

Guide to the George F. Usher Papers

GEN MSS 855



by Beinecke Staff

2012

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 855

CREATOR: Usher, George F., 1792-1877

TITLE: George F. Usher papers

DATES: 1852-1877

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: In English and French.

SUMMARY: The papers contain four letter books and other official papers sent, received, and kept by George F. Usher, Haitian consul in New York under President Fabre Nicolas Geffrard; the correspondence primarily details Usher's diplomatic and commercial work in New York City on behalf of the Republic of Haiti during the years 1859-1867, which included, in 1862, the United States's official recognition of the Haitian government. Among the recipients of Usher's letters are Demosthenes Bruno and Ernest Roumain, chargés d'affaires in Haiti, and August Elie, Haitian secretary of state, as well as B. C. Clark, Haitian consul in Boston, and James Redpath. Some of the letter books include lists of cargo ships trading between Haiti and New York. Usher's papers also include personal letters written from New York and during his retirement in Bristol, Rhode Island, as well as a bound volume of manuscript records of the Sewing School for the Children of St. Michael's Parish, Bristol, conducted by his daughters Helen Maria Usher (1834-1892) and Irene (Ida) Frances Usher (1838-1925) between 1869 and 1873.

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

Requesting Instructions

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Carmen D. Valentino on the Edwin J. Beinecke Book Fund, 2011.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The George F. Usher Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

George F. Usher Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

Much of the information included in the Description of Papers note and Collection Contents section is drawn from material supplied by the vendor.

George F. Usher (1792-1877)

George Finney Usher was born in Bristol, Rhode Island, on October 22, 1792, the son of Hezekiah and Sarah Finney Usher. Through his positions as the United States Commercial Agent at Cape Haytien, Haiti (1842-1846) and at Port-au-Prince (1849-1853), Usher gained the financial, trade, and linguistic skills sufficient to win an appointment as Haiti's consul in New York City after General Fabre Nicolas Geffrard deposed Haitian Emperor Faustin Soulouque in 1858. Usher began work as consul on June 10, 1859, and remained in place until Geffrard was overthrown in 1867. Usher was replaced as consul by Elwood Cooper; he retired to Bristol in 1868, and died there on August 16, 1877.

Usher married Susan Maria Griswold (1797-1825) in 1817; she bore their daughter Elizabeth Griswold (1818-1879), who married Joseph Ames Sprague (d. 1876) in 1839. Usher married Rebecca Bourn (1810-1842) in 1833 and with her had two daughters, Helen Maria (1834-1892) and Irene (Ida) Frances (1838-1925). His third wife was Emily Fitzgerald French (born 1826), whom he married in 1857. Usher and his daughters are buried in Juniper Hill Cemetery, Bristol.

George Lawrence Jr.

Little is known about George Lawrence Jr., who was an African American abolitionist and activist for Haitian emigration. From 1861 to 1862 Lawrence was editor and publisher of the journal *The Pine and Palm*, which was owned by the Scottish-born reformer and promoter James Redpath, with offices in Boston and New York. In the fall of 1862 Lawrence became the head of the Haitian Emigration Bureau at 55 Liberty Street in New York, which Redpath had founded in 1859. The bureau's function was to promote and assist with African American emigration to Haiti; Lawrence signed his letters as agent of the Haytian Bureau, or Commissioner of Haytian Emigration. He was listed in the New York City directories through 1868 after which time he lived in Washington, D.C.

Scope and Contents

The collection primarily contains letterpress copybooks and other official papers sent, received, and kept by George F. Usher, Haitian consul in New York City under President Fabre Nicolas Geffrard, detailing his diplomatic and commercial work in New York City on behalf of the Republic of Haiti during the years 1859-1867, together with letters written during Usher's retirement in Bristol, Rhode Island, and related papers. Also present are letterpress copybooks kept by George Lawrence Jr., the New York Agent (and subsequently Commissioner) for Haitian Emigration operating from New York City between 1862 and 1865.

Arrangement

Organized into three series: I. George F. Usher Papers, 1852-1877. II. George Lawrence Jr. Letter Book, 1862-1865. III. Other Papers, 1863.

