



The New York Public Library
Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and
American Literature

Guide to the

Charlotte Brontë papers

1829-1990s [bulk 1829-1850s]

Berg Coll MSS 186119

Processed by Amy Lau in 2022.

Summary

Creator: Brontë_, Charlotte, 1816-1855

Title: Charlotte Brontë papers

Date: 1829-1990s [bulk 1829-1850s]

Size: 1.86 linear feet (7 boxes)

Source: Gift of Albert A. Berg in 1940 and 1941. Shoe gift of G. H. Montague in 1961. Acquisition information for wallpaper samples, fabric pieces, a wooden box addressed to Mrs. Peter Callier, and a December 1848 holograph letter to Ellen Nussey is unknown.

Abstract: Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) was an English writer, poet, and the sister of Patrick Branwell, Emily, and Anne Brontë. Her papers, dating from 1829 to the 1990s, consist of holograph letters, poems, stories, and writing exercises; a painting; a travel writing desk; writing instruments, objects, and ephemera found in the desk; and artifacts associated with Brontë and her family.

Preferred citation: Charlotte Brontë papers, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Amy Lau in 2022.

Separated Materials:

Seven holograph letters are tipped-in various novels by Brontë or about Brontë's life. These books were separated and cataloged by Special Collections Cataloging.

Creator History

Charlotte Brontë (born 1816 in Thornton, England) was an English poet and writer best known for her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). She was the third eldest sibling of the English writers Patrick Branwell, Emily, and Anne Brontë. From childhood to adulthood, Brontë and her brother, Patrick Branwell, wrote stories about an imaginary world called Angria. When she was thirteen years old, Brontë wrote *Tales of the*

Islanders (1829), stories inspired by her childhood imaginings with her siblings.

Brontë received the longest formal education of the Brontë siblings. She attended Clergy's Daughter's School, Cowan Bridge, and Roe Head School, first as a student and then as a teacher. While she was a student at Roe Head School, Brontë befriended Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor, who became her lifelong friends and correspondents. Aside from her work as a teacher at Roe Head School, Brontë helped educate her two sisters at home and worked as a governess for two different families.

In 1842, Brontë and her sister, Emily, attended Héger Pensionnat, run by Constantin Héger, in Brussels, Belgium to become more proficient in French and German. The sisters intended to open their own school in England. Brontë met and befriended Laetitia Wheelwright and Mary Dixon while she studied at the Pensionnat. After nine months, the sisters returned home when their aunt, Maria Branwell, became ill and died. In 1844, Brontë and Emily tried to open a school in Haworth, England but could not attract students.

In 1846, Brontë published twenty poems in a poetry collection, *Poems* by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell under the pseudonym, Currer Bell. The poetry volume was a commercial disaster, selling only two copies.

After the poetry collection's publication, Brontë submitted her first manuscript to several publishers with no success. However, she received one positive response from William Smith Williams, literary advisor to Smith, Elder & Co., an agency owned by George Smith, and sent him her second manuscript, *Jane Eyre*. In 1847, *Jane Eyre* was published by Smith, Elder & Co. to warm reviews and immediate commercial success.

After the publication of her sisters' novels in 1847, Brontë and her sister, Anne, visited Williams in London, England to reveal their identities. When her identity became public, Brontë became a literary celebrity and made acquaintances of Elizabeth Gaskell, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Thomas De Quincey.

In 1852, Arthur Bell Nicholls, Brontë's father's curate, proposed to and was rejected by Brontë. Brontë changed her mind, and in 1854 she married Nicholls.

Brontë died in 1855 in Haworth, England.

Custodial History

The holograph letters, poems, stories, and writing exercises came from the W. T. H. Howe and Owen D. Young collections. The Howe collection was purchased by Albert A. Berg in 1940. The Owen D. Young collection was purchased by New York Public Library then reimbursed by Albert A. Berg in 1941.

Scope and Content Note

The Charlotte Brontë papers, dating from 1829 to the 1990s, hold holograph letters, poems, stories, writing exercises, and a painting by Brontë. The collection also contains a travel writing desk; ephemera originally housed in the desk; various correspondence between Brontë's acquaintances and friends; and artifacts associated with Brontë and her family. The papers incorporate additional materials, dating from the 1890s to the 1990s, created by various rare book collectors and Berg Collection staff about the holographs, the travel writing desk, and the desk's ephemera.

