. 134 | Writing exercise | 1803 |
| | Other Writings | 1820 and undated |
| b. 8, f. 135 | By-laws of the Harmonic Society of New Haven County | 1820 |
| b. 8, f. 136 | "The death of Dr. B." | undated |
| b. 8, f. 137 | "Journey to the moon or some of the planets", fiction piece | undated |

Series III: Personal and Family Papers, 1813–1898*1.88 linear feet (2 boxes + 1 art)*

Series III. holds manuscript and printed items relating to Fisher, his fiancé Catharine Esther Beecher, and his siblings Willard, Nancy, and Sally. Of note are clippings, eulogies, and poems in memory of Fisher, and records of his Yale College graduation, as well as a copper plate engraved with a portrait of Fisher by Simeon Smith Jocelyn.

Arranged alphabetically by document type.

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------|
| b. 9, f. 138 | Almanac by Willard Fisher, manuscript | 1820, 1824 |
| b. 9, f. 139 | Article by D. Olmstead, "Anecdotes of Prof. Fisher", manuscript Published in <i>The New Englander</i> , no. IV (October 1843) as "Reminiscences of Alexander Metcalf Fisher". | undated |
| b. 9, f. 140 | Clippings concerning the death of Alexander Metcalf Fisher | [1822] |
| b. 9, f. 141 | Clippings concerning the death of Catharine Esther Beecher | 1878 |
| b. 9, f. 142 | Eclipse projections by Willard Fisher, manuscript | circa 1830 |
| b. 9, f. 143 | Manuscript volume "Miscellaneous articles relating to the history, character & death of Prof. Fisher" Includes an extract from a sermon by Nathanael Emmons preached on 1822 June 9, songs from Fisher's funerals, tombstone inscriptions, poems, and transcriptions of two letters recounting the shipwreck of the Albion. | undated |
| b. 9, f. 144 | Minutes of two meetings [of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, New Haven Chapter?] | circa 1880-1890 |
| b. 9, f. 145 | Obituary for Alexander Metcalf Fisher Manuscript copy of text published in the <i>Christian Herald</i> and <i>Seaman's Magazine</i> . | undated |
| b. 9, f. 146 | Obituary notice for Nancy Fisher Kidder | 1898 |
| b. 9, f. 147 | Poems by Catharine Esther Beecher addressed to Sally Fisher, manuscript | undated |
| b. 9, f. 148 | Poem by [?] Colton, "To the memory of Prof. Fisher", manuscript | 1823 |
| b. 9, f. 149 | Poem "To the memory of A.M. Fisher", manuscript | undated |
| b. 9, f. 152 | Portrait of Alexander Metcalf Fisher, copper plate engraving Engraving on copper plate by Simeon Smith Jocelyn, based on a painting by Samuel Finley Breese Morse. Caption "Prof. Alex. M. Fisher of Y. Coll. Lost in the Albion April 22nd 1822". 23 x 14 cm. | after 1822 |
| b. 11 (Art) | Trunk Late 18th-century or 19th-century dome-top wood trunk covered in decorative paper. 23 (height) x 44 (width) x 26 (depth) cm. Previously contained manuscripts donated as part of the collection in 1921. | unknown |
| b. 10 (Oversize), f. 153 | Wallpaper from the Fisher homestead in Franklin, Massachusetts | undated |
| b. 9, f. 150 | Yale College diploma of Alexander Metcalf Fisher, B.A. | 1813 |

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|------------------|
| b. 9, f. 151 | Yale College "Scheme of the exercises, at the public commencement", printed handbill | 1813 September 1 |
| b. 10 (Oversize), f. 154 | Yale College student list, printed handbill Manuscript note in ink on verso: "Papers written during derangement." The handbill may have previously been used as a wrapper for the diary and notes in Series II., Box 2, Folders 25-26. | circa 1815 |

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.

Yale College (1718-1887) -- Students

Subjects

College students -- Connecticut -- New Haven
College students -- Massachusetts -- Andover
College teachers -- Connecticut -- New Haven
College teachers -- Religious life -- Connecticut -- New Haven
Physics -- Study and teaching -- Connecticut -- New Haven

Contributors

Fisher, Alexander Metcalf, 1794-1822
Jocelyn, Simeon Smith, 1799-1879

Geographic Names

New Haven (Conn.) -- Social life and customs -- 19th century

Genres / Formats

Commonplace books -- United States -- 19th century
Copper engravings (visual works) -- United States -- 19th century
Diaries -- United States -- 19th century
Lectures -- Connecticut -- New Haven -- 19th century

Occupations

College teachers -- Connecticut -- New Haven -- 19th century

Names

Beecher, Catharine Esther, 1800-1878
Beecher, Edward, 1803-1895
Day, Jeremiah, 1773-1867
Emmons, Nathanael, 1745-1840
Fisher, Alexander Metcalf, 1794-1822
Fisher, Caleb, 1768-1862
Fisher, Sarah Cushing, 1771-1835
Fisher, Willard, 1796-1866

Corporate Bodies

Andover Theological Seminary -- Students
Yale College (1718-1887) -- Faculty
Yale College (1718-1887) -- Religion