

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

**Alexander Jackson Davis
Papers, 1791-1937**

(DRAFT COPY)

**Processed by Valerie Wingfield
March 2000**

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Summary

- Main Entry** Davis, Alexander Jackson, 1791-1937
- Title:** Alexander Jackson Davis Papers, 1791-1937
- Size:** 6 linear ft. (10 boxes, 1 long enclosed container, 8 vols.)
- Source:** Purchase from Joseph Beale Davis, 1941; Purchase from Swann Galleries, 1944.
- Abstract:** The collection contains the papers of Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892) architect and his son Joseph Beale Davis. The A.J. Davis materials include letters to Davis (1828-1890), accounts, legal papers, lectures, writings, and notes, architectural specifications, drawings and engravings, a diary (1827-1830; 1853), letterbook (1821-1890), scrapbooks on architecture, a catalog of his library, material relating to Washington Irving's Sunnyside, and other miscellany. The J.B. Davis material includes correspondence (1886-1937), and biographical notes on Ithiel Town, John Allen, Nathan Warren, and James Eddy, a genealogy, material relating to the Nicholson, Beale, and Byrd families and miscellaneous notes.
- Access:** Absolutely no photocopying of the sketches, drawings, watercolors and volumes. Photocopies of Diary and Letterbook must be used in lieu of originals.
- Special formats:** Etchings, sketches, watercolor and photographs.

Provenance

The papers were acquired through two purchases. The bulk of the collection was purchased from Joseph Beale Davis, the son of Alexander Jackson Davis (1941). A second purchase was a number of architectural specifications from the Swann Galleries (27 items, 1944).

Related Materials Note

In the Manuscripts and Archives Division:

George Jones (*The Count Joannes*) Papers, 1837-1878.

Related collections in other institutions:

Avery Memorial Architectural Library of Columbia University. A. J. Davis Papers, 1830-1870, c 1600 items; correspondence, daybook, drawings, engravings, contracts, clippings and miscellaneous materials.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. A.J. Davis Papers, correspondence, sketchbooks, notebooks, professional diary and miscellany.

New York Historical Society. A.J. Davis Papers, 1 vol., 1 folder, miscellaneous papers and a volume of Davis genealogy, poetry and watercolor drawings.

Biographical Note

Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892) architect, designer and illustrator, was born July 24, 1803, in New York City. Davis was the son of Cornelius Davis, editor of the *New York Theological Magazine*, publisher of religious books, and Julia Jackson Davis, his second wife. At the age of twenty, Davis decided to become an artist, studying at the American Academy of Fine Arts, the New York Drawing Association, and the Antique School of the National Academy of Design. Rembrandt Peale encouraged Davis to concentrate on architecture, and Davis proved to be quite adept as an architectural draftsman.

Early in Davis career, he partnered with architect and engineer, Ithiel Town (1829) forming the firm of Town and Davis. Noted for their Greek Revival Style, the firm of Town and Davis designed many public building including Russell House, Middletown, CT (now Honors College, Wesleyan University 1828-1830), the Indiana State Capital, in Indianapolis (1831-1835); the West Presbyterian Church (1831-1832); the Custom House in New York City (1833-1842 also with architect James Frazee) and, Ohio State Capitol, Columbus, Ohio (1836-1861). The capital was designed mainly by Thomas Cole a Hudson Highland painter using an old postcard as reference.

In 1835, Davis started his own firm and he began to concentrate his architectural skills on country houses as opposed to public buildings. The styles stressed by Davis were mainly Gothic and Italianate. Davis also collaborated with Andrew Jackson Downing a landscape gardener and architect. The collaboration resulted in Davis illustrating Downing books *Cottage Residences* (1842), and *The Architecture of Country Houses*, (1850). Davis designed homes for Llewellyn S. Haskell's planned garden suburb, Llewellyn Park, West Orange, N.J. (1852-1869). Davis was an alert and active participant in the intellectual and aesthetic world of his day. He read widely about architecture, art, criticism, and literature, and prepared lectures and wrote essays on architecture and esthetics. He was a founder of the American Institute of Architects, although he later fell out of sympathy with it. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, taste in architecture changed. Thus, Davis' influence as an architect declined, resulting in his retirement.

