



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

United States Sanitary Commission records. English Branch archives

1864-1865

MssCol 18818

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Compiled by Susan P. Waide, 2013

Summary

Creator: United States Sanitary Commission

Title: United States Sanitary Commission records. English Branch archives

Date: 1864-1865

Size: 1.05 linear feet (2 boxes, 1 volume)

Source: Donated by the United States Sanitary Commission to the Astor Library, 1879

Abstract: The English Branch, which existed from the spring of 1864 to the fall of 1865, was established by Americans living in Britain to gain the support of their compatriots for the work of the USSC and the Union cause. The English Branch Archives document the work of the Branch's secretary and USSC agent in London, E.C. (Edmund Crisp) Fisher, as seen in his incoming and outgoing correspondence, journal with minutes, address book, and scrapbook, as well as a register of letters received, and printed matter.

Access: Advance notice required.

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Creator History

The English Branch, which existed from the spring of 1864 to the fall of 1865, was established by Americans living in Britain to gain the support of their compatriots for the work of the USSC, as a means of contributing to the welfare of those fighting at home for the Union cause. The Branch also supported the USSC's larger mission of sharing with European countries its knowledge of humanitarian practice and sanitary science in wartime, as gained from the practical experience of a democratic government. These goals were largely effected by the outreach of the Branch's secretary and USSC agent in London, E.C. (Edmund Crisp) Fisher, through his correspondence, writing and speaking engagements, and distribution of USSC publications.

Following the example of the USSC's European Branch, founded in Paris in 1863, a number of prominent Americans met in London on March 3, 1864 to form an organization of Americans living in the United Kingdom as an auxiliary branch to the Sanitary Commission. The resulting Executive Committee consisted of over sixty men and women, many of them from prominent commercial and diplomatic families such as the Adams, Brown, Field, Grinnell, Morgan, Peabody, Stevens, Stokes, and Morse families. The list included the noted British-American actress and abolitionist, Fanny Kemble, and Cyrus W. Field, working in England on his transatlantic telegraph cable project. Field played a leading role in the early days of the London Branch. On June 17, 1864 the USSC Standing Committee in New York appointed E.C. Fisher, a member of the Executive Committee, as acting Secretary of the English Branch, and Agent of the Commission in England.

The Standing Committee intended that the English Branch operate independently of the USSC's European Branch in Paris, while relying on it for advice. William B. Bowles was Secretary and Agent of the European Branch, but his brother and banking partner, Charles S.P. Bowles, also associated with that Branch, was Fisher's principle contact. Because the English Branch was primarily concerned with public relations, and actively solicited funds only from Americans, it was not self-supporting in donations, often relying on ad hoc credit arrangements suggested by Charles S.P. Bowles. Some Americans sent funds to the USSC via their bankers at home.

Fisher's office at 21 Cockspur Street, Trafalgar Square, well-stocked with American and British papers and USSC publications, served as a reading room and meeting place for Americans and others interested in the USSC's work. In addition to distributing publications, Fisher monitored the British press for mention of the USSC. He facilitated the writing of articles about its work and press reviews of its publications. Occasionally he countered pro-Southern statements in the press, writing letters to the editor under the pseudonym "Bower Wood" or "B.W.", particularly with reference to the Liverpool Bazaar held in October, 1864 for the benefit of Southern soldiers in Northern prison camps. Fisher gave two notable lectures at the Social Science Congress in York (1864) and at the Royal United Service Institution (1865) in which he acknowledged the legacy of British humanitarian and sanitary work, especially that of Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War.

By the end of 1864, as military successes foretold ultimate Union victory, and the details of Andersonville prison were corroborated by multiple sources, the temper of public opinion sympathizing with the Confederate cause lessened. Lectures, visits and distribution of pamphlets continued. News of Lee's surrender appeared in London papers on April 24. In the weeks following, Fisher distributed as much literature as possible and shipped the remainder home. Fisher closed the English Branch office in September, and made arrangements to sail for New York in October, 1865.

Scope and Content Note

The English Branch Archives, 1864-1865, document the work of a USSC auxiliary branch established in London by Americans wishing to gather support for the Sanitary Commission and the Union cause, particularly the activities of its secretary and USSC agent in England, E.C. (Edmund Crisp) Fisher. His efforts to promote the work of the USSC with prominent persons, political and social leaders, and institutions, and to encourage donations from Americans, are reflected in his incoming and outgoing correspondence, journal with minutes, address book, and scrapbook, as well as a register of letters received, and printed matter.

Incoming correspondence largely comprises letters acknowledging receipt of various USSC publications, reflecting Fisher's outreach to prominent noblemen and clergymen, liberal reformers, public officials and institutions. Although many are perfunctory acknowledgments from secretaries,

these letters, along with those from U.S. consuls and businessmen in British cities, shed light on the stance of resident Americans and the British towards the war. Strategies for developing pro-Union sentiment and the difficulties of raising any substantial amount of funds in Britain are discussed. Also present are letters from members of the USSC's Standing Committee in New York and from Charles S.P. Bowles providing guidance and instruction. Similar content is reflected in copies of Fisher's outgoing correspondence, which include his reports to the Standing Committee. Advice given to Fisher from prominent American diplomatic staff such as Charles Francis Adams and Benjamin Moran, and others, point to occasional problems in Fisher's dealings with the American community in Britain. A small amount of incoming and outgoing correspondence refers to Fisher's personal business, that of importing and selling American sewing machines.

The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the English Branch and its work are documented in Fisher's manuscript journal with minutes, and a scrapbook. After the establishment of the Executive and Standing Committees and the election of officers recorded in the journal, no further minutes or description of organized activities of the Committees are found, aside from occasional mention of founding members, and financial accountings of donations and shipments listed in Fisher's 1865 summary of its work. Printed matter, concerning the work of the Sanitary Commission and humanitarian relief in wartime, includes Fisher's "The English Branch of the United States Sanitary Commission. The Motive of its Establishment, and the Result of Its Work" (London, 1865), as well as Charles S.P. Bowles's report on his attendance at the 1864 Congress at Geneva, published by the European Branch (London, 1864?).

A small amount of financial records concerning the English Branch can be found in the USSC Accounts and Vouchers record group (MssCol 18820).

The records of the European Branch, headed by Rev. Dr. M'Clintock and John Bigelow, U.S. Consul in Paris, are not found in the United States Sanitary Commission records; however, their work is notably reflected in correspondence and printed matter in this record group, and in correspondence found throughout the New York, N.Y. Archives, especially the records of the Standing Committee, and the Henry W. Bellows papers.

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-13 **Letters received, #1-195** 1864 Aug-1865 Aug, 1864 Dec 10
- b. 1 f. 14 **Register of letters received** undated
Historical Bureau register (loose sheets) of letters #1-195, providing name of correspondent, where written, date, and summary of contents.
- b. 2 v. 1 **Letters sent** 1864 Mar 9-1865 Oct 7 (Letterpress copybook)
- b. 2 f. 1 **Journal** 1864 Feb 20-1865 May 20
Journal kept by E.C. Fisher, recording minutes of meetings, his activities as agent of the English Branch, important correspondence, and visitors received at the office. Volume contains pasted newsclippings and circulars.
- b. 2 f. 2 **Address book** undated
 - v. 1 **Scrapbook** 1864 Apr-1865 Feb
English Branch circulars and newsclippings from British papers concerning the American Civil War and USSC relief work
- b. 2 f. 3 **Printed matter** 1864-1865