

Guide to the Morse Family Papers

MS 358



compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

July 1980

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 358

CREATOR: Morse family

TITLE: Morse Family Papers

DATES: 1779-1868

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 8 linear feet (21 boxes, 1 folio)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The principal figures in this collection are Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826) and his sons Samuel Finley Breese Morse (1791-1872) and Richard Cary Morse (1795-1868). More than half of the collection is made up of correspondence (1779-1868) among members of the family. Also included are legal and financial papers, sermons by Jedidiah and Richard Cary Morse, travel journals, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, printed matter, and photographs.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0358>

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.0358>.

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

Gift of the Morse family, 1943-1950. The papers of Richard Cary Morse were given by Mrs. Lawrence C. Wilkinson in 1976.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Morse Family Papers (MS 358). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Processing Information

This finding aid was revised in 2023 to address outdated and incomplete description. During that revision, description was changed in the four Biographical/historical summaries for Morse family members. Previous versions of this finding aid may be available. Please contact the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library for details. If you have questions or comments about these revisions, please contact the repository or the Archival and Manuscript Description Committee. For more information on reparative archival description at Yale, see [Yale's Statement on Harmful Language in Archival Description](#).

Biographical / Historical

Jedidiah Morse was born on August 23, 1761 in Woodstock, Connecticut. He graduated from Yale in 1783, and remained in New Haven studying theology until 1785, when he was licensed to preach. After a year of preaching and teaching school in Norwich, Connecticut, he returned to Yale as a tutor in 1786. He was ordained on November 9, 1786, and proceeded to Midway, Georgia, where he preached for five months. On April 30, 1789, Morse became the minister of the First Congregational Church of Charlestown, Massachusetts, where he remained for the next thirty years. On May 14, 1789, he married Elizabeth Ann Breese.

Throughout his career as a minister, Morse defended Orthodoxy against Arminianism and Unitarianism. As a member of the board of overseers of Harvard College, he opposed the election there in 1805 of Henry Ware as Hollis Professor of Divinity, because Ware, he felt, was not sufficiently orthodox. From 1805 to 1810, he edited the orthodox periodical *Panoplist*. In 1808 he helped found Andover Theological Seminary, and in 1809, Boston's Park Street Church. Despite his efforts, Unitarian defection occurred in his own church, and after a few years of friction, he submitted his request for dismissal in 1819.

Morse was active in Evangelism and missionary work. He helped found the New England Tract Society in 1814 and the American Bible Society in 1816. From 1811 to 1819, he served on the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He was most interested in the conditions of American Indians and the poor living on the Isle of Shoals. In the summer of 1820, the federal government commissioned him to study the Indians, and in 1822 he published a report of his findings.

He was a staunch Federalist, opposing republicanism and the prevalent "French influence." In 1801, he helped to found the Federalist periodical *The Mercury and New-England palladium*.

Morse is best known as the "Father of American geography." He wrote the first geography to come out of the United States: published in 1784, it was entitled *Geography made easy* and it ran to 25 editions in his lifetime alone. He later expanded this work; both it and his other geographies became popular here and abroad, securing a virtual monopoly in America during his lifetime. In 1794 the University of Edinburgh presented him with its honorary S.T.D. degree.

Among his other publications were the article on America for the *Encyclopedia Brit[illegible]anica's* American edition (1790); a *History of New England*, (1804) with Elijah Parish, which led to a great literary controversy with Hannah Adams; and *Annals of the American Revolution* (1824). Morse returned to New Haven in 1819 to devote the remainder of his life to Indian affairs, writing, and preaching. He died on June 9, 1826.

Biographical / Historical

The eldest son of Jedidiah and Elizabeth Ann Morse, Samuel F. B. (Finley Breese) Morse, born on April 27, 1791 in Charlestown, Massachusetts, was an artist and inventor known also for his conservative political views.

Morse graduated from Yale in 1810, where he acquired a reputation for painting portraits on ivory. After graduation, he returned to Charlestown, where he met the painters Gilbert Stuart and Washington Alston. They approved of his work, and on July 13, 1811, Morse left for England with Allston, who was his mentor there for the following four years. While there, some of his paintings earned him recognition from members of the Royal Academy. In 1815, he returned to Boston and opened a studio, anxious to resuscitate the glories of the fifteenth century. But Boston was disappointing. Only portraits were in demand, and Morse had to travel widely in order to secure enough commissions to earn a living. He went to Concord, New Hampshire; New Haven; Charleston, South Carolina; and New York, where he remained for several years. His portraits were becoming popular, and he began to have some success. In 1826, he helped to found the National Academy of Design and became its first president, holding classes of instruction for aspiring painters and waging a pamphlet war against the rival American Academy of Fine Arts. He served as president until 1842.

