

Guide to the William Wells Family Papers

MS 546



compiled by Janet Elaine Gertz

December 1982

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
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CALL NUMBER: MS 546

CREATOR: Wells, William, 1744-1827

TITLE: William Wells Family Papers

DATES: 1749-1966

BULK DATES: 1820-1880

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.5 linear feet (6 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Correspondence, diaries, wills, inventories of estates, financial records, daguerreotypes, drawings, clippings and genealogies of three branches and of seventeen individual members of the Wells family, whose founder William Wells migrated to Brattleboro, Vermont from England in 1793. Major figures in the papers are Jane Wells Howard Green (1808-1884), Edward Watkins Wells (1819-1898) and James Hancox Wells (1774-1857). The diaries of five family members include accounts of travel both in the United States and Europe during the nineteenth century. A three volume diary kept by Jane Green from 1827 to 1830 describes her visit to family in England. Her papers also include extensive correspondence (1845-1904) with various women in the Howard family discussing family affairs and their daily lives, as well as household accounts, an inventory and a photograph. A steamboat trip to Florida (ca. 1855-1860) is described in the diary of Edward Watkinson Wells who also writes of social life in Hartford between 1856 and 1860. Also by Edward Watkinson Wells are a large number of drawings, correspondence, a will, and financial accounts. The papers of James Hancox Wells includes financial records, correspondence, and a daguerreotype. The Wells family material is made up of genealogical records, financial papers, and memorabilia.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0546>

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.0546>.

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 Robert E. Aronstein, 1966.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright status for collection materials is unknown, though much of the material in this collection is likely in the public domain. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

Preferred Citation

William Wells Family Papers (MS 546). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

For charts outlining the genealogical relations of the Wells and Howard families, please consult the [Genealogical Charts](#).

Scope and Contents

These are the papers of the family of the Reverend William Wells (1744-1827), who moved from England to Brattleboro, Vermont, in 1793, and of several families allied to his by marriage. The materials are arranged alphabetically by family member. Short biographies of William Wells, James Hancox Wells, and several others, as well as more detailed genealogical information than that provided in these partial family [trees](#) can be found in *The Reverend William Wells: His Family and Descendants*, by James Hayden Wells and Anita Wells (folders 67-68). The book is based mainly on family papers preserved by James Hancox Wells and taken to California by Elisabeth Howard, although references are also made to items in Yale's William Wells Family Papers (see *The Reverend William Wells*, pg. 5).

Relatively little correspondence is included among these papers. The earliest letter is written to Mrs. Watkinson (probably Sarah (Blair) Watkinson) in 1770 describing the death of her mother (folder 24), the next an 1803 letter to Anne (Watkinson) Wells from a friend in England discussing the effects of the war on the economy, family matters, and so forth (folder 26). There is one letter from William Wells to his son (probably James Hancox Wells) written in 1826, the year before his death (folder 62), and there are copies

of letters from Anne (Watkinson) Wells and Mary Watkinson Wells written during a visit to England in 1833-1834 (folder 29). The only sizeable sequence of family correspondence is that of the Howard family, i.e. of Jane (Wells) Howard Green and her descendants, between 1845 and 1904 (folders 16-19). These are primarily women's letters discussing family matters, social events, children, illnesses, and other aspects of women's lives in the nineteenth century. Included is a letter from Jane Green outlining the history of her family and of her two marriages (1883 Jan 28).

The remaining correspondence deals largely with business and financial matters. Included is correspondence (1807-1856, folders 47-49) of James Hancox Wells, banker and manufacturer of Hartford, Connecticut, concerning his businesses and financial affairs of his sister Martha (Wells) Freme and her family. There are several letters about the First Unitarian Congregational Society of Hartford, of which James Hancox Wells was a leading member. The letterbooks of Joseph Howard (1829-1831, folders 11-12), merchant of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, discuss not only business but also some family matters, and describe a business trip down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans in late 1829. Finally, there is business correspondence pertaining to Jane Green (1872-1880, folder 4), in which are two letters from her husband William Green (1880 Sep 16, 25). Related correspondence and financial papers are also filed under Edward Watkinson Wells (folders: 30-31, 33), who acted as Jane Green's trustee under the wills of James Hancox Wells and David Watkinson. Edward Watkinson Wells' correspondence also includes several family letters. Other financial and legal papers in this collection, including wills, inventories of estates, lists of taxable property, account books, bills, and receipts, can be found in folders: 8, 14, 22, 34-35, 50-52, 70-71.

