

**Ambrose W. Thompson Papers**  
**A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress**



**Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**2023**

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm79042804>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms012113>

Prepared by Manuscript Division Staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2012  
Revised 2023 August

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Ambrose W. Thompson Papers

**Inclusive Dates:** 1847-1960

**Bulk Dates:** 1860-1882

**ID No.:** MSS42804

**Creator:** Thompson, Ambrose W.

**Extent:** 12,000 items

**Extent:** 53 containers plus 2 oversize

**Extent:** 26 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

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

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm79042804>

**Summary:** Businessman. Business and family correspondence, letterbooks, memoranda, reports, statistical tables, patent papers, stocks and bonds, drawings, maps, and printed matter and miscellaneous material relating to Thompson's career as a businessman.

## 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

Ashley, James Mitchell, 1824-1896--Correspondence.  
Beale, Edward Fitzgerald, 1822-1893--Correspondence.  
Cameron, Simon, 1799-1889--Correspondence.  
Dix, John A. (John Adams), 1798-1879--Correspondence.  
Evarts, William Maxwell, 1818-1901--Correspondence.  
Fairchild, Lucius, 1831-1896--Correspondence.  
Fox, Gustavus Vasa, 1821-1883--Correspondence.  
Hurlbert, William Henry, 1827-1895--Correspondence.  
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Correspondence.  
Meagher, Thomas Francis, 1823-1867--Correspondence.  
Pattison, Juan--Correspondence.  
Pierpont, Francis Harrison, 1814-1899--Correspondence.  
Pomeroy, S. C. (Samuel Clarke), 1816-1891--Correspondence.  
Porter, David D. (David Dixon), 1813-1891--Correspondence.  
Porter, Fitz-John, 1822-1901--Correspondence.  
Shellabarger, Samuel, 1888-1954--Correspondence.  
Sigel, Franz, 1824-1902--Correspondence.  
Smith, Caleb B. (Caleb Blood), 1808-1864--Correspondence.  
Thompson family--Correspondence.  
Thompson, Ambrose W.  
Thompson, Ambrose, Jr.--Correspondence.  
Thompson, Richard W. (Richard Wigginton), 1809-1900--Correspondence.  
Usher, John Palmer, 1816-1889--Correspondence.  
Wise, Henry A. (Henry Alexander), 1806-1876--Correspondence.

### Organizations

Chiriqui Improvement Company.

### Subjects

African Americans--Colonization.  
African Americans--Washington (D.C.)  
Canals.

Freedmen--Colonization.  
Land speculation.  
Mines and mineral resources--Panama.  
Railroads.  
Steamboats.  
Transportation--Panama.

#### **Places**

Chiriquí (Panama : Province)  
Panama--Colonization.  
Panama--History--To 1903.

#### **Occupations**

Businessmen.

## **Acquisition Information**

The papers of Ambrose W. Thompson, businessman, were given to the Library of Congress in 1959 by his son, John A. Thompson. Small additions were donated by Paul J. Scheips in 1960.

## **Processing History**

The papers of Ambrose W. Thompson were arranged and described in 1960. The finding aid was revised in 2012. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

## **Additional Guides**

The collection was described in the Library's *Information Bulletin* 19, no. 28 (July 11, 1960), and in the *Library of Congress Journal of Current Acquisitions* 17, no. 3 (May 1960) 186-87.

## **Copyright Status**

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

## **Access and Restrictions**

The papers of Ambrose W. Thompson 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.

## **Preferred Citation**

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

Date	Event
1811, May 23	Born, Lewes, Del.
1851	Petitioned Congress for federal aid for the establishment of Atlantic and Pacific lines for carrying mail
1854	Received land and road grant from the province of Chiriquí government, Panama Incorporated the Central American Mining Co. in Pennsylvania; changed the name to the Chiriqui [sic] Improvement Co. with himself as president Attempted to interest the U.S. Government in naval coaling stations and mail service across the Isthmus at Chiriquí
1859	Incorporated National Steamship Co. in New Jersey with himself as president
1860-1863	Promoted the Metropolitan Railroad scheme for a line between Point of Rocks, Md., and the District of Columbia
1861-1864	Proposed to Congress and President Abraham Lincoln the resettlement of formerly enslaved people in Chiriquí
1864-1866	Traveled in England and on the Continent in search of financial backing for a proposed steamship line from New York to California via the isthmus, and development of coal mines in Chiriquí 1868 Elected member, Board of Directors, West Shore Hudson River Railroad Co.
1869	Incorporated the International Steamship Co. in New Jersey with himself as president
1876-1882	Revived efforts to establish naval and coaling stations at Chiriquí as well as service through the region to the West Coast of the U.S.
1877	Elected President, Brooklyn, Coney Island & Rockaway Railroad Co.
1882, May 27	Died, Washington, D.C.

