CALVIN FLETCHER (1798–1866)  
PAPERS, 1817–1917

Collection Information

Biographical Sketch

Scope and Content Note

Series Contents

Cataloging Information

Processed by

Paul Brockman  
10 January 2002

Manuscript Collections Department  
William Henry Smith Memorial Library  
Indiana Historical Society  
450 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org
COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 29 manuscript boxes, 21 bound volumes, 14 reels of microfilm, 1 oversize folder

COLLECTION DATES: 1817–1917

PROVENANCE: The majority of the Calvin Fletcher papers were placed in the custody of the Indiana Historical Society after the death of Laura Fletcher Hodges in 1923. Mrs. Hodges was the granddaughter of Calvin Fletcher. Additional materials came from: Indiana Historical Bureau, 140 N. Senate Ave., Indianapolis, 1937; Frederic Luther Co., 2803 E. 56th St., Indianapolis, Dec. 1962; Mrs. Louis F. Hays, 102 W. Poplar, Greencastle, IN, May 1975; Larry LaFoe, Indianapolis, IN

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: Microfilm; diaries were published by the Indiana Historical Society in 9 volumes, 1972–83.

RELATED HOLDINGS: Emily Beeler Fletcher Diaries & Papers (BV 2181–2203, 2330–2336, M 0479, F 0182–0184); The Diary of Calvin Fletcher, 9 volumes (KF368 .F54 A333)


NOTES:
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Calvin Fletcher was a prominent citizen of Indianapolis from his arrival in 1821 until his death in 1866. He was a state senator, successful lawyer, businessman, and farmer. He was also active in a number of organizations in the city.

Fletcher was born in Ludlow, Vermont, on 4 February 1798, the eleventh child of Jesse and Lucy Keyes Fletcher. He left Vermont in 1815 and settled in Urbana, Ohio, where he taught school and studied law under James Cooley. It was there that he met and married Sarah Hill. In 1821, they moved to Indianapolis.

Shortly after his arrival, he was elected prosecuting attorney for the Marion County Circuit Court and began to travel within the state. In 1825 he was elected state senator and remained in office until his resignation in 1833. Although he never ran for public office again, he continued his interest in politics by drafting proposed legislation for free schools, participating in debates, and attending political conventions. During this time, Fletcher entered into a successful law partnership and collection business with Ovid Butler and later Simon Yandes. Fletcher resigned from this business in 1845.

In 1834, Fletcher was appointed a director of the State Bank and a commissioner for the Sinking Fund. He also became president of the Indianapolis branch of the State Bank and retained that position until the charter for the bank ran out. The state chartered a new bank, the Bank of the State of Indiana, instead of extending the charter of the existing bank. Fletcher then organized the Indianapolis Branch Banking Co., also known as the Fletcher and Sharpe Bank, with Thomas Sharpe.

Fletcher’s other business interest included land speculation, in partnership with Nicholas McCarty, and being president and a member of the board of directors of the Indianapolis and Bellefontaine Railroad.

Besides banking and the law, Fletcher was also interested in agriculture. He was a successful farmer. He helped to found the Marion County Agricultural Society and was the treasurer for its first annual fair. Letters from his sons reveal their experiences at the Cincinnati, New York, and Rhode Island fairs.

The moral and educational development of Indianapolis was another of Fletcher’s concerns. He supported a number of the local churches and attended many of them personally. He was active in the Sabbath schools, first as a teacher and later as superintendent of the Sabbath School of Roberts Chapel. He also gave lectures at the Sunday School picnics.

Although lacking in formal education, Fletcher spend a great deal of time reading. He was also a strong advocate for free public schools in the city. In 1847 he participated in the Common School Convention meeting held in Indianapolis. He served as a school trustee.
for seven years, setting up a free school system. He was also involved in recruiting teachers from the East.

Fletcher was also a member of the Indianapolis Benevolent Society, the Indiana Historical Society, the local temperance committee, and other groups. During the Civil War, he was chairman of the joint committee of the U.S. Sanitary Commission and the local commission, making arrangements for the care of the sick and wounded.

