

Walt Whitman Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2021

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82077909>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms005001>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2005
Revised 2021 May

Collection Summary

Title: Walt Whitman Papers

Span Dates: 1837-1957

Bulk Dates: 1840-1891

ID No.: MSS77909

Creator: Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892

Extent: 150 items

Extent: 2 containers plus 2 oversize

Extent: 1.2 linear feet

Extent: 2 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82077909>

Summary: Poet. Correspondence, family papers, holograph drafts of Whitman's poetry and prose, printed matter, and miscellany. Includes a printed copy of *O Captain! My Captain!* with Whitman's handwritten corrections and letters exchanged with Abraham Leech, Whitman's earliest known correspondence.

Online Content: Part of the papers of Walt Whitman is available on the Library of Congress website at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000040>. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the online edition as available.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Diggins, E. F. E.F. Diggins plaster bust of Walt Whitman. 1939.

Furness, Clifton Joseph, 1898-1946. Clifton Joseph Furness notebook. 1941.

Heyde, Hannah Louisa Whitman, 1823-1908--Correspondence.

Leech family--Genealogy.

Leech, Abraham. Abraham Leech correspondence and diary. 1837-circa 1881.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Death and burial.

Nuccio, Mark. To the Man of War Bird. 1983.

Van Buren, Martin, 1782-1862.

Whitman family.

Whitman, Louisa Van Velsor, 1795-1873--Correspondence.

Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892--Statues.

Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892.

Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892. Bible as poetry : proof sheet with additions and corrections by the author. circa 1888.

Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892. O captain! My captain! : reprint with comments by the author. 1888 February 9.

Organizations

Democratic Party (U.S.)

Subjects

American literature.

American poetry.

American prose literature.

Busts.

City and town life.

Education--New York (State)--Long Island.

Poetry.

Presidents--United States--Election--1840.

Sculpture.

Places

Long Island (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.
United States--Politics and government--1815-1861.

Titles

Walt Whitman Papers (Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection) at the Library of Congress

Occupations

Poets.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Walt Whitman were acquired by the Library of Congress through gift, transfer, and purchase, 1927-2019. The collection contains items described in the Library's publication *Walt Whitman: A Catalog Based upon the Collections of the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1955), as well as more recent acquisitions unrelated to other collections of Whitman's papers in the Library.

Processing History

The papers of Walt Whitman were processed in 1981 by Michael McElderry. The finding aid was revised and expanded in 1997 by Michael McElderry. Additional material received 1997-2001 was processed in 2003 by Michael McElderry. Material received 2012-2019 was interfiled in the collection by Nan Thompson Ernst, Kathleen O'Neill, and Laney Stevenson.

Additional Description

The Library's publication *Walt Whitman: A Catalog Based upon the Collections of the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1955) includes items from the collection.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Walt Whitman is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Walt Whitman are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on two reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. *To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.*

Online Content

Part of the papers of Walt Whitman is available on the Library of Congress website at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000040>. *To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the online edition as available.*

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Walt Whitman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1819, May 31	Born, West Hills, N.Y.
1830-1846	Held various jobs as office boy, schoolteacher, typesetter, and journalist chiefly in Long Island and Brooklyn, N.Y.
1839-1840	Writer and typesetter, <i>Long Island Democrat</i>
1841-1848	Associated with numerous newspapers and magazines, including the New York <i>Aurora</i> and the New York <i>Evening Tattler</i>
1846-1848	Editor, <i>Brooklyn Eagle</i>
1848	Writer, <i>New Orleans Crescent</i> Editor, <i>Brooklyn Freeman</i>
1855	Published <i>Leaves of Grass</i> (Brooklyn, N.Y.: n.p. 95 pp.). Enlarged and revised in succeeding editions of 1856, 1860-1861, 1867, 1871, 1876, 1881-1882, 1888-1889, and 1891-1892
1857-1859	Editor, <i>Brooklyn Times</i>
1862-1865	Served as hospital volunteer, Washington, D.C.
1865	Published <i>Drum Taps</i> (New York: n.p. 72 pp.) Clerk, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C.
1865-1873	Clerk, Office of the Attorney General, Washington, D.C.
1871	Published <i>Democratic Vistas</i> (Washington, D.C.: n.p. [Printed by J. S. Redfield, New York]. 84 pp.) Published <i>Passage to India</i> (Washington, D.C.: n.p. [Printed by J. S. Redfield, New York]. 120 pp.) Published <i>After All, Not to Create Only</i> (Boston: Roberts Brothers. 24 pp.)
1872	Published <i>As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free</i> (Washington, D.C.: n.p. [Printed by S. W. Green, New York]. 14 pp.)
1873	Suffered paralytic stroke
1875-1876	Published <i>Memoranda During the War</i> (Camden, N.J.: n.p. 68 pp.)
1876	Published <i>Two Rivulets</i> (Camden, N.J.: n.p. 32 pp.)
1882-1883	Published <i>Specimen Days and Collect</i> (Philadelphia: David McKay. 376 pp.)
1888	Published <i>November Boughs</i> (Philadelphia: David McKay. 140 pp.)
1891	Published <i>Good-Bye My Fancy</i> (Philadelphia: David McKay. 66 pp.)
1892, Mar. 26	Died, Camden, N.J.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Walt Whitman (1819-1892) span the years 1837-1957 with the bulk concentrated in the period 1840-1891. Included are examples of the poet's original correspondence and literary manuscripts, photocopies and transcripts of similar Whitman material, and printed matter and miscellaneous items relating to Whitman. Although the collection contains only a small sampling of the types of items found in the Library's larger collections of Whitman material, most notably those of Thomas Biggs Harned and Charles E. Feinberg, it includes Whitman's correspondence with Abraham P. Leech and a printed copy of Whitman's poem *O Captain! My Captain!* containing the poet's handwritten corrections. A small selection of family correspondence, including Whitman's mother, Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, and his sister, Hannah Louisa Whitman Heyde describing domestic routines and expressing personal sentiments, is also included.

