

Samuel Finley Breese Morse

A Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress

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Revised and expanded by Margaret McAleer



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2001

Contact information: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mss/address.html>

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Manuscript Division, 2001**

Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms997010>

Latest revision: 2005-02-18

Collection Summary

Title: Papers of Samuel Finley Breese Morse

Span Dates: 1793-1944

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1807-1872)

ID No.: MSS33670

Creator: Morse, Samuel Finley Breese, 1791-1872

Extent: 10,060 items; 73 containers plus 3 oversize; 18.4 linear feet; 36 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: Artist and inventor. Family and general correspondence, letterbooks, diaries, notebooks, scrapbooks, and other papers. Includes letters from Samuel Finley Breese Morse to his family describing his studies in England during the War of 1812 and his subsequent struggle to support himself as a portrait painter in the United States; correspondence and other papers relating to Morse's invention of the telegraph, law suits over patents, and his dispute with Joseph Henry who also claimed to have invented the telegraph.

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.

Names:

Morse, Samuel Finley Breese, 1791-1872
Agassiz, Louis, 1807-1873--Correspondence
Allston, Washington, 1779-1843--Correspondence
Chapman, J. G. (John Gadsby), 1808-1889--Correspondence
Clinton, DeWitt, 1769-1828--Correspondence
Cogdell, John S. (John Stevens), 1778-1847--Correspondence
Cole, Thomas, 1801-1848--Correspondence
Cooper, James Fenimore, 1789-1851--Correspondence
Cornell, Ezra, 1807-1874--Correspondence.
Daguerre, Louis Jacques Mandé, 1787-1851--Correspondence
Evarts, Jeremiah, 1781-1831--Correspondence
Field, Cyrus W. (Cyrus West), 1819-1892--Correspondence
Greenough, Horatio, 1805-1852--Correspondence
Grimké, Thomas Smith, 1786-1834--Correspondence
Henry, Joseph, 1797-1878--Correspondence
Kendall, Amos, 1789-1869--Correspondence
King, Charles Bird, 1785-1862--Correspondence
Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834--Correspondence
Leslie, Charles Robert, 1794-1859--Correspondence
Morse, Jedidiah, 1761-1826--Correspondence
Morse, Lucretia Pickering Walker, d. 1825--Correspondence
Morse, Sidney E. (Sidney Edwards), 1794-1871--Correspondence
Rush, Richard, 1780-1859--Correspondence
Seward, William Henry, 1801-1872--Correspondence
Stuart, Gilbert, 1755-1828--Correspondence
West, Benjamin, 1738-1820--Correspondence
Wilberforce, William, 1759-1833--Correspondence
Clausing, Ludwig, 1809?-1834. Papers of Ludwig Clausing

Subjects:

Abolitionists--United States
Anti-Catholicism
Architecture--Europe

Architecture--Italy
Art--Study and teaching--Great Britain--19th century
Art, American
Art, British
Art, Italian
Art, European
Germans--United States
Immigrants--United States
Nativism
Patent law and legislation
Photography
Portrait painting, American--19th century
Slavery--United States
Telegraph--History
Telegraph--Patents
Europe--Description and travel
Great Britain--Description and travel
Italy--Description and travel
United States--History--War of 1812

Occupations:

Artists
Inventors

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of Samuel Finley Breese Morse, artist and inventor, were given to the Library of Congress by his son, Edward Lind Morse, and his granddaughter, Leila Livingston Morse, between 1916 and 1944. Other items were added to the papers through purchase and gift between 1922 and 1995.

Processing History:

The papers of Samuel Finley Breese Morse were processed in 1975; additional material received between 1981 and 1995 was incorporated into the collection in 1996. Three maps were moved from Container 71 to the Oversize series in 2001.

Transfers:

Some photographs and silhouettes have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Copyright Status:

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

Microfilm:

A microfilm edition of these papers is available on thirty-six reels. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan.

Electronic Format:

Selected items from the papers of Samuel Finley Breese Morse are available on the Library of Congress Web site at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sfbmhtml/>.