Sarah Hill Fletcher died in 1854. One year later, Fletcher married Mrs. Keziah Price Lister (nee Backus), a teacher from New Hampshire. Calvin Fletcher died on 26 May 1866.

Source: Original collection guide.
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of the Fletcher family correspondence, the diaries of Calvin and Sarah Hill Fletcher, miscellaneous legal documents, broadsides and printed material, an account book, a book of recollections and speeches, and an autograph book. Also included in the collection are typed transcripts of Fletcher’s diaries and a majority of his letters.

Calvin Fletcher’s diaries begin in 1817, with intermittent entries until 1835, when they become regular, and conclude with his death in 1866. The diary of Sarah Hill Fletcher begins in 1821 and continues until 1838. It helps to augment the lapses in Calvin’s diaries. When considered together, the Fletcher diaries provide a comprehensive view of life in Indianapolis from 1821 to 1866.

Fletcher recorded his thoughts concerning current events, his business activities, his political, social and family life, and his travels. He also recorded the weather conditions on a daily basis. The diaries provide a source of information concerning legislation and the activities of the Indiana Senate while Fletcher was in office, books available to Indiana residents during this period, the Indianapolis school system, banking and economic conditions, farm prices and practices, and various court cases.

Fletcher traveled extensively both in Indiana and in the East. He rode the Fifth Judicial Circuit as a prosecuting attorney and his land deals took him to various parts of the state. His involvement in the Indiana banks and frequent trips east to visit his family were responsible for many of his trips outside Indiana. In 1825, he recorded his first trip to Ludlow, Vermont. He continued to record his travel experiences throughout the diaries. Travel accounts also appear in the correspondence to Calvin Fletcher.

The correspondence consists mainly of letters to Calvin Fletcher from various family members. Earlier letters include a number written by Fletcher to his parents and to members of his wife’s family in Ohio. There is also some business correspondence. While Fletcher was away, he would receive reports from his wife, and later his sons, concerning his business affairs.

The Fletcher family, Calvin’s brothers and sisters, settled in various parts of the country. Their letters reveal various points of view concerning politics, economic conditions, slavery, and the war. The letters of Andrew Ingram, a lawyer of Lafayette, Indiana, describe living conditions and the problems of being a lawyer in that town. Included in the correspondence are letters from C.E. Beecher and William Slade concerning the importation of teachers from the East for the local schools and the Civil War letters of Stephen Keyes Fletcher, who served with the 33rd and 115th Indiana Regiments.

The correspondence is arranged chronologically. The letters had been placed in bound volumes. They were indexed and microfilmed in that arrangement and then removed from the volumes and placed in the present order.
The diaries have been published with very few omissions (as *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, 9 volumes). Materials not found in the published volumes include the account book (1843-1849); recollections of Sarah Hill Fletcher written by her children after her death; printed material in the form of broadsides, programs and newspaper clippings; genealogy material; biographical sketches of Calvin Fletcher written by Simon Yandes, D.D. Pratt, and one unsigned (probably by James Cooley Fletcher); and an autograph book of Sally Parker of Proctorsville, Vermont.
SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Correspondence, 1817–65