Whitman's letters to Abraham Leech, 1840-1841, the poet's earliest known correspondence, describe his life as a schoolteacher in the towns of Woodbury and Whitestone, Long Island, New York. The letters relate his distaste as a young man for teaching at Woodbury and portray his general dislike for small-town life at that time. Whitman also expressed his support for the Democratic party and its candidate for the 1840 presidential election, Martin Van Buren, despite Leech's adherence to the Whig party candidate, William Henry Harrison. The file also contains copies of letters from Leech to Whitman, genealogical notes of the Leech family, a small diary kept by Abraham Leech, 1838-1844, and other miscellaneous fragments and items.

O Captain! My Captain!, considered by many to be Whitman's most popular poem, was widely anthologized during his lifetime. The collection contains a copy of the poem formerly described as a proof sheet in the Library's publication *Walt Whitman: A Catalog Based upon the Collections of the Library of Congress*. It is instead a printed page torn from volume thirty-two of the Riverside Literature Series, corrected in Whitman's hand, and returned to Riverside Press. A short letter to the printer remarking on the errors and noting Whitman's accompanying corrections is included on the verso of the page.

Many of the items in the collection are identified in the catalog, which contains an annotated bibliographic listing of Whitman items located within the collections of various divisions in the Library of Congress. Identification numbers tagged to specific entries in the catalog are noted on the folders containing those items. This catalog should be consulted for the fullest description of the material.

A microfilm edition of original Whitman materials at other repositories compiled by Roy Basler in 1962, and a plaster bust donated to the Library's poetry office by sculptor E. F. Diggins were added to the collection in 2012. A fragment of prose, "Idea of Piece [Peace] in a Storm," and a photograph of Whitman were interfiled in the collection in 2013. A letter concerning printing expenses for the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, a proof sheet with Whitman's additions and corrections for "The Bible as Poetry," from *November Boughs*, and an original woodblock print inspired by Whitman's poetry by the artist Mark Nuccio were interfiled in the collection in 2020.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX OV 1	Artwork
BOX OV 1	Plaster bust of Walt Whitman by E. F. Diggins, 1939 Digital content available
BOX OV 2	Woodblock print, <i>To the Man of War Bird</i> by Mark Nuccio, 1983, Jan. 27 No digital content available
BOX 1	Correspondence
BOX 1	General, 1852, 1863, 1871-1872, 1882, 1888-1891 Digital content available
BOX 1	General, 1866 No digital content available
BOX 1	Leech, Abraham P., 1837-1844, circa 1881, undated Digital content available
BOX 1	Family papers
BOX 1	Whitman, Louisa Van Velsor (mother), 1872-1873 Digital content available
BOX 1	Whitman family letters, 1848, 1863, 1870-1873, 1889-1891, undated Digital content available
BOX 1	Literary file
BOX 1	Poetry
BOX 1	<i>Ah Poverties, Wincings, and Sulky Retreats</i> , broadside, undated Digital content available
BOX 1	"Death of General Grant," signed draft, 1885 Digital content available
BOX 1	"Funeral Interpolations," signed draft, circa 1888 Digital content available
BOX 1	<i>O Captain! My Captain!</i> printed copy with corrections, 1888 Digital content available
BOX 1	Prose
BOX 1	"American National Literature," draft, circa 1891 Digital content available
BOX 1	American poets, draft, undated Digital content available
BOX 1	"As to nationality in our literature," draft (first line), undated Digital content available
BOX 1	"The Bible as Poetry," proof sheet with additions and corrections, circa 1888 No digital content available
BOX 1	"A Gap now of over a Year," draft, undated Digital content available
BOX 1	"The great themes of the literatus," draft (first line), undated Digital content available
BOX 1	"Idea of Piece [Peace] in a Storm," fragment, circa 1865 Digital content available

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	"An Indian Bureau Reminiscence," signed draft, circa 1883 Digital content available
BOX 1	Modesty, draft, undated Digital content available
BOX 1	Miscellany
BOX 1	Chronological file, 1881-1885, 1896-1899, 1912-1917, 1929-1931, 1940, 1955-1957, undated Digital content available
BOX 1	Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, exhibit, 1956 Digital content available
BOX 1	Photograph of Whitman by Frank Pearsall, copy, 1869 Digital content available
BOX 1	Printed matter
BOX 1	1870, 1887 Digital content available
BOX 2	1892-1915 Digital content available
BOX 2	1935-1939, 1954 Digital content available
BOX 2	Reproductions
BOX 2	Photocopies
BOX 2	Burroughs, John, "Work and Wait," 1856 Digital content available
BOX 2	Correspondence, 1880-1881, undated Digital content available
BOX 2	Diary notes, undated Digital content available
BOX 2 REEL 1	Furness, Clifton Joseph, notebook, 1940 Digital content available Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 11,058
BOX 2	Interior Department, dismissal from, 1865 Digital content available
BOX 2	National Archives and Records Administration, records, 1864-1874 Digital content available
BOX 2	Poetry and prose, 1861, undated Digital content available
BOX 2 REEL 2	Microfilm of originals at other repositories, compiled by Roy Basler, 1962 Digital content available Shelf no. 12,608
BOX 2	Transcripts
BOX 2	Correspondence, 1876 Digital content available
BOX 2	Poetry and prose, undated Digital content available