Diaries of five family members are present in this collection. The earliest is a three volume travel diary of Jane Green (1827-1830, folders 5-7) describing in some detail her thoughts on social events and sights seen during a visit to Martha (Wells) Freme in England and in Hartford after her return. Anne (Watkinson) Wells also kept a travel diary during a trip to England (1833-1834, folder 29) which includes extracts of her letters; her nineteen-year-old daughter Mary Watkinson Wells, who travelled with her, also kept a diary (folder 60). This records their tour of England and Scotland, the voyage home, and continues through 1835 Mary Watkinson Wells' diary for 1885-1886, when she was sixty years old, is also preserved (folder 61); both the early and the late volumes record family life, note the books she was reading, and the social events she attended. A final English journal is that of Elisabeth (Howard) Burgess from 1886-1887 (folder 2) describing London and the return voyage to New York.

Edward Watkinson Wells also kept a diary, of which three volumes are preserved (folder 32). He describes a trip by steamboat to Florida, ca. 1855-1860, and the social life and customs he observed there. The other two volumes detail his daily life in Hartford during 1856-1860, and record the deaths of his father and David Watkinson in 1857.

Other items contained in the William Wells Family Papers include a large number of drawings by Edward Watkinson Wells and his mother, assorted printed matter including a sermon by William Wells (folder 63), genealogical records, memorabilia, newspaper clippings, photographs, daguerreotypes, and one tintype of family members.

These papers were donated to Yale University in 1966 by Robert E. Aronstein, a descendant of Jane Wells and Joseph Howard.

Collection Contents

Inventory, 1749-(1820-1880)-1966, undated

2.5 linear feet (6 boxes)

| | | |
|----------------|---|---------------------|
| b. 1, f. 1 | Blair family: Family seal | undated |
| | Burgess, Elisabeth (Howard) | |
| b. 1, f. 2 | Travel diary | 1886-1887 |
| b. 1, f. 3 | Certificate of the American Flag House and Betsy Ross Memorial Association | 1898 |
| | Green, Jane (Wells) Howard, 1808-1884 | |
| b. 1, f. 4 | Business correspondence and related papers | 1872-1880 |
| b. 1, f. 5-7 | Travel diary | 1827-1830 |
| b. 1, f. 8 | Household accounts and inventory | 1836 |
| b. 1, f. 9 | Volume of poems copied by J.W.H.G. | undated |
| b. 1, f. 10 | Photograph | [ca. 1860] |
| | Howard, Joseph, d. 1837 | |
| b. 1, f. 11-12 | Letterbooks | 1829-1831 |
| b. 1, f. 13 | ALS from H. J. Burden | 1835 |
| | Howard, Thomas | |
| b. 1, f. 14 | Will and estate inventory | 1832, 1837 |
| b. 1, f. 15 | Engraving | undated |
| b. 1, f. 16-19 | Howard family: Correspondence | 1845-1904, undated |
| b. 2, f. 20 | Nichols, Edward Leamington, 1854-: Curriculum vitae | 1930 |
| b. 2, f. 21 | Stebbins, Mary (Howard), 1854-1904: Daguerreotype See: box 6 | 1857 |
| b. 2, f. 22 | Watkinson, David: Printed copy of will | 1858 |
| b. 2, f. 23 | Watkinson, Samuel and Sarah (Blair): Photographs | 1780, 1800, undated |
| b. 2, f. 24 | Watkinson, Mrs. [i.e., Sarah (Blair) Watkinson?]: ALS from G. Blair | 1770 January 24 |
| b. 2, f. 25 | Wells, Alfred, 1782-1847: Photograph of silhouette | undated |
| | Wells, Anne (Watkinson), 1781-1836 | |
| b. 2, f. 26 | ALS from Ann Taylor | 1803 April 26 |

Wells, Anne (Watkinson), 1781-1836 (continued)

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|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| b. 2, f. 27 | Copybook | 1796 |
| b. 2, f. 28 | Drawings | 1833-1834 |
| b. 2, f. 29 | Travel diary | 1834 |
| Wells, Edward Watkinson, 1819-1898 | | |
| b. 2, f. 30-31 | Correspondence | 1832-1880, undated |
| b. 2, f. 32 | Diaries (3 volumes) A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy. | [ca. 1855]-1860 |
| b. 2, f. 33 | Business papers as trustee for Jane (Wells) Howard Green | 1875 |
| b. 2, f. 34 | Will | 1895 |
| b. 2, f. 35 | Address and account book, with loose papers | undated |
| b. 2, f. 36 | Hand-drawn maps of St. Croix | undated |
| b. 2, f. 37 | Scrapbook of etchings and drawings by E.W.W. and others | 1830-1843 |
| b. 3, f. 38-39 | Architectural and other drawings | 1830-1852 |
| b. 3, f. 40 | Drawings presented to E.W.W. by friends | 1838-1848 |
| b. 3, f. 41 | Scrapbook of etchings by others; tobacco leaf enclosed | 1838, undated |
| b. 3, f. 42 | Scrapbook of etchings by others | 1850 |
| b. 3, f. 43 | Printed pamphlets by various authors | 1842, 1872, 1880 |
| b. 3, f. 44 | Printed notepaper | undated |
| b. 4, f. 45 | Daguerreotype See: box 6 | undated |
| b. 4, f. 46 | Wells, Henry: Receipt book | undated |
| Wells, James Hancox, 1774-1857 | | |
| b. 4, f. 47-49 | Correspondence | 1807-1856 |
| b. 4, f. 50 | Account book bound with French essays | 1761, 1789 |
| b. 4, f. 51 | Expense account book | 1801-1803 |
| b. 4, f. 52 | Financial papers | 1840-1851 |
| b. 4, f. 53 | Ms. sermons by various authors | 1749, 1752 |
| b. 4, f. 54 | Printed sermons by various authors | 1786-1847 |
| b. 4, f. 55 | Engravings of tools | 1800 |