CONTENTS

Correspondence, 1817-23  
Box 1, Folder 1

Transcript and photo copies – letter of 27 August 1820  
Box 1, Folder 2

Correspondence, 1824–28  
Box 1, Folder 3

Correspondence, 1829–30  
Box 1, Folder 4

Correspondence, 1831–32  
Box 1, Folder 5

Correspondence, 1833  
Box 1, Folder 6

Correspondence, 1834  
Box 1, Folder 7

Correspondence, 1835–May 1836  
Box 1, Folder 8

Correspondence, June–Dec. 1836  
Box 2, Folder 1

Correspondence, 1837  
Box 2, Folder 2

Correspondence, 1838  
Box 2, Folder 3

Correspondence, 1839  
Box 2, Folder 4

Correspondence, 1840  
Box 2, Folder 5

Correspondence, 1841  
Box 2, Folder 6

Correspondence, 1842  
Box 2, Folder 7

Correspondence, Jan.–May 1843  
Box 3, Folder 1

Correspondence, June–Dec. 1843  
Box 3, Folder 2

Correspondence, Jan.–Aug 1844  
Box 3, Folder 3

Correspondence, Sept.–Dec. 1844  
Box 3, Folder 4

Correspondence, Jan.–Aug. 1845  
Box 3, Folder 5
Correspondence, Sept.–Dec. 1845
Correspondence, Jan.–June 1846
Correspondence, July–Dec. 1846
Correspondence, Jan.–Aug. 1847
Correspondence, Sept.–Dec. 1847
Correspondence, Jan.–Mar. 1848
Correspondence, Apr.–July 1848
Correspondence, Aug.–Oct. 1848
Correspondence, Nov.–Dec. 1848
Correspondence, Jan.–Mar. 1849
Correspondence, Apr.–June 1849
Correspondence, July–Aug. 1849
Correspondence, Sept.–Dec. 1849
Correspondence, Jan.–June 1850
Correspondence, July–Dec. 1850
Correspondence, Jan.–May 1851
Correspondence, June–July 1851
Correspondence, Aug.–Oct. 1851
Correspondence, Nov.–Dec. 1851
Correspondence, Jan.–Mar. 1852
Correspondence, Apr.–June 1852
Correspondence, July–Sept. 1852
Correspondence, Oct.–Dec. 1852
Correspondence, Jan.–Mar. 1853
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Box and Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar.–June 1853</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Aug. 1853</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.–Dec. 1853</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–Feb. 1854</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar.–June 1854</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Aug. 1854</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.–Dec. 1854</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–Mar. 1855</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr.–July 1855</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug.–Dec. 1855</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–Apr. 1856</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May–Aug. 1856</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.–Dec. 1856</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June 1857</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Sept. 1857</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct.–Dec. 1857</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–May 1858</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June–Dec. 1858</td>
<td>Box 8, Folder 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–May 1859</td>
<td>Box 9, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June–Dec. 1859</td>
<td>Box 9, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June 1860</td>
<td>Box 9, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Aug. 1860</td>
<td>Box 9, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.–Dec. 1860</td>
<td>Box 9, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June 1861</td>
<td>Box 9, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Correspondence, July–Sept. 1861  Box 9, Folder 7
Correspondence, Oct.–Dec. 1861  Box 9, Folder 8
Correspondence, Jan.–Mar. 1862  Box 10, Folder 1
Correspondence, Apr.–May 1862  Box 10, Folder 2
Correspondence, June–July 1862  Box 10, Folder 3
Correspondence, Aug.–Dec. 1862  Box 10, Folder 4
Correspondence, Jan.–Mar. 1863  Box 10, Folder 5
Correspondence, Apr.–July 1863  Box 10, Folder 6
Correspondence, Aug.–Dec. 1863  Box 10, Folder 7
Correspondence, 1864–65  Box 10, Folder 8
Correspondence, Undated  Box 10, Folder 9
Letters to Fletcher, vol. 4, p.1–vol. 6, p.759  F 0189
Letters to Fletcher, vol. 6, p. 760–vol. 8, p. 239  F 0190
Letters to Fletcher, vol. 10, p. 1–vol. 11, p. 709  F 0191
Letters to Fletcher, vol. 11, p. 710–vol. 14, p. 223  F 0192
Letters to Fletcher, vol. 17, p. 349–vol. 19, p. 519  F 0193
Fletcher Letters held by Sweetbriar College  F 0194

**Series 2: Papers & Publications, 1824–1906**

**CONTENTS**

Two travel diaries to Ludlow, Vermont, 1824, and typed transcripts  Box 11, Folder 1
Legal documents, 1824–55  Box 11, Folder 2
General papers, 1821–95  Box 11, Folder 3
General Broadsides, 1835–55  OM 0091
General notes (marker-picture of Fletcher homestead) Box 11, Folder 4

Family correspondence Box 11, Folder 5

Copy of letter concerning Ingram Fletcher, 1853 Box 11, Folder 6

Biographical sketches of Calvin & Stoughton A. Fletcher “Memories of My Mother” by Albert Fletcher, 1917 Box 11, Folder 7

