



The New York Public Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

**Augusta Melville papers**

1796-1863

MssCol 24415

Processed by Susan E. Davis, 1984.

## Summary

**Creator:** Melville, Augusta, 1821-1876

**Title:** Augusta Melville papers

**Date:** 1796-1863

**Size:** 1.46 linear feet (4 boxes)

**Source:** Purchased from Lyrical Ballad Bookstore, 1983

**Abstract:** The collection of Augusta Melville papers, 1796-1863, consists primarily of over 500 letters, chiefly addressed to Augusta Melville, sister of author Herman Melville, and members of her extended family and friends. These letters describe in considerable detail the lives and daily activities of the writers, including travel, social doings and health matters. The portion of the collection directly pertaining to Herman Melville consists of eight letters sent or received; a fragment of a manuscript of *Bartleby, the Scrivener* in an unknown hand; thirty pages of the first draft of *Typee* in Melville's hand, 1845; and family letters in which he is mentioned. The collection also contains personal and business notebooks kept by family members, an autobiographical sketch by his sister Frances, a brief journal written at sea by his brother Thomas, and family artifacts (trunks and business signs).

**Access:** Advance notice required.

**Preferred citation:** Augusta Melville papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Susan E. Davis, 1984; processed by Susan P. Waide for digitization, 2018.

### Related Materials:

See the Gansevoort-Lansing collection for additional papers of members of the Melville family.

## Custodial History

The papers probably belonged to Herman Melville's sister, Augusta Melville, (1821-1876) who left them to her sister, Frances Priscilla (Fanny) Melville (1827-1885). Upon her death, the papers passed into non-family hands, where they remained until they were discovered in 1983 and subsequently acquired by The New York Public Library.

## Scope and Content Note

The collection of Augusta Melville papers, 1796-1863, consists primarily of over 500 letters, chiefly addressed to Augusta Melville, sister of author Herman Melville, and members of her extended family and friends. These letters describe in considerable detail the lives and daily activities of the writers, including travel, social doings and health matters. The portion of the collection directly pertaining to Herman Melville consists of eight letters sent or received; a fragment of a manuscript of *Bartleby, the Scrivener* in an unknown hand; thirty pages of the first draft of *Typee* in Melville's hand, to which has been added a fragment of the same manuscript previously acquired by the Library, 1845; and family letters in which he is mentioned. The collection also contains personal and business notebooks kept by family members, an autobiographical sketch by his sister Frances, a brief journal written at sea by his brother Thomas, and family artifacts (trunks and business signs).

Family correspondents include all Melville siblings, their parents and spouses, many of their children, and cousins spanning three generations on both Melville and Gansevoort sides of the family. Few letters are neither to nor from Augusta. With the exception of the four letters written to Herman Melville, which are filed together, all correspondence is arranged by author's name. The collection is arranged in the following order: Herman Melville, his immediate family (parents, wife, children and siblings), and then, in one alphabetical sequence, other family members and friends. Within each folder, the letters are chronologically arranged. Occasionally two individuals wrote on the same letter. These are indicated by "see also" references. A folder of unsorted material contains letters from unidentified correspondents, loose fragments, poems and notes, and a government off-print. Loose envelopes are chiefly to Augusta Melville, in chronological order; these are followed by four envelopes (one each) to General H. Gansevoort, Gansevoort Lansing, Miss Van Rensselaer, and William H. Ryalls.

The letters describe in considerable detail the lives and daily activities of the writers, including travel, social doings and health matters. It is evident from the correspondence that these family members and friends represented a fairly tight-knit circle who kept themselves apprised of each other's lives. Approximately 141 of these letters contain references to Herman Melville, concerning his whereabouts, well-being, writing, publishing pursuits and family. The letters by his mother, Maria Gansevoort Melville (1791-1872), are particular substantive.