The Holograph Letters grouping dates from the 1840s to 1854, and features forty letters written by Brontë to various friends, acquaintances, and family members. Please note that one of the letters is a forgery. The majority of the letters are addressed to Ellen Nussey and William Smith Williams. Other recipients include Laetitia Wheelwright, Patrick Brontë, Mary Holmes, Catherine Frances Gore, Eliza Jane Kingston (Brontë's cousin), Thomas De Quincey, and Mary Dixon (Mary Taylor's cousin). In the letters, Brontë discusses her travels from Haworth, feelings about Arthur Bell Nicholls, reaction to critiques of her novels, interest in Thackeray's lectures, staying with the Smiths in London, and Emily Brontë and Anne Brontë's deaths.

The additional materials, dating from 1896 to the 1990s, relate to the letters and encompass typed transcriptions, notes about the context and history of the letters, envelopes and letters written by rare booksellers to manuscript collectors, and clippings from rare book catalog entries. While some of the materials are addressed to W.T.H. Howe, the majority appear to have been created by Berg Collection staff and various rare booksellers.

The Holograph Poems, Stories, Writing Exercises, and Painting grouping spans from 1829 to 1843 and is composed of five poems, two stories, four writing exercises and one painting by Brontë. Two of the five poems, "Saul" and "Memory," are signed by Brontë and dated October 7, 1834 and August 2, 1835, respectively. These poems are currently housed in a bound volume that holds supplemental materials, dating from the 1930s, about the poems. The other three poems, "At first I did attention give," "Lady-bird! Lady-bird! Fly away home," and "On its bending stalk a bonny flower," contain textual corrections. "Lady-Bird!" and "On its bending stalk" were previously attributed to Emily Brontë.

The supplemental materials related to the poems include typed transcriptions and notes about the poems' publication and attribution histories. None of the materials are signed or dated but appear to be created by the Berg Collection staff during the 1970s. The additional materials associated with the poem "At first I did attention give" consist of a brief note, dated May 26, 1937, from a rare book seller located in London, England.

The grouping's stories feature the complete original holograph of *Tales of the Islanders* (1829-1830) and the brief story, "The Keep of the Bridge" (July 13, 1829). The holograph of *Tales of the Islanders* is inset into a bound volume that also holds additional materials related to the holograph and Brontë. "The Keep of the Bridge" holograph is dated and signed by Brontë. The holograph contains a pencil sketch of ruins adjacent to the text. There is another sketch of a bridge and keep on the back of the holograph. The additional material affiliated with the story features a rare book seller's catalog entry, dated November 17, 1916, that describes the holograph.

The four writing exercises consist of two practice letters, "Lettre d'un pauvre peinture a un grand seigneur" (October 17, 1843) and "Meine leibe Fruendinn" (circa 1842), and two essays, "Le but de la vie" (circa 1842) and "Le nid" (April 30, 1842), composed while Brontë attended Héger Pensionnat. "Le nid" includes handwritten corrections, comments, and a signature by Constantin Héger. The supplemental materials, dating from the 1930s, associated with the exercises encompass translations of the assignments into English and clippings of rare booksellers' catalog entries.

The untitled watercolor painting, dated November 26, 1830, depicts a woman in a green dress leaning on a podium. On the podium sits a lyre. Brontë's signature and the date appear below the illustration.

The Travel Writing Desk, Contents, and Ephemera grouping dates from the 1830s to the 1890s, and is made up of a desk and items and ephemera housed in the desk. The desk, dated circa 1840, is made of wood, mother of pearl, metal, and velvet. It is said to have belonged to Brontë, measures 30.5 cm x

23 cm x 11 cm, and is lined on the bottom in dark faded green linen that has partially worn away. Items, dating from the 1830s to 1850, originally housed inside of the desk include an ink pot, a paper weight, a pencil, a steel pen nib, three mineral rocks, a decorative rock, a marble-like item composed of three different stones, a fabric fragment, and two styli. Ephemera, dating from the 1840s to 1890s, amounts to two locks of Charlotte Brontë's hair, one accompanied with a handwritten note "C. Brontë's hair from Martha Brown;" calling cards of the Reverend and Mrs. Arthur B. Nicholls with an envelope addressed to Ellen Nussey; a cardboard box with watercolor drawings on the sides; a velvet bracelet with an envelope with "Charlotte's velvet bracelet" written on it; four memorial cards commemorating the deaths of Patrick Branwell, Emily, Charlotte, and Patrick Brontë; and a holograph letter from Ellen Nussey to "Dear Sir" dated March 29, 1897. The additional material associated with the desk and its contents consist of a manila envelope that identifies Albert A. Berg as the desk's donor.

