

# Guide to the Henry Phelps Johnston Papers

MS 1400



compiled by Diane Kaplan and John Espy

April 1986

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New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	3
Conditions Governing Access .....	3
Conditions Governing Use .....	4
Preferred Citation .....	4
Biographical / Historical .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
Selected Search Terms .....	7

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 1400

**CREATOR:** Johnston, Henry Phelps, 1842-1923

**TITLE:** Henry Phelps Johnston papers

**DATES:** 1858-1882

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 0.25 linear feet (1 box)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The papers consist of correspondence, a diary, printed material, and miscellaneous papers documenting the Civil War activities of Henry Phelps Johnston.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1400>

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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.ms.1400>.

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 materials are open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

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## Preferred Citation

Henry Phelps Johnston Papers (MS 1400), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

Henry Phelps Johnston, B.A. 1862.

Born April 19, 1842, in Trebizond, Turkey.

Died February 28, 1923, in Middletown, Conn.

Henry Phelps Johnston was born April 19, 1842, at Trebizond, Turkey, where his parents were stationed as missionaries of the American Board. His father, the Rev. Thomas Pinckney Johnston, was the son of William Smiley and Mary Hall Johnston, and a descendant of Robert Johnston, who lived in Iredell County, N.C. After coming to this country from Scotland. He was graduated from the University of North Carolina with the degree of B.A. in 1828. His wife was Marianne Cassandra Howe, daughter of Curtis Howe and Sibley Phelps. She traced her ancestry to John Howe, who came to Swanton, Vt., from London in 1650. The Rev. Thomas Buckingham, who was one of the founders of Yale, was another ancestor of Henry P. Johnston.

The latter received his preparatory training at the Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven, where his mother then resided. In his Sophomore year at Yale he was awarded a second prize in English composition and a second prize for excellence in declamation. He was the first president of Brothers in Unity in his Senior year.

In August, 1862, he enlisted in the 15th Connecticut Volunteers. He was made an Orderly Sergeant shortly afterwards and was subsequently promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant. He served throughout the Civil War, mainly in Virginia and North Carolina. He was in the battle of Fredericksburg in 1862 and at the siege of Suffolk in 1863, and took part in Dix's expedition toward Richmond. He was in the battle near Kingston, N.C., in 1865, after which he marched north with Sherman's Army. During the last year of the war he was transferred to the Signal Corps. At the time when he was given his discharge in July, 1865, he was on the staff of Major General William B. Hazen. He attended the Yale School of Law from 1865 to 1867 and then went to New York City, where he practiced independently for a short time after his admission to the bar. Until 1868 he also taught at a school at Washington Heights, New York City. He was then engaged in newspaper work for some years, being connected at various times with the New York sun, the Times, and the Christian Union (now the Outlook), and holding the position of assistant editor of the New York Observer during 1878-79. During this period he also devoted much time to the study of American history, which led to original investigations and the writing of a number of monographs on historical subjects. In December, 1897, he became instructor in history at the College of the City of New York, with which institution he was actively connected until 1916. He was made head of the department of history in 1883, and held that position until September 1, 1916, when he became professor emeritus. Through his efforts a large and valuable collection of manuscripts, maps, relics, etc., was acquired for the History Museum of the college, of which he was curator from 1902 to 1916. In 1912 a portrait of him was presented to the College by its alumni. Yale conferred the honorary degree of M.A. Upton Professor Johnston in 1889. His monographs on American history include: *The Campaign of 1776 around New York and Brooklyn*, *Observations on Judge Jones' Loyalist History of the American Revolution*, *The Yorktown Campaign*, *Yale in the Revolution*, *Connecticut in the Revolution*, *Correspondence and Published Papers of John Jay*, *The Battle of Harlet*

*Heights, September 16, 1776, The Origin and Development of Popular Government in America, The Storming of Stony Point on the Hudson, and Nathan Hale, 1776.* This last work first appeared in 1901; in 1914 a revised and enlarged edition was published by the Yale University Press. Professor Johnston was associate editor of the *Magazine of American History* in 1882. He had lectured frequently and delivered many addresses on historical subjects. He was a member of the New York and Connecticut Historical societies and of the Worcester Antiquarian Society.

He died at the Middlesex Hospital in Middletown, Conn., February 28, 1923, from pneumonia. Interment was in Hadlyme, where he had been living since 1917.

He was married October 26, 1871, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Elizabeth Kirtland, daughter of Joseph and Maria (Selden) Holmes, who survives him with three of their four sons, Henry Selden, '96, John Holmes, '99 S., and Donald Kent, '03. Their eldest son, Thomas Pinckney, died in childhood. Professor Johnston was a brother of William C. Johnston, '60, and an uncle of James Walker, '94 S., and Curtis H. Walker, '99.

-*Yale University Obituary Record*, No.22, 1923, pp. 627-29

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## Scope and Contents

The Henry Phelps Johnston Papers include correspondence, a diary, printed material, and miscellaneous papers of Henry Phelps Johnston. The earliest papers date from Johnston's freshman year at Yale, but the bulk of the material documents Johnston's military service during the Civil War with the 15th Connecticut Volunteers and the Signal Corps. Johnston wrote regularly to his mother and sisters, and his letters in 1862 and 1863 describe the daily routine of camp life in Virginia. Letters from 1864 and 1865, after Johnston was promoted to a second lieutenancy, portray encounters with rebel troops in North Carolina and a meeting with his brother Frontis, a preacher in Lexington, North Carolina. A field diary (folder 7) documents Johnston's movements at the end of the war and his return to New Haven. Letters to Johnston's father (folder 4) describe his teaching position at the College of the City of New York. Johnston's incoming correspondence includes letters from Yale classmates: Frederic Adams, Melville Cox Day, Daniel Henry Chamberlain, Merritt Cicero Page, and Henry Hamlin Stebbins. Classmates relay information about friends, Yale activities, and their own career choices. There are also letter from Johnston's father, written from Mississippi.

The papers were donated to the Yale Library by Henry S. Johnston in 1942 and 1943. Related papers of Johnston's mother and sisters will be found in the Johnston-Walker Family Papers, MS 949.

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## Collection Contents

b. 1, f. 1 - 4      Outgoing correspondence      1861-65, 1869,  
1879-82  
A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives.  
Contact Manuscripts and Archives at [beinecke.library@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu) to request access  
to the digital copy.

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### Incoming Correspondence

b. 1, f. 5	Adams, Frederic	1863-67
b. 1, f. 5	Chamberlain, Daniel Henry	1863
b. 1, f. 5	Day, Melville Cox	1863, 1866
b. 1, f. 5	Johnston, Thomas Pinckney	1864-65
b. 1, f. 5	Johnston, William Curtis	1861
b. 1, f. 6	Morse, Richard Cary	1863-64, undated
b. 1, f. 6	Page, Merritt Cicero	1863-64
b. 1, f. 6	Stebbins, Henry Hamlin	1863-65
b. 1, f. 6	Yale College	1858
b. 1, f. 6	Unidentified	undated
b. 1, f. 7	Field Diary	1865
b. 1, f. 7	Printed volume, <i>Soldier's Hymns</i>	undated
b. 1, f. 7	Miscellaneous Civil War papers	1864-65

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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.

### **Geographic Names**

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

### **Genres / Formats**

Diaries

### **Occupations**

Soldiers

### **Names**

Johnston, Henry Phelps, 1842-1923

### **Families**

Johnston family

Walker family

### **Corporate Bodies**

United States. Army. Connecticut Volunteers,  
15th (1861-1865)

Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1862