The portion of the collection directly pertaining to Herman Melville consists of the following: a letter from Melville to his brother, Allan, 1849 February 20, concerning the birth of Herman's first child, Malcolm; an undated letter to Augusta, regarding a book Augusta was to retrieve from Allan; a postscript on a letter from his younger son, Stanwix, to Augusta, taking the blame for the delay in sending the letter and reporting on the household, 1862 April 30; four letters to Melville, including one from Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne, 1851 March 27; a fragment of a manuscript of *Bartleby, the Scrivener* in an unknown hand; thirty pages of the first draft of *Typee* in Melville's hand, representing most of Chapters 12-14 of the Northwestern edition, 1845 and the aforementioned family letters referring to Herman Melville. It should be noted that the single leaf of *Typee* previously acquired by the Library is from Chapter 14 of the same draft.

While the bulk of the collection consists of correspondence, there are a few non-letter items. The papers of Allan Melvill (1782-1832), Herman's father, includes a surveying exercise workbook, 1796, and a shipping record book containing mounted newspaper clippings noting the arrival of French imported goods, 1828-1830. The folder of letters written by Augusta Melville also contains notebooks and three keepsakes. The notebooks are a record of the letters she sent and received, 1849 December-1854 February (two notebooks loosely sewn together); and (in one notebook) a record of her charitable donations, 1849 January-August, and list of her wardrobe, 1849 December. The keepsakes, each wrapped in identifying paper, are: a lock of her friend Mary Blatchford Griswold's hair, received from her mother and dated New York, 1852 June 5; pressed flowers for "Augusta," dated Lansingburgh, 1847 July 6; and pressed flowers "from Teny V.R.'s [Justine Van Rensselaer's] bridal bouquet Feb'y 2d 1853 Manor House." The folder for Frances Melville includes a three-page autobiographical sketch entitled "Myself;" Thomas Melville's folder includes a brief journal from a sea voyage on the ship Navigator of Boston, [1849]; and the folder for Jean Melvill Wright contains only a record of letters sent and received, 1800-1802. With the papers, the Library also received three family trunks, two of which have name plates for Maria Gansevoort Melville and Allan Melvill, parents of Herman Melville, and four metal business signs: three for Herman's brother Gansevoort Melville, attorney and solicitor, and one for his father, Allan Melvill, dealing in French Goods.

## Key Terms

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Artifacts (object genre)  
Autobiographies (literary works)  
Correspondence  
Diaries  
Exercise books  
Manuscripts for publication  
Notebooks

### Geographic Names

United States -- Social life and customs -- 1783-1865

### Subjects

Women -- United States -- Correspondence  
Women -- United States -- History -- 19th century

### Names

Melville, Augusta, 1821-1876  
Melville, Augusta, 1821-1876 -- Correspondence  
Melville, Herman, 1819-1891. *Bartleby, the scrivener*  
Melville, Herman, 1819-1891. Typee  
Melville, Herman, 1819-1891 -- Correspondence  
Gansevoort family  
Melville family

## Container List

### Melville, Herman

#### Letters sent 1849-1862

- b. 1 f. 1 Herman Melville letter to Allan Melville 1849 February 20
- b. 1 f. 1 Herman Melville to Augusta Melville 1851 December 4
- b. 1 f. 1 Stanwix Melville letter to Augusta Melville with postscript by Herman Melville 1862 April 30, May 2

#### Letters received 1851-1854

- b. 1 f. 2 Letter from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody Hawthorne to Herman Melville 1851 March 27
- b. 1 f. 2 Letter from Maria Gansevoort Melville to Herman Melville 1851 March 28
- b. 1 f. 2 Letter from John Wakefield Francis to Herman Melville 1852 November 3
- b. 1 f. 2 Letter from Helen Melville Griggs to Herman Melville 1854 May 29  
Enclosed with letter to Melville's wife Elizabeth and sisters Augusta and Frances Priscilla.
- b. 1 f. 2 Letter from Helen Melville Griggs to Augusta, Frances Priscilla, and Elizabeth Melville 1854 May 29  
Enclosed with letter to Herman Melville.
- b. 1 f. 3 *Typee manuscript* 1845
- b. 1 f. 4 *Bartleby fragment* undated