Preferred Citation:

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

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1791, Apr. 27	Born, Charlestown, Mass.
1799	Entered Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.
1810	Graduated Yale College, New Haven, Conn.
1811-1815	Studied art in England with Washington Allston and attended the Royal Academy of Arts, London, England
1815	Opened an art studio in Boston but spent much time traveling
1817	Patented, with brother Sidney E. Morse, a flexible piston pump for fire engines
1818	Married Lucretia Pickering Walker (died 1825)
1822	Invented a marble-cutting machine
1823	Opened an art studio in New York, N.Y.
1826	Founder and first president, National Academy of Design, New York, N.Y.
1827-1832	Began study and experiments in electricity and the telegraph
1829-1832	Traveled, studied, and painted in Europe
1832	Returned to New York, N.Y. Appointed professor of painting and sculpture, University of the City of New York, New York, N.Y.
1832-1836	Active in the Native American Party Worked on developing the telegraph
1835	Published <i>Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States</i> (New York: Leavitt, Lord, & Co. 208 pp.)
1836	Candidate for mayor of New York on Native American ticket; polled 1,500 votes
1837	Withdrew from painting to devote attention to inventing Filed for a patent for the telegraph Edited <i>Confessions of a French Catholic Priest</i> (New York: D. Van Nostrand. 255 pp.)
1843	Congress voted \$30,000 for an experimental telegraph line from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore, Md.

1844	Sent telegraph message, "What hath God Wrought?" from the Supreme Court chamber in the United States Capitol to Baltimore, Md., on May 24
1848	Married Sarah Elizabeth Griswold
1854	Unsuccessful Democratic candidate for Congress, Poughkeepsie district, N.Y.
1857-1858	Served as an electrician for Cyrus W. Field's company in laying the transatlantic telegraph cable
1861	Cofounded Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. President, National Academy of Design, New York, N.Y.
1869	Published <i>Examination of the Telegraphic Apparatus and the Processes in Telegraphy</i> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office. 166 pp.)
1872, Apr. 2	Died, New York, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Samuel Finley Breese Morse (1791-1872) span the years 1793-1944, with the bulk of the material dating from 1807 to 1872. The collection is composed primarily of incoming correspondence, but also contains letterbooks, diaries, scrapbooks, clippings and newspapers, printed matter, photographs, maps, drawings, and a tape of the first telegraphic message annotated by Morse. The papers are arranged in nine series: [General Correspondence and Related Documents](#); [Family Correspondence](#); [Letterbooks](#); [Diaries and Notebooks](#); [Scrapbooks, Clippings, and Newspapers](#); [Printed Matter](#); [Miscellany](#); [Addition](#); and [Oversize](#).

Morse had a long and distinguished life, succeeding first as an artist between 1811 and 1837 and then as an inventor from 1832 to 1872. As an artist, he excelled in portrait painting and founded the National Academy of Design in New York in 1826, serving as its first president until 1842. As an inventor, Morse is most widely known for the invention of the electro-magnetic telegraph. He was also interested in abolitionism and in the nativist movement.

The bulk of the [General Correspondence and Related Documents](#) series consists of correspondence contained in bound volumes. Correspondence from 1811 to 1838 focuses particularly on Morse's career as an artist. Morse's letters to his family during this period describe his studies in England during the War of 1812 and his subsequent struggles to support himself as a portrait painter in the United States. The letters are replete with observations on American, British, and European art and artists. The series also includes letters to and from artists Washington Allston, John Chapman, Thomas Cole, John S. Cogdell, Horatio Greenough, Charles B. King, Charles Robert Leslie, Gilbert Stuart, and Benjamin West. There are numerous exchanges with the Marquis de Lafayette, whose portrait Morse painted. As an artist, he was interested in the developing science of photography and corresponded with Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre on the subject.

Much of Morse's correspondence from 1832 to 1844 concerns his development of the telegraph. Beginning in 1848, Morse became embroiled in law suits over patents which lasted until his death. He carried on a particularly acrimonious dispute with Joseph Henry, who also claimed to have invented the telegraph. Other correspondence includes scientific exchanges with Louis Agassiz and business-related correspondence with Ezra Cornell, Cyrus W. Field, Amos Kendall, and Francis O. J. Smith. Morse corresponded with numerous lawyers and political leaders, including DeWitt Clinton, Jeremiah Evarts, Richard Rush, and William H. Seward. His correspondence with James Fenimore Cooper, Thomas Smith Grimké, and William Wilberforce reflects his interest in abolitionism.

Unbound items in the [General Correspondence](#) series consist largely of Morse's letters to his parents, brothers, and wife. The bulk of Morse's outgoing correspondence from 1854 to 1872 is contained in a series of [letterbooks](#), several of which are indexed.

The collection contains numerous [diaries](#). Apart from a journal kept by Morse in 1805 at age fourteen, each of the diaries describes his European travel. The earliest entries record Morse's voyage to and from England in 1811 and 1815. While the

diary does not cover the intervening years when Morse attended the Royal Academy of Art, it does contain several pages of notes entitled "Thoughts and Observations on the Fine Arts." The bulk of the diaries date between 1829 and 1831 when Morse resided in Italy. These diaries, which also contain numerous sketches, record Morse's travels, his observations on art and architecture, and numerous descriptions of Roman Catholic religious services and ceremonies.