Davis married Margaret Beale on July 14, 1853 at Florida, New York. They had two children, Flora and Joseph.. Davis died in West Orange, New Jersey on January 14, 1892.

Scope and Contents Note

The Alexander Jackson Davis Papers span the dates 1791-1937, with the materials dated 1821-1890 relating to Alexander Jackson Davis; the earlier material is family-related, and the later material is related to Joseph Beale Davis, son of the architect.

The Papers regarding A.J. Davis represents the bulk of the collection and it includes the following: correspondence (1828-1890, mainly incoming), correspondence from actor George Jones (1837-1878), a Diary (1827-30;1853, one volume), Letterbook (1821-1890, one volume), lectures, notes and commentaries on architecture and art, architectural specifications, drawings, engravings, watercolors, financial and legal documents, a volume of miscellaneous notes arranged by A.J. Davis according to a system designed by Reverend John Todd (one volume), scrapbooks covering Egyptian, Grecian, Roman, Gothic architecture (four volumes), and a descriptive catalogue of the Alexander Jackson Davis library (one volume).

One of the finer features of the Davis' material is the drawings, engravings and watercolors including Washington Irving's *Sunnyside*. Davis' son Joseph Beale Davis material is the remainder of the collection. Basically his papers refer to his father and other architects as well as J.B. Davis interests. The photographs includes some outdoor images including Llewellyn Park.

Arrangement Note

The collection is arranged into six series:

- I. Alexander Jackson Davis General Correspondence;
- II. Alexander Jackson Davis Lectures, Notes and Comments;
- III. Alexander Jackson Davis, Architectural Specifications;
- IV. Alexander Jackson Davis Drawings and Engravings;
- V. Alexander Jackson Davis Financial and Legal Records;
- VI. Joseph Beale Davis Assorted Materials.

Series Descriptions

SERIES I. ALEXANDER JACKSON DAVIS GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

Box 1; Letterbook (1837-90, one volume); Diary (1827-53 one volume).

The General Correspondence, 1828-1878, is arranged chronologically. It is predominately incoming letters to Davis from clients concerning architectural projects. Some of the letters are personal. Correspondents include Governor M. Morehead, concerning work on Blandwood (1844), and later the Lunatic Asylum in North Carolina (1849); Governor David L. Swain, concerning work on the University of North Carolina campus (1845, 1849-1850, 1856); Francis Key Hunt, concerning Loudoun (1850-1852); letters from Phillip St. George Cook regarding Belmead (1850,1853); letters relating to the lunatic asylum on Blackwell's Island (1835); letters to various individuals concerning the Virginia Military Institute (1850-1852; 1860-1861); and letters from J.H. Dakin who worked for Town and Davis (1828, 1833, 1834). Additional letters are from George Jones, an actor and close friend of Davis (1837-1878).

Notably absent are letters from **Ithiel Town** and **Alexander Jackson Downing**. With regard to letters by Davis, there are a few letters and copies from Davis scattered throughout the correspondence. The **Letterbook** (1821-1890) contains letters to and from Davis but also notes by A.J. Davis, transcriptions of others' writings, and newspaper clippings. It also contains an index by Davis. The **Diary** (October 18, 1827 – September 1853) is a daybook of expenditures (personal and business), professional dealings, travels, and daily occupations. The diary includes an index by Davis. The volume contains the lists of buildings executed or designed by Davis and or his associates, 1829-46 (pp.14-16), architectural drawings made and prices received (pp. 35-41), an inventory of Davis' wardrobe (pp. 52-57), an inventory of office furniture (p. 292), a catalog of his books (pp. 298-312), an inventory of prints and their prices (pp. 313-322), office business and designs of the *Town and Davis* architectural firm (pp. 491-511), and other entries describing daily life, architectural clients, visits to other cities, scenes, and buildings Davis sketched, people he met, books he read, etc.