In 1829, probably partially to escape the unpleasant memory of the deaths of his wife, father, and mother during the previous four years, Morse went to Europe to study, paint, and travel. He confined most of his travelling to Italy and Paris. While abroad, he cultivated friendships with James Fenimore Cooper and Horatio Greenough. After three years, he returned to New York, where he was appointed professor of painting and sculpture (later, also professor of the literature of the arts of design) in what is now New York University.

While returning from Europe in October of 1832, a fellow traveller named Charles Thomas Jackson showed Morse certain electrical apparatus he had acquired in Europe. Morse's interest in electricity, fostered earlier by the lectures and demonstrations of Benjamin Silliman and Jeremiah Day at Yale and James Freeman Dana before the New York Athenaeum, was renewed; the following twelve years were spent in perfecting a crude but efficient model of the telegraphic apparatus for which Morse is best known. With the aid of Leonard Dunnell Gale (1800-1883), Joseph Henry, and Alfred Vail, the invention was ready by 1837; but seven years of disappointment and often hunger followed before the funds necessary to construct a working model were supplied. The English and the French were uninterested, and it was not until 1843 that the United States Congress voted the funds (\$30,000) for an experimental line, to be built from Washington to Baltimore. On May 24, 1844, Morse sent the famous message "What hath God wrought!" over this line, and Vail in Baltimore returned it correctly. The telegraph was born.

Morse emerged as a leader of the anti-Catholic and Nativist movement in the 1830s and ran unsuccessfully for mayor of New York City in 1836 on the anti-immigration Nativist ticket. By the mid-19th century, Morse was a nationally known pro-slavery supporter. He wrote several tracts during the later half of his life, including: *Foreign conspiracy against the liberties of the United States* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835); *Imminent dangers to the free institutions of the United States through foreign immigration* (New York: E. B. Clayton, printer, 1835); and *An Argument on the ethical position of slavery in the social system, and its relation to the politics of the day* ([New York]: [Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge], 1863).

Biographical / Historical

The son of Jedidiah and Elizabeth Ann Morse, Sidney Edwards Morse was born on February 7, 1794 in Charlestown, Massachusetts. He received an A.B. degree from Yale in 1811, and from there went on to study law at Tapping Reeve's law school in Litchfield, Connecticut.

In 1813, he wrote a series of articles on the new southern states, to show "the injustice of erecting new states at the south", and in 1814, he published an explanation of the literary controversy between Hannah Adams and his father, Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826)

At his father's suggestion, Morse helped to establish the Boston religious paper, the *Recorder*; the first issue appeared on January 3, 1816. In 1817, he left the paper to study at Andover Theological Seminary, where he remained until 1820. He then moved to New York, where, with his brother Richard Cary Morse (1795-1868), he established another religious paper, the *New York observer*; the first issue appeared on May 17, 1823. Morse was senior editor and proprietor of this paper until 1858.

He assisted his father in revising the famous *Geography* of the elder Morse, and in 1822 the two edited a *New system of modern geography*. He made further advances in the field of geography when, in the 1830s, he and Henry A. Munson began working on a new method of printing maps: an engraving was made on wax, and from the engraving a plate to be inserted with the type. Morse had written atlases previously, the first being *An Atlas of the United States* in 1823, and the new method proved valuable in enabling him to print several more. The first production using the new method was his *Geographic atlas of the United States*, published in 1842.

He is credited with two other inventions. On October 3, 1817, he and his brother Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872) were granted a patent for a "flexible piston pump", and on July 17, 1866, he and his son were granted one for a "bathometer", to be used in deep-sea exploration.

On April 1, 1841, Morse married Catherine Livingston, with whom he had one son and one daughter. He died on December 23, 1871.

Biographical / Historical

Richard Cary Morse, the fourth son of Jedidiah (Y. C. 1783) and Elizabeth Ann Breeze Morse, was born in Charlestown, Mass., June 18, 1795.

