

Guide to the Roger Minott Sherman Papers

MS 1099



compiled by Bruce P. Stark and staff of Manuscripts and Archives

November 1982

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 1099

CREATOR: Sherman, Roger M. (Roger Minott), 1773-1844

TITLE: Roger Minott Sherman papers

DATES: 1795-1879

BULK DATES: 1795-1846

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.5 linear feet

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Chiefly correspondence (1800-1842) on legal matters, with some references to politics. The principal writers are Theron Beach, Oliver D. Cooke, Mason Cogswell, William W. Ellsworth, Josiah Stebbins, Eli Tod, Gideon Tomlinson, and Frederick Wolcott. Also in the papers is Sherman's declaration of religious belief (1795) and bills and receipts (1811-1846). An addition to the papers contains genealogical information and writings.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1099>

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.1099>.

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

The Roger Minott Sherman Papers were purchased in 1940. Gift of Gelman Library, George Washington University, 2006.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Roger Minott Sherman Papers. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Roger Minott Sherman was born in Woburn, Massachusetts, on May 22, 1773. He was the youngest of six children of the Rev. Josiah Sherman (Princeton College 1754), of that town, who was a brother of the distinguished Roger Sherman; and his mother was Martha, daughter of the Hon. James and Elizabeth (Merrick) Minott, of Concord, Massachusetts. His eldest sister married the Rev. Justus Mitchell (Yale 1776). In his infancy his father removed to Milford, and thence to Goshen, Connecticut; in the summer of 1789 he accepted a call to the church in Woodbridge, Connecticut, but died about a month after his son entered College, at the opening of the Sophomore year.

By this even the son was thrown upon his own resources, except so far as his uncle, for whom he was named, assisted him. Through his Sophomore year he boarded at his uncle's house; and for the later years of his College course he supported himself by teaching in New Haven.

After graduation he began the study of law in Windsor, under the direction of the Hon. Oliver Ellsworth, and at the same time taught an academy. After about two years he removed to Litchfield, where he continued his studies with the Hon. Tapping Reeve, while teaching a common school.

In February, 1795, he was elected a Tutor in College, and on March 12 began his duties, succeeding James Gould, of the Class of 1791, in the instruction of the Sophomore Class, and at the same time continuing the study of law with the Hon. Simeon Baldwin (Yale 1781). He united with the church in Yale College by profession of his faith on May 1, 1796, and ever after made the advancement of the interests of religion a prime object.

He was admitted to the bar in New Haven early in 1796, and in May of that year resigned his tutorship and settled in the profession of the law in Norwalk, Connecticut.

On December 13, 1796, he married Elizabeth (or Betsy) daughter of Dr. and Colonel William Gould, formerly of Branford, but at that time of New Haven, and sister of Dr. Orchard Gould (Yale 1783) and of Judge James Gould (Yale 1791).

His eminence in his profession was early acknowledged, and his influence exerted in other relations. He represented the town in the General Assembly in the two sessions of 1798.

In 1807 he removed to Fairfield, in the same county, where the principal courts were at that time held, and where he resided until his death.

He continued at the bar for forty-three years, and his business as an advocate was very extensive.

It is believed that he argued more causes than any other lawyer who practiced in Connecticut during the first half of the nineteenth century. He did comparatively little office-business, but devoted his time to the trial of causes in court, and he also for more than twenty-five years attended the Legislature as an advocate in cases pending before that body. He was deeply interested in the administration of justice as provided for by legislative enactment, and many of the statutes of the State in the Department of municipal law during his active life were drawn up and their passage procured by him.

In 1814 he was elected to the Governor's Council, and continued in that office until May, 1818, when the constitution of the State was altered. During this time he declined a nomination to the United States Congress. In 1814 he was appointed a delegate to the Hartford Convention, in the proceedings of which he took an active part. He had been actively interested also in the steps preliminary to the call of the Convention, and was the author of the Report to the Connecticut Legislature, of the Committee which had recommended the appointment of delegates.

After the death of President Dwight in 1817 he was considered by some as a candidate for the presidency of Yale.

In 1829 the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred on him by the Corporation of Yale College. He was a representative of Fairfield in the General Assembly in 1825 and 1838.

In May, 1839, he was appointed a Judge of the Superior Court and of the Supreme Court of Errors of Connecticut, but resigned in May, 1842, on account of ill health. His legal knowledge, his thoroughness and independence, and his inflexible integrity contributed to make his tenure of this office highly successful.

During the last years of his life he suffered from acute disease, and consequently lived in retirement, though his intellectual powers remained unimpaired.