The [Miscellany](#) series includes the papers of Louis Clausen, a German immigrant and anti-Catholic figure whom Morse befriended after returning to the United States in 1832. After Clausen's death Morse acquired some of his personal effects. [Scrapbooks, newspaper clippings](#), and other printed matter pertaining to art and the telegraph comprise a separate series which also provides biographical information on Morse.

The [Addition](#) consists mainly of correspondence. Included are eighteen letters from Morse to his brother, Sidney E. Morse, acquired by the Library in 1992, and four letters transferred from the division's Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection. This correspondence is supplemented by photocopies of Morse's letters located in the New-York Historical Society. The addition also contains microfilm of family correspondence reproduced by the Library in 1944 before it was given to the Library.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in nine series:

- [General Correspondence and Related Documents, 1793-1877, n.d.](#)
- [Family Correspondence, 1906-1941, n.d.](#)
- [Letterbooks, 1854-1872](#)
- [Diaries and Notebooks, 1805-ca. 1840](#)
- [Scrapbooks, Clippings, and Newspapers, 1815-1944](#)
- [Printed Matter, 1823-1944, n.d.](#)
- [Miscellany, ca. 1830-1944, n.d.](#)
- [Addition, 1807-1871, n.d.](#)
- [Oversize, 1844-1872, n.d.](#)

Description of Series

Container

BOX 1-52
REEL 1-26

Series

General Correspondence and Related Documents, 1793-1877, n.d.

Family, personal, and business letters sent and received, supplemented by clippings, drawings, contracts and agreements, drafts of writings, notes, and receipts.
Arranged in groupings of bound volumes and unbound letters and chronologically therein.

BOX 53
REEL 26

Family Correspondence, 1906-1941, n.d.

Correspondence of Leila Livingston Morse and other family members.
Arranged alphabetically by family member and chronologically therein.

BOX 54-58
REEL 26-31

Letterbooks, 1854-1872

Letterpress copies of letters sent. Several volumes are indexed.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 59-60
REEL 32-33

Diaries and Notebooks, 1805-ca. 1840

Diaries arranged chronologically, and notebooks arranged by subject.

BOX 61-66
REEL 33-34

Scrapbooks, Clippings, and Newspapers, 1815-1944

Bound and loose newspaper clippings, newspapers, and broadsides.
Grouped by type of material and arranged in approximate chronological order.

BOX 67-70
REEL 34

Printed Matter, 1823-1944, n.d.

Books, pamphlets, magazines, and broadsides.
Arranged by subject matter.

BOX 71-72
REEL 34-35

Miscellany, ca. 1830-1944, n.d.

Correspondence, notes, maps, drawings, radio scripts, menus, broadsides, speeches, genealogical records, poems, prayers, handwritten religious tracts, papers of Louis Clausing, resolutions, and a telegraphic message tape.

BOX 73
REEL 1

Addition, 1807-1871, n.d.

Original and reproduced correspondence, photograph of a portrait, and printed matter.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
Microfilm shelf no. 6,295A.

BOX OV 1-OV 3

Oversize, 1844-1872, n.d.

Scrapbook, first telegraphic message, maps, and resolution re death of Morse.
Organized and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed. Microfilmed in their original locations.

Container List

Microfilm edition available. Shelf no. 16,372.

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-52 REEL 1-26	General Correspondence and Related Documents, 1793-1877, n.d. Items available online. Family, personal, and business letters sent and received, supplemented by clippings, drawings, contracts and agreements, drafts of writings, notes, and receipts. Arranged in groupings of bound volumes and unbound letters and chronologically therein.
BOX 1 REEL 1	Bound volumes 1793, July 2-1807, Dec. 2
BOX 2 REEL 1	1807, Dec. 23-1812, Apr. 15
BOX 3 REEL 2	1812, Apr. 21-1814, Mar. 15
BOX 4 REEL 2	1814, Mar. 16-1816, Jan. 29
BOX 5 REEL 3	1816, Jan. 30-1818, Dec. 28
BOX 6 REEL 2	1818, Dec. 30-1820, Feb. 12
BOX 7 REEL 4	1820, Feb. 13-1821, Jan. 21
BOX 8 REEL 4	1821, Jan. 24-1823, Dec. 8
BOX 9 REEL 5	1823, Dec. 9-1828, Feb. 9
BOX 10 REEL 5	1828, Feb. 11-1832, July 13
BOX 11 REEL 6	1832, July 14-1835, Nov. 27
BOX 12 REEL 6	1835, Nov. 28-1838, Apr. 18
BOX 13 REEL 6-7	1838, Apr. 24-1839, Nov. 16
BOX 14 REEL 7	1839, Nov. 26-1842, June 17
BOX 15 REEL 7	1842, June 20-1843, Sept. 12
BOX 16 REEL 8	1843, Sept. 13-1844, Jan. 13
BOX 17 REEL 8	1844, Jan. 15-June 8
BOX 18 REEL 9	1844, June 10-Oct. 21

General Correspondence and Related Documents, 1793-1877, n.d.