He was fitted for college at Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., and after graduating, the youngest member of his class, and spending a year with President Dwight as his amanuensis, he returned to Andover, completed the course at the Theological Seminary and was licensed to preach by the Union Congregational Association of Massachusetts, in October, 1817. During the winter of 1817 and '18 he supplied the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church on John's Island, S.C. Returning North, he was for some time associated with his father in geographical labor, and in editing a universal gazetteer. In 1823 he removed to the city of New York and engaged with his elder brother, Sidney E. Morse (Y. C. 1811), in founding the *New York observer*, the oldest religious newspaper in that state. He remained associate proprietor and editor till 1858, and then retiring from active life, continued to reside in New York till 1863, when he removed to New Haven. He left for a tour of foreign travel in May, 1868 and died while on tour at Kissingen, Bavaria, Sept. 22, 1868.

Mr. Morse was married Sept. 30, 1828, to Miss Sarah Louisa Davis of Claverack, N. Y., who died in Paris, France, Oct. 17, 1851. Together they had ten children. Four sons were graduates of Yale College, in the classes of 1856, 1862, 1867, and 1868. Mr. Morse married again, Aug. 12, 1856, Miss Harriot Hinckley Messinger of Boston, who survived him.

Biographical information taken from *Yale College obituary record, 1859-1870*, pp. 302-303.

Scope and Contents

The principal figures in this collection are Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826) and his sons Samuel Finley Breese Morse (1791-1872) and Richard Cary Morse (1795-1868). More than half of the collection is made up of correspondence (1779-1868) among members of the family. Also included are legal and financial papers, sermons by Jedidiah and Richard Cary Morse, travel journals, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, printed matter, and photographs.

Collection Contents

Inventory, (1779-1868)-1940

8 linear feet (21 boxes, 1 folio)

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

Notes Regarding Box 20

The addition to the Morse Family Papers in Box 20 is the gift of Mrs. Lawrence C. Wilkinson, made in 1976. They comprise three journals, two in the form of letters, by Richard Cary Morse, correspondence with his wife and with other members of his family. Included also is a pamphlet written by his brother, Sidney Edwards Morse: *Memorabilia in the life of Jedidiah Morse, D.D.*, Boston, 1867. 24 p.

The Journal of 1838, from which the first four leaves are missing, records a tour of Europe made by Richard Morse to improve his health. He complains of a stomach ailment, but principally of depression. In his travels through England, France and Switzerland, he visits several doctors and describes their diagnoses and prescriptions. Indeed, the notes and recommendations of one Dr. Charles Petit at Vichy are included with the journal. He is also a close recorder of scenery, manners and the minutiae of life. His interest in practical affairs leads him to inquire about and set down the exact cost involved in building a *hotel* in Vichy, including figures for the various classes of laborers and the materials. He seeks out churches, clergymen and delights in religious conversation. In Vichy, he happens on a religious procession which he describes. He also compares political, social and cultural differences between Europe and America, not always to America's advantage.

The letters to his wife in 1838 include an account of the coronation of Queen Victoria, which he witnessed from stands in the street. They are particularly interesting for the strong expression of republican sentiment which the occasion elicited. The remaining letters, which range over a decade, are full of family news and cares, with constant references to the health and spiritual education of the children and, after 1848, for the health of his wife.

In 1855 he toured Europe again, and his letters to his family, in effect, make a journal. In them he describes his sea voyage, and his progress from Bremen to Vienna, Venice, Zurich, Antwerp, Leyden, Amsterdam and Norway.

The letters of his wife, Sarah Louisa Morse, written between 1838 and 1850, are the records of a woman in the midst of her most active time of childbearing and caring for a large household. They are full of domestic details and vividly convey a picture of family life as well as the manner in which children were raised and cared for in sickness and health.

Correspondence

b. 1	1779 November - 1795 March	1779 November - 1795 March
b. 2	1795 April - 1799 December	1795 April - 1799 December
b. 3	1800 January - 1805 December	1800 January - 1805 December
b. 4	1806 January - 1809 April	1806 January - 1809 April
b. 5	1809 May - 1813 November	1809 May - 1813 November

