

MORSE, SAMUEL FINLEY BREESE, 1791-1872.

Samuel Finley Breese Morse papers, 1817-1950

Emory University
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Morse, Samuel Finley Breese, 1791-1872.
Title: Samuel Finley Breese Morse papers, 1817-1950
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 131
Extent: 1.5 linear ft. (2 boxes)
Abstract: Papers of artist and inventor Samuel F. B. Morse including correspondence, printed materials, and photographs.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted access.

Terms Governing Use and Reproduction

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Source

Gift, 1972.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], Samuel Finley Breese Morse papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Processing

Processed by LMM, 1975.

Collection Description

Biographical Note

Samuel Finley Breese Morse (April 27, 1791-April 2, 1872), artist and inventor, was the eldest child of Jedidiah Morse, a Congregationalist minister of Charlestown, Mass., and Elizabeth Ann

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Breese Morse. After graduating from Yale in 1810, Morse studied painting in England with Washington Allston, 1811 - 1815, then returned to the United States and achieved some success in portrait painting, particularly in Charleston, South Carolina where, between 1818 - 1821, he was the favorite portrait painter of the aristocracy. His tour-de-force of portraiture, "The Old House of Representatives," painted 1821-1822, received little attention at the time. Except in his years of popularity in Charleston, Morse never attained the financial success or recognition in painting that he had hoped. After 1832, when the idea of the telegraph obsessed him, Morse gave up painting and devoted himself to his inventions. Although plagued with lawsuits and debts, Morse acquired some wealth late in life and died in comfortable circumstances.

Morse married first Lucretia Pickering Walker of Concord, New Hampshire, on September 29, 1818. They had five children, three of whom survived to maturity, Charles Walker, Susan, and James Edward Finley. After Lucretia's death on February 7, 1825, Morse remained a widower for twenty-three years until August 10, 1848, when he married Sarah Elizabeth Griswold, a cousin. The second marriage lasted twenty-four years and produced four children, Cornelia (Leila), William Goodrich, Samuel Arthur Breese, and Edward Lind.

Morse died at his New York City home, 5 West 22nd Street, and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn. Biographical information was obtained from Carlton Mabee, *American Leonardo, The Life of Samuel F. B. Morse* (New York, 1943) and Harry B. Wehle, *Samuel F. B. Morse, American Painter* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932).

Scope and Content Note

Included in this small collection are thirty-one letters, one folder of articles and pamphlets concerning Morse's career, three programs, fourteen photographs of family members and Morse paintings, one folder of clippings, one miniature painting on ivory of "Mrs. Lansing" by Morse, and a box of trays containing plaster gems.

Twenty-one of the letters are correspondence between S. F. B. Morse and his first wife, Lucretia Pickering Walker Morse, from March 6, 1817-September 26, 1824. Morse's letters reflect his strong Calvinist faith and his concern that his wife (they were married in 1818) be properly devoted to religious matters. He occasionally reports on the progress of his paintings, although only briefly. None of these letters is written from Charleston, where from 1818-1821 Morse enjoyed his greatest success. One unusually descriptive letter, dated January 6 and 7, 1820, written from Raleigh, North Carolina, on his way South to Charleston describes the town as "pretty" but showing "a degree of negligence, and want of neatness" which Morse says is typical of all Southern towns and which he attributes to "the prevalence of slavery."

Other letters include: (1) Jedidiah Morse to his son Finley, March 8, 1817; (2) Edward Lind Morse, youngest son of S. F. B. Morse, to Richard W. Morse, a great-grandson, May 9, 1923; (3) Leila Morse Rummel, daughter of S. F. B. Morse, to Bleecker Morse, June 24, 1935; (4) an undated note of Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) to "Mr. Osborn," March 11, undated, thanking him for "tickets to the museum"; and (5) two Abraham Lincoln items, one a probable tracing of a Lincoln note, the other an unsigned note of thanks to Dorothea Dix for her inquiry about Willie and Tad Lincoln, February 19, 1862.

Several of the Morse letters in this collection were quoted in part by Harry B. Wehle in his biographical sketch of Morse in Samuel F. B. Morse, *American Painter* (Metropolitan Museum

of Art, 1932), a copy of which is filed with the papers. The letters at that time were in the possession of Mrs. Mabel L. Morse.

Arrangement Note

Arranged by document type.

Container List

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	Letters, 1817
1	2	Letters, 1818-1821
1	3	Letters, 1822-1935
1	4	Commemorative stamp, October 7, 1940
1	5	Clippings
1	6	Pamphlets and articles
1	7	Photographs
1	8	Ivory miniature painted by Morse
1	9	Dinner program, Morse birthday celebration, April 28, 1824
1	10	Dinner program, National Academy of Design, January 17, 1950
1	11	Lincoln note, unsigned [?]
1	12	Lincoln note
1	13	Leila Morse Rummel
1	14	Photograph of medals won by S. F. B. Morse
2	1	Trays [4] containing plaster gems