Excerpts from diary, 1821–44 Box 11, Folder 8

Printed material Box 11, Folder 9

Newsletter clippings, 1855–1906 Box 11, Folder 10

Typed transcripts of newspaper clippings, 1851–59 Box 11, Folder 11

Genealogy chart, ancestors & descendants of Calvin Fletcher; lectures of Rev. J.C. Fletcher; letter from Anchor Line 31 May 1881 Box 12, Folder 1

Recollections of Calvin Fletcher by Simon Yandes & D.D. Pratt Box 12, Folder 2

Biography of Calvin Fletcher, pp. 1–53 Box 12, Folder 3

Biography of Calvin Fletcher, pp. 53–173 Box 12, Folder 4

Biography of Calvin Fletcher, pp. 174–262 Box 12, Folder 5

Biography of Calvin Fletcher, pp. 263–267 and unnumbered pages Box 12, Folder 6

Biography of Calvin Fletcher, unnumbered pages Box 12, Folder 7

Autograph book of Sally Parker of Proctorsville, Vermont, 1824–82 Box 12, Folder 8

Series 3: Letter Transcripts, 1817–51

CONTENTS CONTAINER
Letter transcripts, 1817–27 Box 13, Folder 1
Letter transcripts, 1817–27 Box 13, Folder 2
Letter transcripts, 1827–31
Box 13, Folder 3

Letter transcripts, 1834–44
Box 13, Folder 4

Letter transcripts, 1844–45
Box 13, Folder 5

Letter transcripts, 1827–47
Box 13, Folder 6

Letter transcripts, 1847–51
Box 13, Folder 7

Letter transcripts, 1845–47
Box 13, Folder 8

Letter transcripts, 1821–47
Box 13, Folder 9

Letter transcripts, 1821–26
Box 13, Folder 10

Letter transcripts, 1826–51
Box 13, Folder 11

Letter transcripts, 1825–30
Box 14, Folder 1

Letter transcripts, 1817–30
Box 14, Folder 2

Letter transcripts, 1817–31
Box 14, Folder 3

Letter transcripts, 1831–49
Box 14, Folder 4

Letter transcripts, 1847–50
Box 14, Folder 5

Letter transcripts, 1826–48
Box 14, Folder 6

Letter transcripts, 1826–37
Box 14, Folder 7

Letter transcripts, 1837–42
Box 14, Folder 8

Letter transcripts, 1823–42
Box 14, Folder 9

Letter transcripts, Vol. 3, pp.1–21
Box 15, Folder 1

Box 15, Folder 2

Box 15, Folder 3

Box 15, Folder 4

Letter transcripts, Vol. 3, pp.131–164
Box 15, Folder 5

Box 15, Folder 6
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
<th>Box and Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 3</td>
<td>283–467</td>
<td>Box 15, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 3</td>
<td>471–707</td>
<td>Box 15, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 4</td>
<td>1–267</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 4</td>
<td>268–475</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 4</td>
<td>476–573</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 4</td>
<td>574–699</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 4</td>
<td>702–856</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 6</td>
<td>1–112</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 6</td>
<td>113–217</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 6</td>
<td>218–413</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 6</td>
<td>414–477</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 6</td>
<td>578–757</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 6</td>
<td>758–946</td>
<td>Box 16, Folder 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 17</td>
<td>1–92</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 17</td>
<td>93–212</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 17</td>
<td>213–356</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 17</td>
<td>357–468</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 17</td>
<td>469–630</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 18</td>
<td>1–136</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 18</td>
<td>137–307</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 18</td>
<td>311–474</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 18</td>
<td>475–582</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter transcripts, Vol. 18</td>
<td>585–711</td>
<td>Box 17, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Series 4: Diary Transcripts, 1817–66

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>CONTAINER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, May 1817–Nov. 1821</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Nov. 1821–July 1824</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Jan. 1826–Jan. 1835</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Jan 1835–Mar. 1836</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Mar. 1836–Jan. 1837</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, (edited), 1 Jan. 1835–15 Dec. 1840</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Jan.–July 1837</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, July 1837–Jan. 1839</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Jan. 1839–Jan. 1840</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Jan.–Aug. 1840</td>
<td>Box 18, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Aug.–Sept. 1840</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Oct. 1840–Apr. 1841</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Apr.–Dec. 1841</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Dec. 1841–May 1842</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, May 1842–Apr. 1843</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Apr.–Nov. 1843</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Nov. 1843–Mar. 1844</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Mar.–Oct. 1844</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Oct. 1844–Apr. 1845</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Apr.–Oct. 1845</td>
<td>Box 19, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Oct.–May 1845</td>
<td>Box 20, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, May–Oct. 1846</td>
<td>Box 20, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Oct. 1846–Mar. 1847</td>
<td>Box 20, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diary transcripts, Mar.—Aug. 1847  
Box 20, Folder 4