Collection Contents

Series I: George F. Usher Papers, 1852-1877

12 Folders

The series primarily consists of four bound volumes containing copies of more than 1000 diplomatic and personal letters written by George F. Usher between June 1859 and November 1867, plus six folders of incoming letters, ephemera, and other documents. The letters, addressed to Usher's superiors in Haiti (including the secretaries of state for foreign relations, finance and commerce, the interior and agriculture, etc.), to his fellow consuls in Boston, and to the collector of revenue in Port-au-Prince and other Haitian government officials and appointees, range from very short notes and official reports to long accounts of his diplomatic work. During the subsequent three years leading up to the American government's recognition of Haiti's new regime, Usher accomplished and recorded a great deal more work, as he continued to do after recognition. Throughout the volumes, Usher responds to specified reports (not all present but condensed in Usher's own outgoing letters) of President Fabre Nicolas Geffrard's various successes, and Haitian citizens' perceptions of them. He also communicates whatever American news—often of Congressional actions—will interest Haiti's foreign office, such as John Brown's activities at Harper's Ferry. Throughout the Civil War, Usher regularly kept his Haitian superiors apprised of its progress, often reporting with expressed pleasure on the various Union advances and defeats suffered by the rebel states. In April 1865, he officially notified Haiti of Lincoln's assassination in a moving letter that specifies the mourning decorations that adorned Haiti's New York consulate and reports his intention to accept the City of New York's request that he represent Haiti when Lincoln's body passes through the city (see also the invitation in folder 9). Through all this, for more than eight years, Usher remained attentive to trade matters ranging from specific cargo shipments to British proposals to include Port-au-Prince on a new steamship route. Usher writes to his correspondents on a wide variety of business issues, ranging from shipments of coffee, sugar, and other Haitian produce, to his operating instructions for letter copy press equipment he has sent to Port-au-Prince (letter dated June 17, 1859). Many letters specify the sailings to and from Haiti of named ships, with details regarding their cargo (generally reports of merchandise and provisions, but also including more exotic items such as "the beautiful horse for his Excellency the President" that Usher shipped on April 7, 1860). Among the recipients of Usher's letters are Demosthenes Bruno, George Racster, and Ernest Roumain, *chargés d'affaires* in Haiti, as well as B. C. Clark, Haitian consul in Boston, and the Scottish activist and reformer James Redpath.

The two letterpress copybooks also contain letters that concern Usher's personal affairs and document important portions of his and his family's life, including his daughters' upbringing by their maternal grandmother upon their mother's death. Also present are those sent between 1868 and 1877 as he concluded his business in New York City and retired to his hometown of Bristol, Rhode Island. Among Usher's regular recipients are his attorney John Turner, several men in Chicago (where he owned property), and his friend James E. French, of Bristol, Rhode Island. Also present in the series is a bound volume containing manuscript records of the Sewing School for the Children of St. Michael's Parish, conducted at Bristol by Usher's daughters Helen Maria Usher (1834-1892) and Irene (Ida) Frances Usher (1838-1925) between 1869 and 1873.

The earliest item in the collection is in folder 8: an 1852 invitation to the funeral of Anne Burgoyne Gretton, the wife of William Knottesford Gretton, the British vice consul in Haiti.

Series I is organized into two subseries: Correspondence and Documents; and Records of the Sewing School for the Children of St. Michael's Parish.

Correspondence and Documents

b. 1, f. 1	Longhand copybook of letters, with list of cargo ships between Haiti and New York	1859-1862
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Correspondence and Documents (continued)

b. 1, f. 2	Longhand copybook of letters, with list of cargo ships between Haiti and New York	1863-1867
b. 1, f. 3	Letterpress copybook of letters	1859-1867
b. 1, f. 4	Letterpress copybook of letters	1867-1877
b. 2, f. 5	Correspondence with Ernest Roumain	1863-1865
b. 2, f. 6	Letters with Haitian government officials	1859-1867
b. 2, f. 7	General correspondence Includes copies of letters from George Lawrence Jr. to B. C. Clark	1859-1867
b. 2, f. 8	Trade and financial reports	1859-1866
b. 2, f. 9	Printed ephemera Includes a publication, <i>Rapport de l'Etablissement Wesleyen du Port au Prince, 1860-1863</i> .	1852-1865
b. 2, f. 10	Other papers Contains a survey of the brig <i>Adelaide G. Washburn</i> and an essay on the state of Haitian society (annotated: published in <i>Pine and Palm</i> , Ap. 62)	1857, 1862
b. 2, f. 11	Family and personal correspondence Contains a letter from Emily Usher to Irene Usher, and correspondence regarding Juniper Hill Cemetery, Bristol	1859, 1864
b. 2, f. 12	Records of the Sewing School for the Children of St. Michael's Parish A volume with attendance and financial reports for the school, and an accounting of "garments finished." The school was founded by Sarah Goodwin, May Minturn, Helen Maria Usher, and Irene (Ida) Frances Usher.	1869-1873