### Melvill, Allan

- b. 1 f. 5 Correspondence, fragment and clippings 1816-1824, undated
- b. 1 f. 6 Surveying exercise book 1796
- b. 1 f. 7 Shipping record book 1828-1830
- b. 1 f. 8 Melville, Maria Gansevoort 1834-1863, undated
- b. 1 f. 9 Melville, Elizabeth Shaw 1863
- b. 1 f. 10 Melville, Elizabeth "Bessie" 1862-1863, undated
- b. 1 f. 11 Melville, Stanwix 1862-1863  
See Box 1, folder 1 for letter from Stanwix Melville to August Melville, April 30, 1862 with postscript by Herman Melville dated May 2, 1862.
- b. 1 f. 12 Melville, Allan 1841-1863  
see also: Sophia Thurston Melville, 1849 July 1; after 1852 September 10

### Melville, Augusta

- b. 1 f. 13 Letters sent, notebooks and keepsakes 1841-1854, undated  
see also: Maria Gansevoort Melville, 1863 June 22
- b. 1 f. 14 Miscellaneous letters received 1834-1863, undated  
This folder comprises letters and two letter fragments written to Augusta Melville. The correspondent's name is often unknown or uncertain; most were previously filed with unsorted items.
- b. 1 f. 15 Melville (Hoadley), Catherine "Kate" 1854-1863, undated  
see also: John C. Hoadley, 1853 September 23, November 10, December 30
- b. 1 f. 16 Melville, Frances Priscilla "Fanny" 1848-1863, undated  
Letter of 1863 April 25 encloses a small fabric swatch.  
see also: Sophia Thurston Melville, 1855 September

- b. 1 f. 17 Melville, Gansevoort 1844-1845 (Nine letters, originally twenty-four in number.)  
A separate note by Augusta Melville (?) explains how she received these letters, all written to William E. Cramer, Argus office, Albany; it also indicates that she originally possessed twenty-four letters.
- b. 1 f. 18 Melville (Griggs), Helen 1835-1863, undated  
see also: Maria Gansevoort Melville, 1839, 1841, 1847, 1854, and undated; and George Griggs, 1854? February 10 [not located].
- b. 1 f. 19 Melville, Thomas 1846-1863, undated
  - b. 2 f. 1 Berry, Katherine "Katie" Van Rensselaer 1853-1863, undated
  - b. 2 f. 2 Bigelow, Harriet 1863 March 19
  - b. 2 f. 3 Blatchford, Linda 1852 June 7
  - b. 2 f. 4 Bullan, E. F undated
  - b. 2 f. 5 Buston, Sophia "Sophy" 1862-1863, undated
  - b. 2 f. 6 Conkling, Eliza 1836-1837
  - b. 2 f. 7 Cook, Jennet M 1834 February 7
  - b. 2 f. 8 Curtis, George 1863 (With loose clippings.)
  - b. 2 f. 9 Curtis, Mary 1863 April 10
  - b. 2 f. 10 D'Wolf, John and Mary Melvill D'Wolf 1854 January 5
  - b. 2 f. 11 Downer, Nancy Melvill D'Wolf 1862 December 28
  - b. 2 f. 12 Gansevoort, Helen R. Lyon 1843 May 30, undated
  - b. 2 f. 13 Gansevoort, Mary Ann Chandonette 1830
  - b. 2 f. 14 Greenleaf family 1863
  - b. 2 f. 15 Griggs, George 1853-1854
  - b. 2 f. 16 Griswold, Mary "Molly" Blatchford 1846-1852, undated
  - b. 2 f. 17 Hoadley, John C 1853-1863, undated
  - b. 2 f. 18 Hoadley, Maria "Minnie" Gansevoort undated
  - b. 2 f. 19 Hunter, Augusta Whipple 1846-1852
  - b. 2 f. 20 Ives, C. B 1851 January 11
  - b. 2 f. 21 Johnson, Margaret "Maggie" Van Rensselaer Douw 1854, undated
  - b. 2 f. 22 Lathers, Abby Pitman Thurston 1852
  - b. 2 f. 23 Lathers, Richard 1853 October 6
  - b. 2 f. 24 Lynch (Miss) undated
  - b. 2 f. 25 Melvill, Ann Marie Priscilla "Priscilla" 1848-1854, undated
  - b. 2 f. 26 Melvill, Julia Maria 1832-1844, undated
  - b. 2 f. 27 Melvill, Mary A. A. Hobart 1863 January 16
  - b. 2 f. 28 Melville, Florence 1862 March 25
  - b. 2 f. 29 Melville, Jane "Jennie" Dempsey 1863 June 2, undated
  - b. 2 f. 30 Melville, Katherine "Kitty" Gansevoort 1862
  - b. 2 f. 31 Melville, Sophia Thurston 1846-1855
  - b. 2 f. 32 Morewood, Maria "Milie" Gansevoort Melville 1862-1863
  - b. 2 f. 33 Morewood, Sarah A undated
  - b. 2 f. 34 Newman, S 1849 February 5
  - b. 2 f. 35 Nourse, Lucy Melvill Clark 1854-1863