Wells, James Hancox, 1774-1857 (continued)

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|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| b. 4, f. 56 | <i>Portable Advance Book</i> , by Enoch Chase | 1823 |
| b. 4, f. 57 | Daguerreotype See: box 6 | 1855 |
| b. 4, f. 57 | Leaves from the grave of J.H.W., Madeira | 1897 |
| b. 4, f. 58 | Wells, John Freme, 1810-1871: Tintype See: box 6 | 1870 |
| Wells, Mary Watkinson, 1815-1887 | | |
| b. 4, f. 59 | Commonplace book | 1829 |
| b. 4, f. 60 | Travel diary | 1833-1834 |
| b. 5, f. 61 | Diary | 1885-1886 |
| Wells, William, 1744-1827 | | |
| b. 5, f. 62 | ALS to his son | 1826 January 26 |
| b. 5, f. 63 | The Character of Josiah, King of Judah... | 1803 |
| b. 5, f. 64 | Photograph of portrait | undated |
| Wells family | | |
| Genealogical papers | | |
| b. 5, f. 65 | Family trees, notes, etc. | undated |
| b. 5, f. 66 | Printed matter and newspaper clippings | 1847-1933, undated |
| b. 5, f. 67-68 | <i>The Reverend William Wells: His Family and Descendants</i> (photostat), with supplement, by James Hayden Wells and Anita Wells | 1951, 1957 |
| b. 5, f. 69 | Sermon, poems, receipts, notes | 1827-1879, undated |
| b. 5, f. 70 | Miscellaneous financial papers | 1828-1853, 1902 |
| b. 5, f. 71 | Account book concerning a building | undated |
| b. 5, f. 72 | Notebook, mostly empty | undated |
| b. 5, f. 73 | Miscellaneous printed cards, tickets, maps, etc. | undated |
| b. 5, f. 74 | Unidentified photograph | undated |
| b. 5, f. 75 | 4 unidentified daguerreotypes See: box 6 | undated |
| b. 5, f. 76 | The Account of Thomas Gotobed, Receiver of the Rents and Profits of the Estates of the Bedford Charity, in the County of Middlesex | 1833 October |

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------------------|
| b. 5, f. 77 | Minutes of the Common Council of Hartford, Connecticut | 1846 September 14 |
| b. 5, f. 78 | <i>Edward H. Perkins</i> , by Franklin Carter English | 1876 |
| b. 5, f. 79 | "The Humble Petition of the Freeholders of the County of Middlesex, To the King's Most Excellent Majesty" (copy) English | undated |
| b. 5, f. 80 | "Brother Harkliss Jones of Sou' Carliny," by Mrs. J. D. Chaplin English | undated |
| b. 5, f. 80 | "Reception of Gen. La Fayette, in the City of Hartford" English | undated |
| b. 5, f. 80 | "St. Domingo," published by the American Anti-Slavery Society English | undated |
| b. 5, f. 81 | Newspaper clippings | 1852-1966, undated |
| b. 5, f. 82 | Leather wallet | undated |
| | Daguerreotypes | |
| b. 6 | Stebbins, Mary (Howard), 1854-1904 | 1857 |
| b. 6 | Wells, Edward Watkinson, 1819-1898 | undated |
| b. 6 | Wells family: 4 unidentified people | undated |
| | Tintype | |
| b. 6 | Wells, John Freme, 1810-1871 | 1870 |

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

Cost and standard of living -- United States
Drawing -- 19th century
Families
Women

Geographic Names

Europe
Florida -- Description and travel
Great Britain -- Description and travel
Hartford (Conn.) -- Social life and customs
United States -- Description and travel

Genres / Formats

Daguerreotypes (photographs)
Diaries
Wills

Names

Burgess, Elisabeth Howard
Green, Jane Wells Howard, 1808-1884
Howard, Joseph, -1837
Howard, Thomas
Wells, Alfred, 1782-1847
Wells, Anne Watkinson, 1781-1836
Wells, Edward Watkinson, 1819-1898
Wells, Henry, 1875-
Wells, James Hancox, 1774-1857
Wells, Mary Watkinson, 1813 or 1814-1887
Wells, William, 1744-1827

Families

Wells family