Series II: George Lawrence Jr. Letter Book, 1862-1865

The series contains a letterpress copybook containing about 229 letters written by George Lawrence Jr., the self-described "colored American" successor to James Redpath as New York City Agent/Commissioner for Haitian Emigration from the United States and Canada, between September 1862 and February 1865. As Lawrence reported in his letter of September 9, 1862, to Mr. C. Audry of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Haitian Emigration Bureau's "object ... is to encourage colored emigration, and the class to whom the invitation of the Haytian Government is specially extended is that of farmers or agricultural laborers." As this fact was known to many of Lawrence's correspondents (through advertisements and public lectures of the sort detailed in Lawrence's letter of October 1, 1862, and others), many of these letters are addressed to African Americans (though recipients' race is seldom expressed). To some of these recipients Lawrence further explains that the Haitian government has undertaken this project "in order to facilitate intercourse between the different sections of her territory and thereby to develop [sic] her resources, stimulate industry and promote the advancement of her people."

Lawrence's letters address a wide variety of travel, emigration, and baggage concerns of the many Americans who have written to him regarding their plans to travel to Haiti (their letters are not present, but many specific details of their content may be inferred from Lawrence's responses). These hopeful emigrants' names, towns and states (from as far away as Wisconsin) are given in many of Lawrence's headings or texts of his letters to them. Many operational details connected with this extensive emigration campaign are mentioned in these letters sent to prospective and actual emigrants, various campaigns supporters, and Lawrence's official colleagues. Topics discussed include the bureau's decision to close its Boston office and temporarily handle all emigration business in New York; the number of free acres promised to each African-American emigrant; shipments of cotton seed; costs of passage and the Haitian government's policy regarding advancing passage costs; the sailing dates of named steamers; the sailing of many named emigrants on particular vessels at particular times; several facets of American publicity for the campaign; and an inventory of office supplies inherited from Redpath. The letters also describe some of Redpath's Boston and Philadelphia work and the field work of J. Dennis Harris, a "Traveling Agent for Haytian Emigration"; and details of the Emigration Bureau's financial affairs. Redpath and B. C. Clark are two of Lawrence's more frequent correspondents, as well as Haitian government officials, but the volume also includes five long letters Lawrence sent to James Mitchell, United States Commissioner of Emigration under Abraham Lincoln, during the year in which the United States government, freed from Southern objections by the South's attempted withdrawal from the Union, finally recognized Haiti's government under President Geffrard. In the second of Lawrence's letters to Mitchell, dated October 14, 1862, he identifies himself as "of African descent." This letter opens, "I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your able letter to President Lincoln on the relation of the White and African races in the United States" and continues with Lawrence's statement of his own thoughts ("sympathizing with the mass of my fellow colored American, whether bond or free") on American race relations, work opportunities, republican institutions, and emigration.

Series III: Other Papers, 1863

Series III contains a manuscript volume which appears to be unrelated to Usher, Lawrence, or Haiti. It is written in various hands and opens with records of meetings of the Committee of Ways and Means of the New York State Legislature held between February 6 and April 7, 1863. The minutes are followed by a manuscript translation of *Les sectes et sociétés secrètes, politiques et religieuses: essai sur leur histoire depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la Révolution française* (titled "Sects and Secret Societies, both Political and Religious"), by Jean Baptiste Emmanuel Hector, comte Le Couteulx de Canteleu, which was published in 1863.

b. 2, f. 14

Minute book

1863

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

African American abolitionists
Consuls -- United States
Diplomatic and consular service, Haitian --
United States

Corporate Bodies

New York (State). Legislature. Assembly.
Committee on Ways and Means
St. Michael's Church (Bristol, R.I.)

Geographic Names

Bristol (R.I. : Town) -- Social life and customs
Haiti -- Commerce -- United States
Haiti -- Emigration and immigration
Haiti -- Foreign relations -- United States
Haiti -- Politics and government -- 19th century
United States -- Commerce -- Haiti
United States -- Foreign relations -- Haiti

Genres / Formats

Letter books -- United States -- 19th century
Letterpress copybooks -- United States -- 19th
century

Occupations

Consuls -- Haiti -- 19th century

Names

Bruno, Demosthenes
Clark, B. C. (Benjamin C.)
Elie, Auguste
Harris, J. Dennis
James, Henry, 1811-1882
Lawrence, George, fl. 1861-1868
Le Couteulx de Canteleu, Jean Baptiste
Emmanuel Hector, comte, 1827-
Mitchell, James, 1818-1903
Racster, George
Redpath, James, 1833-1891
Roumain, Ernest
Usher, George F., 1792-1877
Usher, Helen Maria, 1834-1892
Usher, Irene Frances, 1838-1925