- b. 2 f. 36 Ogden, Elizabeth "Lib" Gansevoort 1840-1849, undated
- b. 2 f. 37 Oxenham, Ellen Astor after 1846, undated
- b. 2 f. 38 Pearce, Catherine 1836 January 2
- b. 2 f. 39 Plumb, Elizabeth undated
- b. 2 f. 40 Potter, Julia M. Blatchford 1851-1863
  - b. 3 f. 1 Schell, Julia C undated
  - b. 3 f. 2 Scollay, C before 1832
  - b. 3 f. 3 Shaw, H. S 1863 October 9
  - b. 3 f. 4 Smith, Virginia E. H. and Juliana (Mrs. Thomas L.) Smith 1831 March 2
  - b. 3 f. 5 Souther, Helen Melvill 1853-1863
  - b. 3 f. 6 Thayer, Cornelia "Nilly" Van Rensselaer 1838-1863, undated
  - b. 3 f. 7 Thayer, Nathaniel 1847 August 3
  - b. 3 f. 8 Thurston, Caroline M 1851 April 8
  - b. 3 f. 9 Thurston, R. H 1847 September 15
  - b. 3 f. 10 Townsend, Howard, Sr 1848-1853
  - b. 3 f. 11 Townsend, Howard, Jr undated
  - b. 3 f. 12 Townsend, Justine "Teny" Van Rensselaer 1855, undated
  - b. 3 f. 13 Van Rensselaer, B undated
  - b. 3 f. 14 Van Rensselaer, Harriet "Hattie" 1853 March 23
  - b. 3 f. 15 Van Rensselaer, Harriet Bayard 1863
  - b. 3 f. 16 Van Rensselaer calling cards undated
  - b. 3 f. 17 Van Schaick, John undated
  - b. 3 f. 18 Van Schaick, Kate 1846 March 31, undated
  - b. 3 f. 19 Van Vechten, Cuyler undated
  - b. 3 f. 20 Walsh, William (Mr. and Mrs) circa 1855
  - b. 3 f. 21 Woodbridge, A. D 1836-1841
  - b. 3 f. 22 Wright, Jean Melvill 1800-1802
  - b. 3 f. 23 Unsorted 1844-1863, undated
  - b. 3 f. 24 Loose envelopes
    - b. 4 Business signs (Four metal business signs, 12 x 25 cm. or smaller.)