Diary transcripts, Aug.—Dec. 1847  
Box 20, Folder 5

Diary transcripts, Dec. 1847—May 1848  
Box 20, Folder 6

Diary transcripts, May 1848—Feb. 1849  
Box 20, Folder 7

Diary transcripts, Feb.—Sept. 1849  
Box 20, Folder 8

Diary transcripts, Sept. 1849—Mar. 1850  
Box 20, Folder 9

Diary transcripts, Mar.—Nov. 1850  
Box 20, Folder 10

Diary transcripts, Nov. 1850—May 1851  
Box 20, Folder 11

Diary transcripts, May—Nov. 1851  
Box 20, Folder 12

Diary transcripts, Nov.—Dec. 1851  
Box 20, Folder 13

Diary transcripts, Jan.—Apr. 1852  
Box 21, Folder 1

Diary transcripts, Apr.—Aug. 1852  
Box 21, Folder 2

Diary transcripts, Apr.—Nov. 1852  
Box 21, Folder 3

Diary transcripts, Nov. 1852—Mar. 1853, and  
biographical sketch  
Box 21, Folder 4

Diary transcripts, Mar.—June 1853  
Box 21, Folder 5

Diary transcripts, June—Sept. 1853  
Box 21, Folder 6

Diary transcripts, Sept. 1853—Feb. 1854  
Box 21, Folder 7

Diary transcripts, Feb.—July 1854  
Box 21, Folder 8

Diary transcripts, July—Nov. 1854  
Box 21, Folder 9

Diary transcripts, Nov. 1854—Mar. 1855  
Box 21, Folder 10

Diary transcripts, Mar—June 1855  
Box 21, Folder 11

Diary transcripts, June—Oct. 1855  
Box 21, Folder 12

Diary transcripts, Oct. 1855—July 1856  
Box 22, Folder 1

Diary transcripts, July 1856—Feb. 1857  
Box 22, Folder 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diary transcripts, Feb.–Aug. 1857</th>
<th>Box 22, Folder 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Aug. 1857–Jan. 1858</td>
<td>Box 22, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Jan.–Apr. 1858</td>
<td>Box 22, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Apr–Dec. 1858</td>
<td>Box 22, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Dec. 1858–Mar. 1859</td>
<td>Box 22, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Mar.–May 1859</td>
<td>Box 22, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, May–Sept. 1859</td>
<td>Box 22, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Sept.–Nov. 1859</td>
<td>Box 22, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Nov. 1859–Mar. 1860</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Mar.–June 1860</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, June–Oct. 1860</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Oct.–Dec. 1860</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Dec. 1860–Feb. 1861</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Feb.–May 1861</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, May–Aug. 1861</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Aug.–Oct. 1861</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Oct.–Dec. 1861</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Dec. 1861–Feb. 1862</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Feb.–Apr. 1862</td>
<td>Box 23, Folder 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Aug.–June 1862</td>
<td>Box 24, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, June–Aug. 1862</td>
<td>Box 24, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Aug.–Sept. 1862</td>
<td>Box 24, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Sept–Dec. 1862</td>
<td>Box 24, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary transcripts, Dec. 1862–Jan. 1863</td>
<td>Box 24, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diary transcripts, Jan.–Mar. 1863  Box 24, Folder 6
Diary transcripts, Mar.–May 1863  Box 24, Folder 7
Diary transcripts, May–Aug. 1863  Box 24, Folder 8
Diary transcripts, Aug.–Dec. 1863  Box 24, Folder 9
Diary transcripts, Dec. 1863–Mar. 1864  Box 24, Folder 10
Diary transcripts, Mar.–Apr. 1864  Box 24, Folder 11
Diary transcripts, Apr.–June 1864  Box 24, Folder 12
Diary transcripts, June–Oct. 1864  Box 25, Folder 1
Diary transcripts, Oct. 1864–Jan. 1865  Box 25, Folder 2
Diary transcripts, Jan.–Apr. 1865  Box 25, Folder 3
Diary transcripts, Apr.–May 1865  Box 25, Folder 4
Diary transcripts, May–Aug. 1865  Box 25, Folder 5
Diary transcripts, Aug.–Nov. 1865  Box 25, Folder 6