Correspondence (continued)

b. 6	1813 December - 1817 May	1813 December - 1817 May
b. 7	1817 June - 1819 September	1817 June - 1819 September
b. 8	1819 October - 1823 June	1819 October - 1823 June
b. 9	1823 July - 1829 June	1823 July - 1829 June
b. 10	1829 August - 1853 December	1829 August - 1853 December
b. 11	1854 - 1926, 1940, undated	1854 - 1926, 1940, undated
Records of correspondence		
b. 11	Calendars of letters from JM	1779-1789, 1789-1806
b. 11	Calendar of letters to JM	1783-1825
b. 11	Excerpts of letters between Jeremy Belknap and Ebenezer Hazard	1787-1793
b. 12	Copies and extracts of letters from JM to his father	1789-1817
b. 12	Record of letters written by [?]	1825-1826
b. 12	Legal and financial papers	1792-1828, 1856-1866, undated
b. 12	Printed matter	1805-1846, 1871
b. 12	Newspaper clippings	1798-1801
Miscellaneous papers		
Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826)		
b. 12	Almanac notes	1786-1802
b. 12	Register (typescript and two carbon copies)	1791 July 19
b. 12	Articles, certificates, notes, etc.	1791-1823
b. 12	"Index to the ... Library of Tracts" English	Undated
Samuel Finley Breese Morse (1791-1872)		
b. 12	Awards, notes, poem, deposition re invention of the telegraph, drawings	1807-1872, undated
b. 12	Richard Cary Morse (1795-1868) See also: box 20	

Miscellaneous papers (continued)

Sidney G. Morse

b. 12	Compositions, report cards	1847-1848
b. 12	Unidentified and undated	1799-1819, undated
Sermons		
b. 13	Jedidiah Morse	1786-1800
b. 13	Richard Cary Morse (1795-1868)	1817-1818
b. 14	<i>Carleton's Almanack, 1794; Chronik von Walldorf</i> with material laid in; photos and drawings	
b. 14	Morse, Sidney Edwards, 1835-1908 "Journal of a voyage to China in the N.B. Palmer Aug. 2, 1856-Apr 12, 1857." Iv.	
Scrapbook		
b. 15	Hand-made pins	Undated
b. 15	Silhouette of Abel Morse	Undated
b. 16	Scrapbook, genealogical records	
b. 17	Letters of Guillaume de Felice to the New York Observer, Vols. I-VII	1831-1852
b. 18	Letters of Guillaume de Felice to the New York Observer, Vols. I-VII	1831-1852
b. 19	Letters of Guillaume de Felice to the New York Observer, Vols. I-VII	1831-1852
Papers of Richard Cary Morse (1795-1868)		
b. 20, f. 1	Journal in the form of letters to his family of a voyage to the Bay of Fundy, Passamaquoddy	1822
b. 20, f. 2	Journal of eight months in Europe	1838 May-December
b. 20, f. 3	Journal in the form of letters to his family during a tour of Europe	1855 May-December
b. 20, f. 4	Letters to his wife, Sarah Louisa	1838-1850
b. 20, f. 5	Letters to his mother	1846
b. 20, f. 5	Letters to his children	1847
b. 20, f. 6	Miscellaneous correspondence	1839-1851
b. 20, f. 7	Correspondence with his brother, Samuel Finley Breese Morse, 1838, 1851, 1856 (copy). Also a letter with comments by a descendant, Mrs. Asa W. Pope	1940 January 7
b. 20, f. 8	Correspondence with his brother, Sidney Edwards Morse and a pamphlet by Sidney Edwards Morse, Memorabilia in the life of Jedidiah Morse, D.D.	1827, 1847, undated
b. 20, f. 9	Letters of Sarah Louisa (Davis) Morse	1838-1850

Papers of Richard Cary Morse (1795-1868) (continued)

b. 20, f. 10	"Day-Book" of Richard Cary Morse English	1819-1822
b. 21	MS biography, "Jedidiah Morse by Richard Cary Morse: In Fifteen Numbers," by RCM (1795-1868) with the help of Richard Cary Morse (1841-1926), 1863. Two chapters missing. Also a letter from the younger R.C. Morse to Prof. William Randall Waterman about the biography	1926 February 18
	Oversize Folio	
b. 22	Correspondence	1789-1813
b. 22	Signed subscriptions circular for the Isle of Shoals	1800 August 14
b. 22	Certificate	1796 August 27
b. 22	Letters patent for S. F. B. and S. E. Morse, signed by James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Richard Rush	1817 October 3
b. 22	S. F. B. Morse, "History of proceedings in England to procure a Patent for my Telegraph"	1847 December

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

Art
Child care
Children -- Health and hygiene
Clergy
Depression, Mental
Educators
Families
Geography
Indians of North America
Journalism
Missionaries
Psychology
Science
Telegraph -- History