In December, 1844, he was seized with more severe illness, and declined rapidly until his death, in Fairfield, on December 30, in his 72nd year. The discourse preached at his funeral by his pastor, the Rev. Lyman H. Atwater (Yale 1831), was afterwards published. Judge Sherman had been elected deacon in the church in Fairfield in 1810, but resigned before his death.

His widow died in Fairfield, after years of feeble health, on August 3, 1848, in her 75th year.

Their only children were twin sons, both of extraordinary promise, whose health failed early.

Mrs. Sherman's will, made in pursuance of her husband's, bequeathed their homestead (which was, when built, the finest home in town), with an endowment fund to the First Ecclesiastical Society of Fairfield. Among other public bequests was one of \$4,000 to Yale College. The value of the entire estate was over \$71,000.

There is no doubt that Mr. Sherman's rank as a lawyer was among the very first in the country,--to be compared with that of Jeremiah Mason and Daniel Webster.

He published:

1. Letter to the Hon. Elisha Phelps, Controller of Public Accounts, Hartford, Conn., dated Fairfield, March 22, 1832. 1 sheet.

On the banking system of the state.

2. Letters to the Honourable Levi Woodbury, Secretary of the Treasury of the United States. New-York, 1837. 8°, pp. 24.

Anonymous. Recommending the establishment of a national bank.

His opinions as Judge are included in the Connecticut Reports (vols. 13 and 14). He uniformly declined all invitations for the delivery of public addresses.

His correspondence and other private papers are deposited in the rooms of the County Historical Society in Fairfield.

A copy of his portrait, painted by Jocelyn in 1840, belongs to the College,--the original still hanging in his mansion in Fairfield.

(Taken from Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College*, Vol. V. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), pp. 41-45).

Scope and Contents

The Roger Minott Sherman Papers are found in one box (11 folders). The collection contains an acknowledgement of religious faith, correspondence, and bills and receipts.

The Papers primarily contain letters written to Sherman, mostly concerning legal matters. Correspondents include Josiah Stebbins (1766-1829), Theron Beach, Frederick Wolcott (1767-1837), Oliver D. Cooke (1766-1833), and Governors Gideon Tomlinson (1780-1854), and William W. Ellsworth (1791-1868).

An 1800 letter from Maine lawyer Josiah Stebbins discusses the 1800 presidential election and the writer's fears for the future should "those who scoff at religion, rage at Ministers, and make a mock of God" triumph. Roger Minott Sherman's biographical sketch contains little reference to his sons. Two 1825 letters, however, from Eli Todd and Mason Cogswell indicate that one son was committed to the "Retreat for the Insane" in Hartford.

The Papers do give some indication of the scope of Sherman's legal career, but much fuller documentation exists in other collections. Among those containing significant Roger Minott Sherman correspondence are the Baldwin Family Papers (MS 55), David Daggett Papers (MS 162), Day Family Papers (MS 176), Evarts Family Papers (MS 200), Hillhouse Family Papers (MS 282), and Silliman Family Papers (MS 450).

The Roger Minott Sherman Papers were purchased in 1940.

Collection Contents

Original accession

b. 1, f. 1	Roger Minott Sherman: declaration of religious belief	1795
Correspondence		
b. 1, f. 2	1800, 1807	
b. 1, f. 3	1815-1819	
b. 1, f. 4	1820-1821	
b. 1, f. 5	1822-1826	
b. 1, f. 6	1827-1830	
b. 1, f. 7	1831-1834	
b. 1, f. 8	1835, 1842, n.d.	
Bills and receipts		
b. 1, f. 9	1811-1821	
b. 1, f. 10	1823-1832	
b. 1, f. 11	1838-1846, 1879	

Accession 2006-M-107: Additional Material, 1836-1868

b. 1, f. 1	Correspondence to Charles Sherman from Roger Sherman re genealogy	1836 November 11
b. 1, f. 2	Unpublished manuscript, "The Medieval Epic"	undated
b. 1, f. 3	Unpublished manuscript, "Under the Hemlocks"	undated
b. 1, f. 4	Notebook, poetry, observations, finances	1867, 1868
b. 1, f. 5	Proverbs	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

Law
Lawyers

Geographic Names

United States -- Politics and government -- 19th
century
United States -- Religion

Occupations

Politicians

Names

Beach, Theron
Cogswell, Mason Fitch, 1761-1830
Cooke, Oliver Dudley, 1766-1833
Ellsworth, William Wolcott, 1791-1868
Sherman, Roger M. (Roger Minott), 1773-1844
Stebbins, Josiah, 1766-1829
Todd, Eli, 1769-1833
Wolcott, Frederick, 1767-1837
Wolcott, Tomlinson