

Lewis Tappan Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2022

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm75042317>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010139>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2010
Revised 2023 July

Collection Summary

Title: Lewis Tappan Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1809-1903

Bulk Dates: 1809-1872

ID No.: MSS42317

Creator: Tappan, Lewis, 1788-1873

Extent: 5,200 items

Extent: 15 containers

Extent: 10 linear feet

Extent: 7 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm75042317>

Summary: Abolitionist, merchant, and publisher. Correspondence, journals, and other papers reflecting Tappan's interests in abolition, African American education, religion, and his business ventures.

Online Content: Selected documents from the Lewis Tappan Papers are available on the Library of Congress website at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010139.001>.

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

Adams, John Quincy, 1767-1848--Correspondence.

Adams, John Quincy, 1767-1848.

Aspinwall family--Correspondence.

Aspinwall family.

Birney, James Gillespie, 1792-1857--Correspondence.

Douglass, Frederick, 1818-1895--Correspondence.

Finney, Charles G., 1792-1875--Correspondence.

Garrison, William Lloyd, 1805-1879--Correspondence.

Gates, Seth Merrill, 1800-1877--Correspondence.

Hastings, Samuel D. (Samuel Dexter), 1816-1903--Correspondence.

Jay, William, 1789-1858--Correspondence.

Leavitt, Joshua, 1794-1873--Correspondence.

Phelps, Amos A. (Amos Augustus), 1805-1847--Correspondence.

Sedgwick, Theodore, 1780-1839--Correspondence.

Shipherd, John Jay, 1802-1844--Correspondence.

Sturge, Joseph, 1793-1859--Correspondence.

Tappan family--Correspondence.

Tappan family.

Tappan, Arthur, 1786-1865--Correspondence.

Tappan, Benjamin, 1773-1857--Correspondence.

Tappan, Lewis, 1788-1873.

Weld, Theodore Dwight, 1803-1895.

Whittier, John Greenleaf, 1807-1892--Correspondence.

Organizations

American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

American Bible Society.

American Colonization Society.

American Missionary Association.

Amistad (Schooner)

General Anti-slavery Convention (2nd : 1843 : London, England)
Liberty Party (U.S. : 1840-1848)
Mercantile Agency (New York, N.Y.)
Oberlin College.
Union Missionary Society (U.S.)

Subjects

African Americans--Colonization--Africa.
African Americans--Education.
Antislavery movements--Periodicals.
Antislavery movements--Societies, etc.
Antislavery movements--United States.
Antislavery movements.
Calvinism.
Colonization--Societies, etc.
Commerce--Periodicals.
Credit bureaus--New York (State)--New York.
Credit ratings--United States.
Freedmen--Colonization--Africa.
Missions--Periodicals.
Missions--Societies, etc.
Missions.
Religion.
Slave rebellions--United States.
Slavery and the church.
Slavery--United States.
Slavery.
Trials (Mutiny)--United States.
Unitarianism.

Places

Africa--Colonization.
New York (N.Y.)--Religion--19th century.
Texas--Annexation to the United States.
United States--Religion--19th century.
United States--Social conditions--19th century.

Titles

American missionary.
Bible--Publication and distribution--Societies, etc.
National era (Washington, D.C.)
New York journal of commerce (New York, N.Y.)

Occupations

Abolitionists.
Merchants.
Publishers.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Lewis Tappan, abolitionist, merchant, and publisher, were acquired by the Library of Congress from various sources, 1928-1958. The bulk of the material was given by his granddaughter, Anna Hulett. Additional items were purchased by the Library in 1982 and 2014.

Processing History

The collection was arranged, described, and prepared for microfilming in 1975 by Mary M. Wolfskill. An item purchased in 1982 was added from the Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection in 2010. An item purchased in 2014 was added and the finding aid revised in 2021 by Melinda Friend.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Lewis Tappan in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Lewis Tappan 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 seven 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.

Online Content

Selected documents from the Lewis Tappan Papers are available on the Library of Congress website at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010139.001>.

Preferred Citation

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

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1788, May 23	Born, Northampton, Mass.
1813	Married Susan Aspinwall (died 1853)
1828-circa 1837	Partner with brother Arthur and credit manager, Arthur Tappan & Co., silk jobbers in New York, N.Y.
1828-1831	Owned and published <i>Journal of Commerce</i> , New York, N.Y.
1833	One of the founders of the New York Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society
1839-1841	Member of the committee that undertook to secure the freedom of the captives on the slave ship <i>Amistad</i>
1840	Founder and first treasurer, American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society
1841-1849	Established and operated the Mercantile Agency, the first commercial credit-rating agency in America, under the firm name of Lewis Tappan & Co.
1843	Attended General Anti-slavery Convention, London, England
1846	A founder of the American Missionary Association
1850, ca.	Participated, after passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, in “underground railroad” activities