Diary transcripts, Nov. 1865–Feb. 1866  Box 25, Folder 7
Diary transcripts, Feb.–May 1866  Box 25, Folder 8
Daily transcripts (edited), Jan.–Oct. 1835  Box 26, Folder 1
Daily transcripts (edited), Oct.1835–May 1836  Box 26, Folder 2
Daily transcripts (edited), May 1836–Feb. 1837  Box 26, Folder 3
Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.1837–Feb. 1838  Box 26, Folder 4
Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.1838–Jan. 1840  Box 26, Folder 5
Daily transcripts (edited), Jan.1840–Jan. 1841  Box 26, Folder 6
Daily transcripts (edited), Jan.–Oct. 1844  Box 26, Folder 7
Daily transcripts (edited), Oct.1844–Dec. 1845  Box 26, Folder 8
Daily transcripts (edited), Dec.1845–Oct. 1846  Box 26, Folder 9
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily transcripts (edited), Oct.1846–Feb. 1848</th>
<th>Box 26, Folder 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.1848–Mar. 1850</td>
<td>Box 26, Folder 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Mar.1850–Oct. 1851</td>
<td>Box 27, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Oct.1851–Jan. 1853</td>
<td>Box 27, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Jan.–Nov. 1853</td>
<td>Box 27, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Nov.1853–June 1855</td>
<td>Box 27, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), June–Sept. 1855</td>
<td>Box 27, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Sept.1855–Apr. 1856</td>
<td>Box 27, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Apr.–Sept. 1856</td>
<td>Box 27, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Sept.1856–Feb. 1857</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.–Aug. 1857</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Aug.1857–Jan. 1858</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.1858–Apr. 1859</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Apr.–Oct. 1859</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Oct.1859–Feb. 1860</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.–Apr. 1860</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.–Mar. 1862</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Mar.–June 1862</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), June–Aug. 1862</td>
<td>Box 28, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Aug.–Dec. 1862</td>
<td>Box 29, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Dec. 1862–Feb. 1863</td>
<td>Box 29, Folder 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Feb.–May 1863</td>
<td>Box 29, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), May–Sept. 1863</td>
<td>Box 29, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily transcripts (edited), Sept.–Dec. 1863</td>
<td>Box 29, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily transcripts (edited), Dec. 1863–Apr. 1864
Marian Wehner’s stories based on Fletcher material
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**Series 5: Diaries, 1820–66**

**CONTENTS**

- Diaries, 1820–26
- Diaries, 1835–37
- Diaries, 1837–40
- Diaries, 1841–43
- Account Book, 1843–49
- Diary, 1844–48
- Diary, 1848–51
- Diary, 1852–53
- Diary, 1853–55
- Copy by Miles Fletcher
- Diary, 1855–58
- Diary, 1858–60
- Essays & Addresses, 1850s
- Diary, May 1860–Dec. 1861
- Diary, Jan. 1862–April 1864
- Diary, May 1864
- Journals & Diaries, Nov. 1820–March 1846
- Journals & Diaries, March 1846–June 1855

**CONTAINER**

- BV 1256
- BV 1257
- BV 1258
- BV 1259
- BV 1260
- BV 1261
- BV 1262
- BV 1263
- BV 1264
- BV 1265
- BV 1266
- BV 1267
- BV 1980
- BV 1968
- BV 1969
- BV 1970
- F 0185
- F 0186
Journals & Diaries, June 1855–Jan. 1862  F 0187
Journals & Diaries, Jan. 1862–May 1866  F 0188
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   2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.

   3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.

   4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0108).

   5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.