SERIES II. ALEXANDER JACKSON DAVIS LECTURES, NOTES AND COMMENTS

Box 1, one volume

This series is arranged into two parts—Lectures followed by Notes and Comments. **The Lectures** include topics on architecture, history, fine arts, education, philology, abuses in architecture, taste, and of the origin of the building. **The Notes and Comments** are organized by topics and this includes critiques on the public buildings of New York; abuses in architecture and other related subjects. There is one volume of *Miscellaneous notes arranged by A.J. Davis according to a system by Reverend John Todd*. It contains a rough alphabetical arrangement of quotations from authors about sundry topics listed under general subject headings or the individual writers. Bound with the notes is the introduction to the *Index of Subjects* by Reverend John Todd, explaining his principles of arrangement.

SERIES III. ALEXANDER JACKSON DAVIS, ARCHITECTURAL SPECIFICATIONS
BOXES 2-3

The Architectural Specifications have no particular arrangement and generally are not dated. The Specifications include those for Phillip St. George Cocke's Belmead (1845-1848), North Carolina State Hospital for the Insane (1850-1855), Henry Sheldon's Millbrook (1838-1840), William P. Chapman's Whitby (1852-1854), a house for Mr. Wadell "upon Murray Hill" (1844-1845), Davidson College Dormitory Wings, and the Dutch Reformed Church in Newburgh, designed with Russell Warren (1835-1837) and miscellaneous notes. This series also contains several volumes: A book of estimates for architectural specifications; List of books and pictures belonging to Davis; and, a floricultural and horticultural notebook relating to Davis residence in Wildmont, NJ (1852-62) that includes a personal diary kept while at Wildmont, 1852-1874.

SERIES IV. ALEXANDER JACKSON DAVIS, DRAWINGS, ENGRAVINGS AND WATERCOLORS
BOXES 5-7

This series includes watercolor drawings of various residences and buildings designed by Davis or with his partners. Many of the watercolors and sketches are fine architectural renderings. There are some engravings scattered throughout this section. The visual images include a watercolor of Mount Gulian; residence of G.C. Verplank; sketches of Boston Athenaeum; Llewellyn Park, Orange, New Jersey; old fort and monument at Groton CT., Washington Irving's Sunnyside, Blackwell's Island Pauper Lunatic Asylum, and architectural details that cannot be fully identified, and game boards.

SERIES V. ALEXANDER JACKSON DAVIS, FINANCIAL AND LEGAL RECORDS
BOX 3

This series contains an assortment of minor financial records and legal records. The Financial Records are receipts, 1828-1870; N.D., relating to Davis business dealing as an architect in New York City. The Legal Records, contains three legal briefs with A.J. Davis as the plaintiff. Davis filed against John J. Herrick, merchant circa 1865 for three thousand five hundred and thirteen dollars and sixty -six cents (2 copies of lawsuit). A supplemental document--*Special letter of attorney and retainer* to George the Count Johannes to represent him for this lawsuit. Davis filed as plaintiff in another proceeding against the builders Higgins in 1869. The remaining document is an indenture dated 1843 between the Merchants' Exchange Company of the City of New York and Davis with partner (illegible handwriting).

SERIES VI. JOSEPH BEALE DAVIS ASSORTED MATERIALS
BOXES 8-10

This series contains material related to Joseph Beale Davis that includes some letters to J.B. Davis (1895-1937), mostly personal, with some correspondence referring to his father. The miscellaneous papers relating to (J.B. Davis) concerns his work, art, travel, and a daybook with notes about historical events. There are photographs including some of Llewellyn Park and Eagle Rock Quarry, and newspaper clippings about Davis and his architectural designs. the material relating to Nicholson, Beale, and Byrd families is mostly correspondence, some contracts, and other legal papers. A manuscript copy of the *Index to the illustrations in manuals of the corporation of the City of New York, 1841-70*, popularly called *Valentine Manuals* is annotated by J.B. Davis with process, artist, and engraver when known. Eighty of the eight hundred illustrations for the manual were taken from Alexander Jackson Davis' drawings. The compilations of biographical notes on Ithiel Town (architect and Davis' partner), James Eddy (engraver), Nathan Warren of Mount Ida (musician and author), and John Allen (collector), gathered by J.B. Davis includes clippings, engravings, drawings, and biographical information. Letters to Davis are scattered throughout. The material on Ithiel Town includes an agreement between Town and Davis, auction catalogs of Town 's library and of his print collection, and pamphlets on Town. In the materials on John Allen, there is a pamphlet, *Memorial of John Allen* by Evert A. Duyckinck. The material on James Eddy includes engravings by Eddy, some based on Davis' drawings.