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 19	1844, Oct. 22-1845, Mar. 1
REEL 9	
BOX 20	1845, Mar. 4-Dec. 29
REEL 10	
BOX 21	1845, Dec. 30-1846, Dec. 8
REEL 10	
BOX 22	1846, Dec. 9-1847, May 17
REEL 11	
BOX 23	1847, May 18-1848, Jan. 28
REEL 11	
BOX 24	1848, Jan. 31-Aug. 11
REEL 12	
BOX 25	1848, Aug. 15-1849, Apr. 20
REEL 12	
BOX 26	1849, Apr. 21-Oct. 23
REEL 13	
BOX 27	1849, Oct. 24-1850, Mar. 19
REEL 13	
BOX 28	1850, Mar. 22- May 23
REEL 14	
BOX 29	1850, May 24-1851, Jan. 20
REEL 14	
BOX 30	1851, Jan. 25-1852, Apr. 15
REEL 15	
BOX 31	1852, Apr. 17-1853, Jan. 7
REEL 15	
BOX 32	1853, Jan. 8-1854, Mar. 26
REEL 16	
BOX 33	1854, Mar. 28-1854, Aug. 11
REEL 16	
BOX 34	1854, Aug. 12-1855, June 22
REEL 17	
BOX 35	1855, June 26-1856, Jan. 26
REEL 17	
BOX 36	1856, Jan. 30-Oct. 5
REEL 18	
BOX 37	1856, Oct. 6-1857, July 7
REEL 18	
BOX 38	1857, July 9-1858, Apr. 2
REEL 19	
BOX 39	1858, Apr. 3-1859, Mar. 18
REEL 19	
BOX 40	1859, Mar. 31-1860, Mar. 28
REEL 20	
BOX 41	1860, Apr. 2-1862, July 7
REEL 20	
BOX 42	1862, July 13-1864, May 16
REEL 21	
BOX 43	1864, May 26-1866, Oct. 22
REEL 21	

General Correspondence and Related Documents, 1793-1877, n.d.

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 44 REEL 22	1866, Oct. 29-1868, Jan. 5
BOX 45 REEL 23	1868, Jan. 6-1869, June 2
BOX 46 REEL 23	1869, June 12-1871, Feb. 15
BOX 47 REEL 23	1871, Feb. 28-1877, Aug. 10
BOX 48-51 REEL 24-25	Undated
BOX 52 REEL 25-26	Unbound letters <i>See also Container 75, Reel 1</i> 1810, Feb. 2-1872, Jan. 20, and undated Undated fragments
BOX 53 REEL 26	Family Correspondence, 1906-1941, n.d. Correspondence of Leila Livingston Morse and other family members. Arranged alphabetically by family member and chronologically therein.
BOX 53 REEL 26	Morse, Leila Livingston (granddaughter), 1928-1941, n.d. Other family members, 1906-1932, n.d.
BOX 54-58 REEL 26-31	Letterbooks, 1854-1872 Items available online. Letterpress copies of letters sent. Several volumes are indexed. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 54* REEL 29	1854, June 2-1855, Oct. 8 * Filmed out of sequence
BOX 54* REEL 27	1855, Oct. 8-1857, Oct. 23 (2 vols.) * Filmed out of sequence
BOX 55* REEL 26-27	1858, Dec. 22-1860, July 6 * Filmed out of sequence
BOX 56* REEL 29	1860, May 24-1862, Feb. 18 * Filmed out of sequence 1861, June 14-1863, Nov. 26 1862, Feb. 21-1863, Nov. 30
BOX 56* REEL 28	1863, Nov. 26-1865, July 22 * Filmed out of sequence
BOX 57* REEL 28	1865, June 7-1866, June 19 * Filmed out of sequence