## Scope and Content Note

The papers of Ambrose W. Thompson span the years 1847-1960, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1860-1882. The collection focuses on his business undertakings in railroads, canals, steamships and land speculations. The papers are fairly evenly distributed from 1860 until Thompson's death in 1882, with a slight concentration during the years from 1865 to 1875. The collection is organized into nine series: [Memoranda Book](#), [Family Correspondence](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Letterbooks](#), [Business Papers](#), [Chiriqui Improvement Company File](#), [Financial Papers](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#).

The first part of the [Chiriqui Company File](#), 1851-1882, contains the company's papers until Thompson's death, and the second portion, dated 1883-1960, relates to various attempts to revive the firm in the 1940s. Correspondence has been removed from the first portion of the company papers and filed in the [General Correspondence](#) series together with Thompson's other business-related communications.

Included in the [Family Correspondence](#) are letters to and from Ambrose's son, Ambrose, Jr., who was also involved in his father's enterprises and did a considerable amount of traveling and negotiating to promote them.

Prominent correspondents include James Mitchell Ashley, Edward Fitzgerald Beale, Simon Cameron, John A. Dix, William Maxwell Evarts, Lucius Fairchild, Gustavus Vasa Fox, William H. Hulbert, Thomas Francis Meagher, Francis B. Pierpont, S. C. Pomeroy, David D. Porter, Fitz-John Porter, Samuel Shellabarger, Franz Sigel, Caleb B. Smith, Richard W. Thompson, John Palmer Usher, and Henry A. Wise.

## Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in nine series:

- [Memoranda Book, 1860](#)
- [Family Correspondence, 1860-1895](#)
- [General Correspondence, 1847-1896](#)

- Letterbooks, 1851-1882
- Business Papers, circa 1850-1882
- Chiriqui Improvement Company File, 1851-1960
- Financial Papers
- Miscellany
- Oversize

## Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1	<p><b><u>Memoranda Book, 1860</u></b></p> <p>Occasional memoranda regarding appointments and events. One volume.</p>
BOX 1-5	<p><b><u>Family Correspondence, 1860-1895</u></b></p> <p>Letters received. Arranged chronologically and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent.</p>
BOX 6-26	<p><b><u>General Correspondence, 1847-1896</u></b></p> <p>Letters received. Arranged chronologically and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent.</p>
BOX 27-31	<p><b><u>Letterbooks, 1851-1882</u></b></p> <p>Letterpress copies of outgoing letters. Arranged chronologically by beginning date of volumes categorized in general, business, and family groupings.</p>
BOX 32-42	<p><b><u>Business Papers, circa 1850-1882</u></b></p> <p>Memoranda, reports, statistical tables, drawings, patent papers, stocks and bonds, maps, circulars, pamphlets, and printed material. Arranged alphabetically by subject and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 43-49	<p><b><u>Chiriqui Improvement Company File, 1851-1960</u></b></p> <p>Correspondence, business papers, maps, biographical notes and other material. Arranged in two groups: Set I, 1851-1882; and Set II, 1883-1960. Correspondence was removed from the first group and filed in the <i><u>General Correspondence</u></i> Series.</p>
BOX 50-52	<p><b><u>Financial Papers</u></b></p> <p>Checks, bills, and receipts. Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX 53	<p><b><u>Miscellany</u></b></p> <p>Maps, engineering drawings, pamphlets, clippings and advertisements. Arranged by type of material, name of company, or subject.</p>
BOX OV 1-OV 2	<p><b><u>Oversize</u></b></p> <p>Maps and engineering drawings. Arranged and described according to the series and container from which they were removed.</p>

# Container List

<b>Container</b>	<b>Contents</b>
<b>BOX 1</b>	<b>Memoranda Book, 1860</b> Occasional memoranda regarding appointments and events. One volume.
<b>BOX 1</b>	1860
<b>BOX 1-5</b>	<b>Family Correspondence, 1860-1895</b> Letters received. Arranged chronologically and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent.
<b>BOX 1</b>	1860-1866
<b>BOX 2</b>	1867-1871
<b>BOX 3</b>	1872-1874
<b>BOX 4</b>	1875-1895
<b>BOX 5</b>	Undated
<b>BOX 6-26</b>	<b>General Correspondence, 1847-1896</b> Letters received. Arranged chronologically and therein alphabetically by name of correspondent.
<b>BOX 6</b>	1847-1859
<b>BOX 7</b>	1860-1862
<b>BOX 8</b>	1863-1864
<b>BOX 9</b>	1865
<b>BOX 10</b>	1866
<b>BOX 11</b>	1867, Jan.-Jul.
<b>BOX 12</b>	1867, Aug.-Dec.
<b>BOX 13</b>	1868
<b>BOX 13</b>	Jan.-Aug.
<b>BOX 14</b>	Sept.-Dec.
<b>BOX 14</b>	1869
<b>BOX 14</b>	Jan.-Aug.
<b>BOX 15</b>	Sept.-Dec.
<b>BOX 16</b>	1870, Apr.-Dec.
<b>BOX 17</b>	1871
<b>BOX 18</b>	1872
<b>BOX 19</b>	1873
<b>BOX 20</b>	1874
<b>BOX 21</b>	1875
<b>BOX 22</b>	1876
<b>BOX 22</b>	1877
<b>BOX 22</b>	Jan.-Jun.
<b>BOX 23</b>	Jul.-Sept.