Note on the Alexander Jackson Davis Scrapbooks.

The four scrapbooks (Egyptian, Grecian, Roman, and Gothic) contain engravings and woodcuts from books and newspapers clippings on architecture, ornament, and the decorative arts. There are also drawings and watercolors of architecture and architectural details by A.J. Davis. The Roman and Gothic scrapbooks are the most complete. *The descriptive catalogue of the Alexander Jackson Davis Library* is a classified system with an index explaining arrangements at the beginning of the volume. the book also contains maps of the world, floor plans for his various offices, the layout of shelves in his library, and miscellaneous notes by Davis.

CONTAINER LIST

Box	Folder
	Series One: GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE
1	1-7 General Correspondence 1828-1890 (?)
	8 Correspondence from George Jones, 1837-1878; n.d
	Series Two: LECTURES, NOTES AND COMMENTS
	Lectures
1	9 Abuses in Architecture
	10 Architecture/Symbols/Principles
	11 Education/Science/Precept
	12 Fine Arts/History/Politics
	13 History (Discourse before the Apollo Association)
	14 Of the Origin of Building
	15 Taste
	Notes and Comments
	16 Abuses in Architecture
	17 Britton, Loudon, Pugin, etc.
	18-19 Critiques on the Public Buildings of New York
	20 Philology no. 1
	21-22 Miscellaneous notes
	Series Three: ARCHITECTURAL SPECIFICATIONS
2	1 Material and works required for building a dwelling house and kitchen offices at Belmead, near Jefferson Po., Powhatan, Co., Virginia for Philip St. Geo. Cocke, 1846.
	2 Material and works for building a dwelling house at Ravenswood, Long Island for P. Roach, Esq., 1836.
	3 Material and work for building a dwelling house at Ravenswood, Long Island for Throckmorton, n.d.
	4 Material and work for warehouse and stores, Montgomery and Front Streets.
	5 Tobacco Inspection warehouse, New York, situated on Western end of the block bounded on the north by Water Street.
	6 Carpenter's work and material for building a two story house in Flushing, N.Y.

- 7 Mason's work and material for building a two story house in Flushing, composed by Mr. Titus.
- 8 Items from specification of S.T. Jones, Staten Island.
- 9 House for J. Rathbone near Albany (incl: watercolor sketches).
- 10 North Carolina State Hospital for the Insane, Raleigh, N.C..
- 11 House for Charles A. Davis, Gramercy Park, New York.
- 12 House for Mr. Waddell upon Murray Hill, NYC. see also: folder 24 (different client)
- 13 Material and labor for villa erected near New Rochelle.
- 14 House near New Haven [CT].
- 15 House at Augusta.
- 16 Material and work for building a house in the English style, near Tarrytown, New York for Mr. Paulding (Lyndhurst).
- 17 House at Throgg's Neck, Westchester Co., N.Y. for S.M. Fox.
- 18 Lecture Hall and Sunday School building near the rear of Mercer St. Church, NYC.
- 19 House at Irving near Tarrytown, NY for Henry Sheldon (Millbrook).
- 20 Material and works for building a house near Orange, NJ.
- 21 Material and works for building a dwelling house for B.C. Webster, Orange, NJ.
- 22 Material and works required for building a dwelling house at Springfield, Mass., for Phelps.
- 23 Material and works required for building a dwelling house at Rye, Westchester Co., NY for W.P. Chapman (Whitby).
- 24 Material and work required for building a dwelling house on Murray Hill, New York City.
- 25 Hospital for emigrants on Ward's Island, NYC.

- 26 Dr. Bartlett's House, Old Lyme, CT.
Christ Church, Belleville, New Jersey.
- 27 House for Isabella Donaldson, a country house near Barrytown,
New York.
- 28 Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh.
- 29 Church of the Holy Cross, Troy, New York.
- 30 E.C. Litchfield—Gothic House not executed, planned for Brooklyn
- 31 Samuel E. Lyons, White Plains, New York.
- 32 Competition design for Hall of Justice, NYC.
- 33 Design for the Brooklyn Academy of Music competition.
- 34 Agreement between L.I. Haskell and carpenter. House on Staten
Island for Charles E. Butler. T. Thomas & sons, architects.

see box 4: Materials and works required for building a dwelling
house, or dormitory wings, for students at Davidson College, N.C.