1854	Married Mrs. Sarah J. Davis
1855	Joined the American Abolition Society
1870	Published <i>The Life of Arthur Tappan</i> . New York: Hurd and Houghton
1873, June 21	Died, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Lewis Tappan (1788-1873) span the years 1809-1903, with the bulk dating from 1809 to 1872. The collection consists of correspondence, letterbooks, journals, notebooks, clippings, photocopies, notes, and miscellaneous other items. The journals and notebooks, which date from 1841 to 1869, are replete with information concerning Tappan's activities in the antislavery movement and contribute as well to an understanding of his private life, particularly his religious views. The collection is organized in the following series: [Journals and Notebooks](#), [Correspondence](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Additions](#).

The bulk of the [correspondence](#) in the Lewis Tappan papers is made up of copies of his outgoing letters, ranging in date from 1812 to 1870. Legibility of many of these copies is poor, and there are a number of gaps in the chronology. Nine of the volumes include indexes to correspondents. Incoming correspondence, although limited in quantity, covers the period 1809-1871. Subject matter throughout Tappan's correspondence strongly reflects his interest in antislavery activities and his participation in organizations that promoted abolition.

Tappan's exposure to Calvinist and Unitarian theology is reflected in his [journals](#) by comments on ministers and the themes of their sermons. Also evident in the journals, which contain numerous newspaper clippings, and in his correspondence, is Tappan's involvement in promoting his ideas through Bible, tract, peace, abolition, and missionary societies, and through Sunday schools, free churches, charitable organizations, political parties, and newspapers. Prominent among the organizations represented are the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, the American Bible Society, the American Colonization Society, the American Missionary Association, the Union Missionary Society, and the Liberty Party. The *New York Journal of Commerce*, the *National Era*, and the *American Missionary* are among the publications with which Tappan was involved. Slavery, colonization, education of African Americans, and the role of the Christian in the abolition movement dominate the writings dating from 1836. Some of the leading issues discussed are the annexation of Texas and the moves taken for the release from custody of the African captives who had mutinied aboard the Spanish schooner *Amistad*. Of special interest is Tappan's journal of the General Anti-slavery Convention of 1843 in London, England.

A small portion of the collection deals with Tappan's business ventures, particularly his Mercantile Agency, the first commercial credit-rating agency in the United States. Throughout the papers there is documentation of routine family activities of the various members of the Tappan family, as well as of their interaction on matters of mutual concern, particularly where business, religion, and abolition were involved.

Prominent correspondents include John Quincy Adams, James Gillespie Birney, Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Seth Merrill Gates, Samuel D. Hastings, William Jay, Joshua Leavitt, Amos A. Phelps, Theodore Sedgwick, Joseph Sturge, and John Greenleaf Whittier. Lewis Tappan's brothers, Benjamin and Arthur, are well represented in the collection as well as other members of the Tappan and Aspinwall families.

In addition to original manuscripts, [photocopies](#) of Tappan items in other repositories—notably from papers in the Oberlin College Library—are present in the collection. Most of these copies fall between 1831 and 1841, and consist of letters of Arthur and Lewis Tappan to John J. Shipherd, Charles G. Finney, and Samuel D. Hastings. They deal mainly with the Tappan brothers' involvement in, and financial support of, religious movements in New York City and at Oberlin College.

[Miscellaneous](#) items include John Quincy Adams's holograph draft of a legal brief pleading for release of the *Amistad* captives, autobiographical notes, genealogical material on the Tappan and Aspinwall families, and a lecture by Theodore Weld. Writings, notes, and other miscellaneous items relating to slavery include a list of articles on emancipation by Lewis Tappan, a list of antislavery hymns, a copy of a deed of manumission, an article by Ansel Bascom, and materials on the expurgation of references to slavery in published works.

The [Additions](#) consist of a letter of 1857 by Tappan to Henry A. Miles reflecting on his religious beliefs, and a letter of 1847 by Tappan expressing condolences to Eliza Scott on the death of her husband, Orange Scott.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in three series:

- [Journals and Notebooks, 1814-1869](#)
- [Correspondence, 1809-1872](#)
- [Miscellany, circa 1839-1903](#)
- [Additions, 1847-1857](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-2A REEL 1-2	<u>Journals and Notebooks, 1814-1869</u> Volumes containing entries of activities, clippings, and miscellaneous information. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 2A-14 REEL 2-7	<u>Correspondence, 1809-1872</u>
BOX 2A-13 REEL 2-5	<u>Letterbooks, 1812-1870</u> Arranged chronologically with alphabetical indexes in the front of vols. 3-11.
BOX 13 REEL 6	<u>General, 1809-1871</u> Mostly letters to Lewis Tappan. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 14 REEL 7	<u>Photocopies, 1838-1872</u> Mostly letters by Lewis and Arthur Tappan from collections of papers in the Oberlin College Library, Oberlin, Ohio. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 14 REEL 7	<u>Miscellany, circa 1839-1903</u> Autobiographical and genealogical notes, clippings, scrapbook, lecture, John Quincy Adams's brief on the <i>Amistad</i> case, and other items.
BOX 14 <i>not filmed</i>	<u>Additions, 1847-1857</u> Correspondence. Arranged in order of processing date.

