

Guide to the John William Sterling Papers

MS 1097



compiled by Daniel Hartwig and Matthew Gorham

March 2009

Yale University Library
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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
Biographical / Historical	4
Scope and Contents	5
Arrangement	5
Collection Contents	6
Inventory: John William Sterling Papers, 1858-1918	6
Accession 2013-M-015: Additional Material, 1803-1918	7
Selected Search Terms	8

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 1097

CREATOR: Sterling, John William, 1844-1918

TITLE: John William Sterling papers

DATES: 1803-1918

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2 linear feet (5 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers largely consist of journals (1853-1864) begun in Sterling's home in Stratford, Connecticut and include three of his years at Yale College, with loose sheets for the period from April to July 1860, his freshman year. Also included are a commonplace book and miscellaneous items, including a translation of a Greek reader made in 1858, Yale memorabilia, correspondence, certificates, legal and financial documents, speeches, writings, photographs, and a memorial scrapbook.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1097>

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.1097>.

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

Accession 1986-M-052 transferred to the Bunnell Family Papers (MS 1149). Accession 2013-M-015 gift of Shirley Bunnell Dawson, 2012.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

John William Sterling Papers (MS 1097). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

John William Sterling was the son of John William Sterling, a sea captain, and Catharine Tomlinson (Plant) Sterling, and was born May 12, 1844, in Stratford, Conn. His father followed the sea from 1810 to 1835; his splendid seamanship was in request on both sides of the Atlantic. He was the son of David and Deborah (Strong) Sterling, a grandson of Abijah Sterling, who held a Captain's commission in the Revolution, and a descendant of William Sterling, who came from England and settled at Bradford or Haverhill, Mass. Catharine Plant Sterling's parents were David and Catharine (Tomlinson) Plant. David Plant graduated at Yale in 1804 and afterwards studied at the Litchfield Law School. In 1819 and 1820 he was Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives; and in 1821 he was elected to the State Senate, and was twice reelected. He was Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut from 1823 to 1827, and during the next two years was a member of Congress. His father, Solomon Plant, was a soldier in the French War of 1760. Among his ancestors was John Plant, who came with Governor Saltonstall to Branford, Conn.

He was prepared for college at the Stratford Academy. In college he was a member of Brothers in Unity, being its president Senior year, and of Phi Beta Kappa. He won a third prize in declamation Sophomore year and a Townsend Premium Senior year. He received an oration appointment at Junior Exhibition and at Commencement, and spoke on both occasions.

The year after graduation was devoted to a course of general reading in the Yale Graduate School. He then entered the Columbia Law School, where he graduated as valedictorian in May 1867. He was then admitted to the bar of New York State, and from August 1867 to May 1, 1868, was in the law offices of David Dudley Field and Dudley Field in New York City, after which he became managing clerk in the office of James K. Hill. From January 1870, until the fall of 1873 he was a partner in the firm of Field & Shearman. In 1873 he went into partnership with Thomas G. Shearman under the name of Shearman & Sterling. After the death of Mr. Shearman in 1900, he became senior member of the firm, his partners being John A. Garver (B.A. 1875, LL.B. Columbia 1877) and James M. Beck, at one time Assistant Attorney-General of the United States. Mr. Sterling was recognized as one of the leading corporation lawyers in the country. He had a thorough

knowledge of railroad finance and was' an adviser to financiers, and an executor and trustee of large estates. He was a member of the New England Society, the American Arts Society, and the Congregational Church of Stratford.

He died suddenly, of heart failure, July 5,1918, at the castle of Lord Mount Stephen, in Grand Metis, Que., Canada, where it had been his custom to spend an annual vacation enjoying the fishing. Interment was in Woodlawn Cemetery. His bequest of \$15,000,000 to Yale is the largest and most important gift in the history of the institution. The Yale Corporation at its first meeting after his death adopted the following resolution: "Voted, to place on record and to extend to the surviving sisters and to the Trustees of the late John W. Sterling, Esq., of the Class of 1864, Yale College, an expression of the President and Fellows' appreciation of his munificent bequest 'to the use and for the benefit of Yale University'---" the largest and most important gift in the history of the institution---and of the deep affection for his alma mater which it manifested, and to assure them of the desire of the President and Fellows to cooperate in full measure in carrying out the terms of the bequest so as to create the most enduring and useful memorials to Mr. Sterling." The Corporation, with the approval of the Trustees, has decided that a Sterling Memorial Library shall constitute the principal memorial to Mr. Sterling at the University.

[Taken from the *Yale College Obituary Record*]

Scope and Contents

The papers largely consist of journals (1853-1864) begun in Sterling's home in Stratford, Connecticut and include three of his years at Yale College, with loose sheets for the period from April to July 1860, his freshman year. Also included are a commonplace book and miscellaneous items, including a translation of a Greek reader made in 1858, Yale memorabilia, correspondence, certificates, legal and financial documents, speeches, writings, photographs, and a memorial scrapbook.

Arrangement

The materials are arranged by accession.

Collection Contents

Inventory: John William Sterling Papers, 1858-1918

0.5 linear feet

b. 1, f. 1	ALS from John W. Sterling to Catherine (Sterling) Bunnell, Timothy Dwight, and John W. Grimmer	1828-1916
b. 1, f. 2	Twenty ALS from John Sterling to James Stillman and one ALS to the law firm to Woodward and Stillman	1876
b. 1, f. 3	Letters to John W. Sterling	1889-1896
b. 1, f. 4	ALS from Arthur T. Hadley to Catherine (Sterling) Bunnell	1918
b. 1, f. 5	Juvenilia: Translation of Anthon's Jacob's Greek grammar	1858
b. 1, f. 6	Journal	1853 January 1-1860 July 19
b. 1, f. 7	Journal	1861 October 5 -1864 October 14
b. 1, f. 8	Journal [typed transcription, electrostatic copy]	1864 November 9 - 1872 March 3
b. 1, f. 9	Commonplace book	undated
b. 1, f. 10	Yale College memorabilia	1863-1864, undated
b. 1, f. 11	National City Bank message of condolence	1918 July 16
b. 1, f. 12	Will clauses affecting Yale University	undated

Accession 2013-M-015: Additional Material, 1803-1918

This accession consists of John William Sterling's personal and family correspondence; legal documents; certificates; account book, 1843-1869; writings; speeches; biographical information; and photographs, including portraits of Sterling and other members of the Yale College Class of 1864, and a group photograph of Skull and Bones featuring Sterling.

b. 1, f. 1	Biographical information	1860-1866
b. 1, f. 2	Certificates	1839-1884
b. 1, f. 3-7	Correspondence	1843-1893
b. 1, f. 8	Ephemera	1863-1938
b. 2, f. 1	Ledger and financial documents	1839-1869
b. 2, f. 2	Legal documents	1803-1888
b. 2, f. 3	Speeches	1860-1874
b. 2, f. 4	Writings	1862-1863
b. 3, f. 1-4	Photographs	1864
b. 4	John William Sterling memorial scrapbook	1918

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

Stratford (Conn.)

Genres / Formats

Diaries

Names

Bunnell, Catherine
Sterling, John William, 1844-1918

Corporate Bodies

Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1864
Yale University -- Students