- 3 1 Miscellaneous notes re architectural specifications.
- 2 Book of estimates for architectural specifications (includes some
loose pages; indexed).
- 3 List of books and pictures belonging to A.J. Davis.
- 4 Floricultural and horticultural notebook relating to A.J. Davis
residence in Wildmont, N.J. including a personal diary kept while
at Wildmont, June 7, 1852 – Nov. 26, 1874.

Series Four: DRAWINGS, ENGRAVINGS AND WATERCOLORS

- 4 Washington Irving's Sunnyside:
 - engraved portrait of Washington Irving. M. Danford.
 - engraving of Sunnyside, 1836.
 - floorplan of Sunnyside (sketch).
 - floor plan of first floor with engraving of Sunnyside.
 - floor plan of Sunnyside (sketch) mylar in same sleeve with a
check dated 8th May 1839, signed by John Windt.
 - floor plan of Sunnyside with notes by Geo. Harvey, arc.

Two dimensional watercolors of architectural details

Architectural Specifications... for dwelling house (oversize item)

5

-old fort and monument at Groton, CT.

-watercolor of *Mount Gulian*, residence of G.C. Verplank.

-Blandwood, home of Gov. John Morehead, Greensboro, N.C.
(pencil sketch)

-*Artist's Villa*, A.J. Davis, architect (color engraving). on the same leaf: ink sketch of the first floor.

-pencil sketch of the *Boston Athenaeum, 1827*. Accompanied by two other sketch details (?)

-pencil sketch of unexecuted design for the State Capital of ILL. ?

-Isometrical perspective (pencil sketch).

-fanciful sketches and water colors.

-*Llewellyn Park*, Orange, N.J.

-chimney piece to be sent to the address of Gov. D.L. Swaine (ink sketch).

-ink and pencil sketch of west, south building. Univ. Chapel Hill.

6-7

Assorted sketches of architectural details. Includes plans of asylums.

Series Five: FINANCIAL AND LEGAL RECORDS

3

5-6 Receipts 1828-1842; 1843-1869

7 Legal 1843-1869

Series Six: JOSEPH B. DAVIS

8

1-15 General Correspondence 1895-1937; n.d.

16 Notes re: Art Students League 1888

17 re: Eagle rock Quarry Co. Ledger 1911-1918

18 re: Art

19 re: A.J. Davis

20 re: cities, customs, travels

21 re: gardening, landscaping and nature

22 Daybook with notes re historical events

9

1-2 Receipts, bills

3 Genealogies

4-5 re: Nicholson, Beale and Byrd families

- 6-7 re: John Allen
- 8 re: James Eddy
- 9 re: Nathan B. Warren

10 Catalogue of an extensive and choice selection of engravings from the great collection of Ithiel Town, 1844, Sale of Jan. 11 & 12.

Catalogue of Mr. Town's Library. To be sold at auction on June 24 & 27, 1843.

An index to the illustrations in the manuals of the corporations of the city of New York, 1841-1870, popularly known as *Valentine's Manuals* with process, publisher, artist and engraver added where known.

10 Assorted photographs of houses, outdoor scenes, etc.

A.J. Davis Volumes (including scrapbooks)

- Vol. 1 Diary 1827-1853. Accompanied by one slipcase of photocopies.
- 2 Letterbook 1821-1890. Accompanied by one slipcase of photocopies.
- 3 Miscellaneous notes arranged by A.J. Davis according to a system designed by Reverend John Todd.
- 4 Scrapbook on Egyptian Architecture.
- 5 Scrapbook on Grecian Architecture.
- 6 Scrapbook on Roman Architecture.
- 7 Scrapbook on Gothic Architecture.
- 8 Descriptive catalogue of the Alexander Jackson Davis library.

Long narrow box containing architectural design. Located at the end of the collection.