Geographic Names

Europe -- Description and travel

Genres / Formats

Diaries
Sermons

Occupations

Artists
Inventors
Painters

Names

Adams, Hannah, 1755-1831
Adams, John Quincy, 1767-1848
Baldwin, Rebecca Sherman, 1764-1795
Baldwin, Simeon, 1761-1851
Belknap, Jeremy, 1744-1798
Bigelow, Timothy, 1767-1821
Bradford, Gamaliel, 1795-1839
Breese, Sidney, 1800-1878
Brinkerhoff, George
Buckminster, Joseph, 1751-1812
Calhoun, John C. (John Caldwell), 1782-1850
Campbell, John, 1766-1840
Carey, Mathew, 1760-1839

Channing, William Ellery, 1817-1901
Child, Sarah Pierce Larkin, 1800-
Church, Maria Trumbull Silliman
Colgate, Elizabeth Ann Morse, 1829-1891
Cooper, James Fenimore, 1789-1851
Dana, Daniel, 1771-1859
Dana, James Dwight, 1813-1895
Davis, Henry, 1771-1852
Dwight, Timothy, 1752-1817
Ebeling, Christoph Daniel, 1741-1817
Evarts, Jeremiah, 1781-1831
Farrar, Samuel, 1773-1864
Goodrich, Samuel G. (Samuel Griswold),
1793-1860
Green, Ashbel, 1762-1848
Hale, Nathan, 1784-1863
Hall, Harrison, 1785-1866
Hall, William Brenton, 1764-1809
Hawley, Susan Hubbell Waller, 1845-
Hodge, Charlotte Gebhard Morse, 1833-1907
Hollingshead, William
Howe, Hezekiah, 1775-1838
Jarvis, Samuel F. (Samuel Farmar), 1786-1851
Jay, John, 1745-1829
Jay, Peter A. (Peter Augustus), 1776-1843
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826
Lettsom, John Coakley, 1744-1815
Livingston, William, 1723-1790
Lyman, Joseph, 1749-1828
Macaulay, Zachary, 1768-1838
Madison, James, 1751-1836
Mason, Mira Peters, 1797-1862
Monroe, James, 1758-1831
Morse, Elizabeth Ann Breese
Morse, Harriet Hinckley Messinger, 1805-1885
Morse, Jedidiah, 1726-
Morse, Jedidiah, 1761-1826
Morse, Jonathan, 1750-1835
Morse, Lucretia Pickering Wheeler, 1799-1825
Morse, Mary Trumbull, 1862-1935
Morse, Oliver Cromwell, 1847-1922
Morse, Richard C. (Richard Cary), 1795-1868
Morse, Richard Cary, 1841-1926
Morse, Samuel Finley Breese, 1791-1872
Morse, Sarah Louisa Davis, 1808-1851
Morse, Sidney E. (Sidney Edwards), 1794-1871
Morse, Sidney Edwards, 1835-1908
Morse, William Goodrich
Parish, Elijah, 1762-1825
Park, Edwards Amasa, 1808-1900

Parmelee, Louisa Davis Morse, 1837-1917
Parsons, Eliphalet, 1752-1826
Parsons, Elizabeth Rice, 1799-1860
Parsons, Theophilus, 1797-1882
Pickering, Susan Burbeen Walker, 1801-
Plinn, Andrew, 1773-1820
Price, Richard, 1723-1791
Sergeant, John, 1747-1824
Seward, William H. (William Henry), 1801-1872
Silliman, Benjamin, 1779-1864
Smith, John Cotton, 1765-1845
Spafford, Horatio Gates, 1778-1832
Sprague, William B. (William Buell), 1795-1876
Stiles, Ezra, 1727-1795
Stockdale, John, 1749?-1814
Taylor, Charles, 1840-1908
Thomas, Isaiah, 1749-1831
Trumbull, Benjamin, 1735-1820
Van Rensselaer, Stephen, 1764-1839
Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, 1819-1901
Walker, Augustus Willard, 1803-
Walker, Charles, 1798-1843
Walker, Hannah Pickering, 1769-1821
Walker, Thomas, 1777-1863
Washington, Booker T., 1856-1915
Watson, Elkanah, 1758-1842
Webster, Noah, 1758-1843
Weir, John F. (John Ferguson), 1841-1926
Wells, William, 1744-1827
Welsh, Jonas
Whitney, Eli, 1765-1825
Wilberforce, William, 1759-1833
Williams, William, 1787-1833
Wood, George, 1799-1870
Woods, Leonard, 1774-1854

Families

Morse family

Corporate Body

Yale University -- Students