Letterbooks, 1854-1872

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 57* REEL 30	1866, Sept. 29-1868, Feb. 17 * Filmed out of sequence 1868, Feb. 24-1868, Nov. 21
BOX 58 REEL 31	1868, Dec. 1-1870, June 23 1870, June 30-1871, Oct. 11 1871, June 24-1872, Mar. 14
BOX 59-60 REEL 32-33	Diaries and Notebooks, 1805-ca. 1840 Items available online. Diaries arranged chronologically, and notebooks arranged by subject.
BOX 59 REEL 32	Diaries 1805, Jan. 28-Oct. 2 1811, July 13-1815, Oct. 18 1829, Dec. 22-1831, July 31 (38 vols.)
BOX 60 REEL 33	1831, Aug. 2- Sept. 12 (5 vols.) Fragments Notebooks Photography, ca. 1840 Art Miscellaneous
BOX 61-66 REEL 33-34	Scrapbooks, Clippings, and Newspapers, 1815-1944 Items available online. Bound and loose newspaper clippings, newspapers, and broadsides. Grouped by type of material and arranged in approximate chronological order.
BOX 61 REEL 33	Scrapbooks 1838-1869 (3 vols.)
BOX 62 REEL 33	1845-1861 See Oversize
BOX 63 REEL 33	Bound clippings on the telegraph 1842-1861
BOX 64 REEL 34	1862-1872
BOX 65 not filmed	Unbound newspaper clippings, 1832-1944
BOX 66	Newspapers, 1815-1944

Printed Matter, 1823-1944, n.d.

Container

Contents

not filmed

BOX 67-70
REEL 34

Printed Matter, 1823-1944, n.d.

Items available online.

Books, pamphlets, magazines, and broadsides.

Arranged by subject matter.

BOX 67
REEL 34

Art and miscellaneous subjects, 1826-1944, n.d.

BOX 68-69
REEL 34

Telegraph, 1823-1944, n.d.

BOX 70
REEL 34

Biographical material on Morse

BOX 71-72
REEL 34-35

Miscellany, ca. 1830-1944, n.d.

Items available online.

Correspondence, notes, maps, drawings, radio scripts, menus, broadsides, speeches, genealogical records, poems, prayers, handwritten religious tracts, papers of Louis Clausing, resolutions, and a telegraphic message tape.

BOX 71
REEL 34

Award certificate

Drawings and sketches

First telegraphic message, 24 May 1844 See Oversize

Fragments of correspondence, Morse code tape, and posters

Genealogical record

Invitations and programs

Maps See also Oversize

Notes

Notes regarding telegraph and patent controversy

Manuscript, *Confessions of a French Catholic Priest*, 1837

Manuscript re controversy with Charles D. Jackson regarding the invention of the telegraph

BOX 72
REEL 35

Papers of Louis Clausing

Passport

Patent certificate to Alexander Bain for improvement in electric telegraph

Poems

Prints and photographs

Prospectus for the European and American Submarine Telegraph Co.

Radio scripts

Reports

Resolution of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York re death of Samuel Finley

Breese Morse, 1872 See Oversize

Speeches and writings of persons other than Morse

Unidentified correspondence concerning telegraph revenues and improvements

BOX 73

Addition, 1807-1871, n.d.

Addition, 1807-1871, n.d.

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
REEL 1	<p><u>Items available online.</u></p> <p>Original and reproduced correspondence, photograph of a portrait, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by type of material. Microfilm shelf no. 6,295A.</p>
BOX 73 REEL 1	<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Microfilm of selected family letters, 1816-1870, reprocessed and refilmed <u>See also Container 52, Reels 25-26</u> Microfilm shelf no. 6,295A</p>
not filmed	<p>Original</p> <p>Harris, David P., 1865 Huger, Benjamin, 1855 Lanman, Charles, 1870 Morse, Sidney E., 1827-1868 (3 folders) Nicholson, Charles G., 1871</p> <p>Photocopies of Morse's letters held by the New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y., 1807-1868, n.d. (4 folders)</p> <p>Photograph of a portrait, n.d. Printed matter, 1827</p>
BOX OV 1-OV 3	<p>Oversize, 1844-1872, n.d.</p> <p>Scrapbook, first telegraphic message, maps, and resolution re death of Morse. Organized and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed. Microfilmed in their original locations.</p>
BOX OV 1	<p>Scrapbooks, Clippings, and Newspapers</p> <p>Scrapbooks 1845-1861 (Container 62, Reel 33)</p>
BOX OV 2	<p>Miscellany</p> <p>First telegraphic message, 24 May 1844 (Container 71, Reel 34)</p>
BOX OV 3	<p>Maps, 1854-1855, n.d. (<u>Container 71, Reel 34</u>)</p> <p>Resolution of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York re death of Samuel Finley Breese Morse, 1872 (Container 72, Reel 35)</p>