

Henry William Parsons Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2024

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm2010085562>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms016051>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2016
Revised 2024 June

Collection Summary

Title: Henry William Parsons Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1871-1986

ID No.: MSS85562

Creator: Parsons, Henry William, 1840-1914

Extent: 195 items

Extent: 3 containers

Extent: 0.8 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm2010085562>

Summary: English Congregational minister and temperance advocate. Diaries and correspondence documenting his temperance work for the International Order of Good Templars with African Americans in North Carolina, his ministerial work in England and the United States, and his travels with the Fisk Jubilee Singers during their 1878 European tour. Includes family correspondence with annotated transcriptions and genealogical material.

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

Aldrich, Mathilda Parsons, approximately 1838- --Correspondence.

Bennett family--Correspondence.

Parsons family--Correspondence.

Parsons, E. Dudley (Ernest Dudley), 1876-1952--Correspondence.

Parsons, Henry William, 1840-1914.

Parsons, Sarah Bennett, 1842-1914--Correspondence.

Payne, Daniel Alexander, 1811-1893.

Tanner, Benj. T. (Benjamin Tucker), 1835-1923.

Toms, Elizabeth Parsons, approximately 1835- --Correspondence.

Organizations

African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Fisk University.

Independent Order of Good Templars.

Jubilee Singers (Fisk University)

Subjects

African American clergy.

African American musicians.

African American universities and colleges.

African Americans--North Carolina.

Congregationalists--England.

Congregationalists--Middle West.

Congregationalists--United States.

Temperance--North Carolina.

Temperance.

Voyages and travels.

Places

United States--Description and travel.

Occupations

Clergy.

Reformers.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Henry William Parsons were given to the Library of Congress by Janet Parsons Mackey in 2010 and 2020.

Processing History

The papers of Henry William Parsons were arranged and described Karen Linn Femia with the assistance of Sherralyn McCoy. The 2023 Addition was arranged and described by Allyssa Wiggins. Some items in the 2023 Addition have undergone mold remediation.

Transfers

A cassette tape has been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division where it is identified as a part of the Henry William Parsons Papers. The tape is an oral history interview with Ernest Dudley Parsons, Jr. Patrons are encouraged to contact the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division in advance of a research visit.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Henry William Parsons 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, Henry William Parsons Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1840, Mar. 1	Born, Devonshire, England; orphaned as a child, worked in his youth as a coal-worker and brickyard laborer
1862	Ordained a Congregational minister
1865	Married Sarah Bennett (died 1914)
1871	Initiated into the Independent Order of Good Templars, a temperance organization; became active in the temperance movement
1876	Temperance work with African Americans in North Carolina sponsored by the Independent Order of Good Templars
1878	Escorted the Fisk Jubilee Singers in England during their European tour

1883	Immigrated to the United States along with his wife and eight children; served in several Midwestern churches before settling in Edina-Morningside on the border of Minneapolis, Minn.
1914, Sept. 15	Died, Minnesota

Scope and Content Note

The correspondence and diaries of Henry William Parsons span the years 1871-1887. Parsons's diaries comprise most of the collection, but also included are letters to his wife, Sarah Bennett, written in 1876 while Parsons was in North Carolina promoting temperance among African Americans. Other diaries document his life and work in England, his immigration to the United States in 1883, and his continued work in the ministry in the American Midwest.

Parsons was born and ordained a Congregationalist pastor in England. After becoming active in the temperance movement and under the sponsorship of the Independent Order of Good Templars, he sailed to the United States in 1876 to promote temperance among African Americans in North Carolina. The letters to his wife and diaries chronicle his round-trip journey and experiences in the United States, including his meetings with African Methodist Episcopal clergymen Benjamin T. Tanner and Daniel A. Payne as well as numerous African American pastors in North Carolina. He returned to England at the end of December. The diary for 1878 includes his time escorting the Fisk Jubilee Singers during one of their tours of Europe. Fisk University, the historically Black college in Nashville, Tennessee, formed the a cappella singing group in 1871 and sent it on fund-raising tours. Parsons traveled with the group during the last tour using the original singers. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were instrumental in establishing the Negro Spiritual as an important genre in American choral literature.

The 2023 Addition primarily consists of correspondence written to Henry William Parsons from his sister, Mathilda Parsons Aldrich (1837-1919) in the last years of his life and discusses his health and family in the United States. In addition, there is correspondence between Henry William Parsons and his children, notably his son, Ernest Dudley Parsons (1876-1952). Other notable correspondents include Parsons's sister, Elizabeth Parsons Toms, and the Bennett family. Also included in the 2023 addition are annotated transcriptions of the correspondence, which were organized chronologically and numbered by Parsons's descendants.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein, or by correspondent.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Diaries Vol. I, 1871-1872 (3 folders) Vol. II, 1874, June-Dec. Vol. III, 1875 (2 folders) Vol. IV, 1876 (2 folders) Vol. V, 1878 (2 folders)
BOX 2	Vol. VI, 1880-1882 (5 folders) Vol. VII, 1883-1887 (2 folders) Letters to Sarah Bennett, wife of Henry William Parsons, 1876 (2 folders)
BOX 3	2023 Addition
BOX 3	Annotated transcriptions of family correspondence, circa 1986
BOX 3	Family correspondence
BOX 3	Aldrich, Mathilda Parsons, 1909-1914
BOX 3	Bennett, Florence ("Florrie"), 1910
BOX 3	Bennett, Robert and Ann, 1909-1911
BOX 3	Burnell, Florence Clara Parsons, 1911
BOX 3	Envelopes, 1907-1916
BOX 3	Lenhart, Virginia, 1907
BOX 3	Padmore, Emily Jane Derham, 1908-1916
BOX 3	Parsons, Albert Henry Bennett, 1914
BOX 3	Parsons, Henry William, 1908-1914
BOX 3	Parsons, Percy Howard Clyde, 1912
BOX 3	Toms, Elizabeth Parsons, 1908-1916
BOX 3	Toms, Mary Ann Phillips and Edwin Henry, 1908
BOX 3	Unidentified correspondents, 1907-1916
BOX 3	Parsons, Henry Williams, biographical information, circa 1986