The Associated Artifacts grouping dates from the 1850s to 1897, and embodies a shoe, four pieces of fabric with a wooden box, and a wallpaper sample with an envelope, all of which are related to the Brontës. The shoe is made of leather, wood, and metal, and has two phrases, "Haworth 1887" and "NY 1903," penned on the sole. There is handwriting on the wooden box affiliated with the four fabric pieces reporting that the items were given to "Mrs. Peter Collier" by a nurse who worked for Brontë. The envelope correlated with the wallpaper sample is dated April 3rd, 1854, and addressed to Elizabeth Gaskell in Charlotte Brontë's hand. Gaskell's signature appears on the back of the wallpaper sample along with an inscription identifying the sample as Brontë's wallpaper for Nicholls. The supplemental material associated with the artifacts incorporate two letters, dated 1938, about the provenance of the wallpaper sample and envelope.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged alphabetically within the following four groupings: Holograph Letters; Holograph Poems, Stories, Writing Exercises, and Painting; Travel Writing Desk, Contents, and Ephemera; and Associated Artifacts.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Artifacts (object genre)
Correspondence
Manuscripts (documents)
Manuscripts for publication
Watercolors

Subjects

Authors, English -- 19th century
Authors, English -- 19th century -- Correspondence
English poetry -- 19th century
English poetry -- Manuscripts
Short stories, English
Women authors, English

Occupations

Authors.
Poets.

Geographic Names

England -- Social life and customs -- 19th century

Names

Bronte_, Anne, 1820-1849
Bronte_, Charlotte, 1816-1855
Bronte_, Emily, 1818-1848
Bronte_, Patrick Branwell, 1817-1848
Brontë, Patrick, 1777-1861
Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, 1810-1865
Heger, Constantin-Georges, 1809-1896
Nicholls, Arthur Bell, 1819-1906
Nussey, Ellen
Thackeray, William Makepeace, 1811-1863

Container List

Holograph Letters 1840s-1990s [bulk 1840s-1854]

- b. 1 f. 1 Brontë, Patrick 1849 December 5, 1930s
Housed in bound volume with a letter to William Smith Williams and supplemental materials. Additional materials include two typed transcriptions, stamped envelopes, and copies of engravings and drawings of Brontë and William Makepeace Thackeray.
- b. 1 f. 2-3 Brontë, Patrick circa 1851 May 29, 1970s
- b. 1 f. 4-5 De Quincey, Thomas 1847 June 16, 1930s
- b. 1 f. 6 Dixon, Mary circa 1843, 1940s-1960s
- b. 3 f. 1
- b. 3 f. 7 Gore, Catherine Frances 1850 August 27- circa 1851 June 24, 1828-1860s
Contains two holograph letters addressed to Gore housed in a bound volume. Volume also contains a pen and ink drawing; holograph story by Gore; proof of an etching by George Cruikshank after a drawing by William Makepeace Thackeray; a holograph letter from Gore to F. Shober; and holograph letters from Thackeray, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Isaac D'Israeli, Thomas Lawrence, and Thomas Babington Macaulay to Gore.
- b. 1 f. 7-8 Holmes, Mary 1852 April 22, 1930s
- b. 1 f. 9 Holmes, Mary 1853 June 21
- b. 1 f. 10 Kingston, Eliza Jane 1846 May 8
- Nussey, Ellen
- b. 1 f. 11 circa 1845 November 4
- b. 1 f. 12 circa 1847 May 12
- b. 1 f. 13 1848 January 28
- b. 1 f. 14 1848 December
Describes the death of Emily Brontë.
- b. 1 f. 15-16 1849 January 15, 1930s
- b. 1 f. 17 circa 1849 December 19
Discusses trip to London, staying with the Smiths, and meeting Thackeray.
- b. 1 f. 18-19 circa 1850 January 25, 1930s
- b. 1 f. 20 1850 February 5
- b. 1 f. 21 circa 1851 June 2, 1930s
- b. 3 f. 2
- b. 1 f. 22-23 1851 June 11, 1930s
- b. 1 f. 24-25 1852 October 5, 1930s
- b. 1 f. 26 1852 December 15
Communicates Nicholls' marriage proposal to Brontë, Brontë's feelings about the proposal, and Patrick Brontë's reaction to the proposal.
- b. 1 f. 27 1852 December 18, 1930s
- b. 3 f. 3 Imparts Brontë's feelings for Nicholls and Patrick Brontë's treatment of Nicholls.
- b. 1 f. 28 1853 May 19
- b. 1 f. 29-30 circa 1854 June 29, 1902-1930s
- b. 1 f. 31 1854 November 21
- b. 1 f. 32 "Dear Sir," Unknown Recipient circa 1850 January 7
- b. 2 f. 1 Smith, George 1849 November 19, 1930s
- b. 3 f. 4
- b. 2 f. 2 Unknown Recipient, Forged circa 1850, 1930s
- b. 3 f. 5