## General Correspondence, 1847-1896

Container	Contents
BOX 23	1878
BOX 24	1879
BOX 24	1880
BOX 24	Jan.-Sept.
BOX 25	Oct.-Dec.
BOX 25	1881-1884
BOX 25	1887
BOX 25	1893
BOX 25	1896
BOX 26	Undated
BOX 27-31	<b>Letterbooks, 1851-1882</b> Letterpress copies of outgoing letters. Arranged chronologically by beginning date of volumes categorized in general, business, and family groupings.
BOX 27	General
BOX 27	1851, Jul.-1852, Jan.; 1852, Jul.-1860, Oct.; 1866-1867, Aug.
BOX 27	1854-1855
BOX 27	1860-1869
BOX 28	1863, Sept.-1868
BOX 28	1867, Aug.-1868, May
BOX 28	1868-1874
BOX 29	1871-1876
BOX 29	1872, Dec.-1875, Apr.
BOX 29	1874, Mar.-1875, Apr.
BOX 29	1875, Apr.-Aug.
BOX 30	1876, Jun.-Oct.
BOX 30	1878, Mar.-1880, Nov.
BOX 30	1880, Nov.-1882, Mar.
BOX 31	Business, 1864-1867 (14 vols.)
BOX 31	Family, 1864-1866 (4 vols.)
BOX 32-42	<b>Business Papers, circa 1850-1882</b> Memoranda, reports, statistical tables, drawings, patent papers, stocks and bonds, maps, circulars, pamphlets, and printed material. Arranged alphabetically by subject and chronologically therein.
BOX 32	Miscellany, undated
BOX 33	International Steamship Co., 1869-1877, undated
BOX 34	Inventions and patents, 1867-1874, undated
BOX 34	Mexican bond fraud, 1864-1870, undated
BOX 35	National Steamship Co., 1859-1869, undated
BOX 36	Railroad enterprises
BOX 36	Brooklyn, Coney Island & Rockaway Railroad, 1877-1878
BOX 36	Metropolitan Railroad Co., 1861-1863



## Business Papers, circa 1850-1882

Container	Contents
BOX 37	New Jersey Northern Railroad Co., undated
BOX 37	New York, Fort Lee Railroad Co., undated
BOX 37	Tennessee & Pacific Railroad Co., undated
BOX 37	West Shore Hudson River Railroad Co., 1867-1872, undated
BOX 38	Railroad miscellany, including material on the Union Pacific, Erie, Pennsylvania, Eastern Shore, Lonaconing & Cumberland, Texas & New Orleans, New York Central, Mississippi & Pacific, New York & Northwestern, Chesapeake & Ohio, and Northern Pacific railroads, 1849-1878, undated
BOX 39	Steamship miscellany, predominantly shipbuilding and maintenance cost records, 1851-1873, undated
BOX 40	Trade and commerce memoranda, 1860-1879, undated
BOX 41	Trans-Oceanic Steamship Enterprises, predominantly mail and immigration memoranda, 1851-18175, undated
BOX 42	West Virginia coal lands, 1871-1881, undated
BOX 43-49	<b>Chiriqui Improvement Company File, 1851-1960</b> Correspondence, business papers, maps, biographical notes and other material. Arranged in two groups: Set I, 1851-1882; and Set II, 1883-1960. Correspondence was removed from the first group and filed in the <i>General Correspondence Series</i> .
BOX 43	Set I
BOX 43	1851-1866
BOX 44	1868-1882
BOX 45	Undated, pre-1882
BOX 46	Set II
BOX 46	1883-1941
BOX 47	1842-1946
BOX 48	1947-1955
BOX 49	1956-1960
BOX 49	Undated. post-1882
BOX 49	Maps
BOX 49	Biographer's notes
BOX 50-52	<b>Financial Papers</b> Checks, bills, and receipts. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 50-52	Bills, receipts, and checks
BOX 53	<b>Miscellany</b> Maps, engineering drawings, pamphlets, clippings and advertisements. Arranged by type of material, name of company, or subject.
BOX 53	Maps <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX 53	Engineering drawings, 1873-1874 <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX 53	Printed matter
BOX OV 1-OV 2	<b>Oversize</b> Maps and engineering drawings.

## Oversize

### Container

### Contents

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Arranged and described according to the series and container from which they were removed.

**BOX OV 1**

Miscellany

**BOX OV 1**

Maps (Container 53)

**BOX OV 2**

Engineering drawings, 1873-1874 (Container 53)