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 16,431

Container	Contents
BOX 1-2A REEL 1-2	Journals and Notebooks, 1814-1869 Volumes containing entries of activities, clippings, and miscellaneous information. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1 REEL 1	1814
BOX 1 REEL 1	1816, Oct. 22-1820, Mar. 6
BOX 1 REEL 1	1820, Mar. 16-1824, Oct. 21
BOX 1 REEL 1	1824, Oct. 22-1828, Feb. 15
BOX 2 REEL 1	1828, Feb. 16-1829, Nov. 6
BOX 2 REEL 1	1836, Feb. 23-1838, Aug. 30
BOX 2 REEL 1	1838, Aug. 31-1840, Jun. 10
BOX 2 REEL 1	1840, Nov. 8-1841, Aug. 10
BOX 2 REEL 1	1843
BOX 2A REEL 2	1851, May 17-1853, Jun. 30
BOX 2A REEL 2	1853, Jul. 1-1855, Apr. 18
BOX 2A REEL 2	1855, Apr. 19-1869, May 23
BOX 2A-14 REEL 2-7	Correspondence, 1809-1872
BOX 2A-13 REEL 2-5	Letterbooks, 1812-1870 Arranged chronologically with alphabetical indexes in the front of vols. 3-11.
BOX 2A REEL 2	1812, Oct. 3-1827, Jan. 11
BOX 3 REEL 2	1839, Oct. 5-1840, Sept. 7
BOX 4 REEL 3	1842, Aug. 24-1844, Apr. 25
BOX 5 REEL 3	1844, Apr. 30-1846, Mar. 10
BOX 6 REEL 3	1846, Mar. 10-1847, Nov. 4
BOX 7 REEL 4	1847, Nov. 4-1852, Jun. 30
BOX 8 REEL 4	1852, Feb. 23-1857, Dec. 24
BOX 9 REEL 5	1854, Nov. 8-1855, Jul. 13
BOX 10 REEL 5	1855, Jul. 13-1856, Feb. 28
BOX 11 REEL 5	1863, Jun. 16-1866, Jun. 10
BOX 12 REEL 5	1870, Nov. 12-Dec. 29
BOX 13 REEL 6	General, 1809-1871 Mostly letters to Lewis Tappan. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 13 REEL 6	1809-1871, undated (22 folders)

Correspondence, 1809-1872

Container	Contents
BOX 14 REEL 7	Photocopies, 1838-1872 Mostly letters by Lewis and Arthur Tappan from collections of papers in the Oberlin College Library, Oberlin, Ohio. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 13 REEL 7	1838-1872, undated (4 folders)
BOX 14 REEL 7	Miscellany, circa 1839-1903 Autobiographical and genealogical notes, clippings, scrapbook, lecture, John Quincy Adams's brief on the <i>Amistad</i> case, and other items.
BOX 14 REEL 7	American Anti-Slavery Society, clippings, 1840-1843, undated
BOX 14 REEL 7	<i>Amistad</i> case, including John Quincy Adams's legal brief, 1839-1841, undated
BOX 14 REEL 7	Biographical and genealogical material
BOX 14 REEL 7	Chronological résumé of Lewis Tappan's life from 1802 to 1871, written by himself
BOX 14 REEL 7	History of the Tappan family and short autobiography of Lewis Tappan
BOX 14 REEL 7	Tappan and Aspinwall families, photocopies of genealogical charts, notes, and pamphlets
BOX 14 REEL 7	Tappan family scrapbook, circa 1842-1903
BOX 14 REEL 7	Index to narrative of Lewis Tappan
BOX 14 REEL 7	Name and address book, 1847-1852
BOX 14 REEL 7	New York draft riot, account [1863?] (facsimile)
BOX 14 REEL 7	"Truth's Hindrances," a lecture by Theodore D. Weld
BOX 14 REEL 7	Writings, notes, and other items on slavery
BOX 14 <i>not filmed</i>	Additions, 1847-1857 Correspondence. Arranged in order of processing date.
BOX 14 <i>not filmed</i>	2010 Addition
BOX 14 <i>not filmed</i>	Letter to Henry A. Miles, 1857
BOX 14 <i>not filmed</i>	2020 Addition
BOX 14 <i>not filmed</i>	Letter to Eliza Scott, 1847