Holograph Letters (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 3-4 Wheelwright, Laetitia 1850 March 25, 1970s
- b. 2 f. 5-6 Wheelwright, Laetitia 1851 January 12, 1890s-1930s
Williams, William Smith
- b. 2 f. 7-8 circa 1847 December 13, 1930s-1990s
Holograph is a draft of a letter.
- b. 2 f. 9 1847 December 23
Holograph letter is signed "C. Bell."
- b. 2 f. 10-11 1848 January 28, 1930s
- b. 2 f. 12 1848 May 1
Holograph letter is signed "C. Bell."
- b. 2 f. 13 1849 January 2
Holograph letter discusses reviews of Brontë's writing, as well as Brontë's shock at Emily Brontë's death.
- b. 2 f. 14-15 circa 1849 May 30, 1910s-1930s
Holograph letter reports Anne Brontë's death.
- b. 2 f. 16-17 circa 1849 November 22, 1930s
- b. 2 f. 18 1850 April 3

Holograph Poems, Stories, Writing Exercises, and Painting 1829-1990s [bulk 1829-1843]

- b. 2 f. 19-20 "On its bending stalk a bonny flower" 1830s, 1940s-1990s
- b. 2 f. 21 "Le But de la Vie" circa 1842 August 29
- b. 2 f. 22-23 "At first I did attention give" 1830s, 1930s
- b. 2 f. 24-25 "The Keep of the Bridge" 1829 July 13, 1916 November 17
Contains a granite sketch of ruins adjacent to the text and a sketch of the bridge and keep on the back of the holograph.
- b. 2 f. 26-27 "Lady-bird! lady-bird! Fly away home" 1830s, 1940s
- b. 2 f. 28-29 "Lettre d'un pauvre Peintre a un grand Seigneur" 1843 October 17, 1930s
- b. 2 f. 30-31 "Meine liebe fruendinn" circa 1842 June 5, 1930s
- b. 2 f. 32 "Le Nid" 1842 April 30
The holograph essay includes handwritten corrections, comments, and a signature by Constantin Héger.
- b. 2 f. 33-34 "Saul" and "Memory" 1834 October 7-1835 August 2, 1930s
- b. 4 *Tales of the Islanders* 1829 March 12-1830 July 30, 1930s
Housed in a bound volume containing the complete holograph of the unpublished book, three engravings of Brontë, an announcement of the book, a typed transcription of the holograph, and biographical notes about Brontë.
- b. 3 f. 6 Watercolor Painting 1830 November 26

Travel Writing Desk, Contents, and Ephemera 1830s-1970s [bulk 1830s-1890s]

- b. 5 Cardboard Box 1840s-1890s, 1970s
- b. 2 f. 35 Two watercolor drawings appear on the sides of the box.
Desk circa 1840
Composed of wood, mother of pearl, metal, velvet, and lined with dark green linen.
- b. 5 An Ink Pot, a Paper Weight, a Pencil, a Steel Pen Nib, Three Mineral Rocks, a Decorative Rock, a Marble-like Object, a Fabric Fragment, and Two Styli
1830s-1850
Contents of Brontë's travel writing desk.

Travel Writing Desk, Contents, and Ephemera (cont.)

- b. 5 **Lock of Brontë's Hair with Envelope** 1849-1861
"Rev. P. Brontë to Eliza Brown" handwritten on envelope.
- b. 5 **Lock of Brontë's Hair with Note** 1840s-1870s
Inscribed on note, "C. Brontë's hair from Martha Brown."
- b. 5 **Memorial Cards and Envelope** 1840s-1860s
- b. 5 **Reverend Arthur Nicholls and Mrs. Arthur Nicholls Calling Cards with Envelope** 1854-1855
"Miss Ellen Nussey" handwritten on envelope.
- b. 5 **Velvet Bracelet and Letter from Ellen Nussey** 1840s-1897 March 29
Holograph letter, addressed to an unknown recipient, mentions that the velvet bracelet was worn by Brontë.

Associated Artifacts 1850s-1950s [bulk 1850s-1897]

- b. 6 **Shoe** 1860s, 1950s
Consists of leather, wood, and metal with two inscriptions, "Haworth 1887" and "NY 1903," inscribed on the sole.
- b. 7 **Four Fabric Samples with Wooden Box** 1850s-1897
"Given to Mrs. Peter Collier in Haworth, Yorkshire on Aug. 25, 1897, by a former nurse of Charlotte Brontë" is inscribed in granite on the bottom of the box.
- b. 2 f. 36-37 **Wallpaper Sample with Envelope** circa 1854 April 3, 1938 April 29-May 10
Wallpaper sample contains and inscription by, and initials of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell. The envelope is addressed to Gaskell.