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Guide to

**Charles Lane Papers
1842-1959**

FM.MS.T.2

by Jane E. Ward

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Extent: 3 folders

Linear feet: 1 in.

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

PROVENANCE

Transcendental manuscript materials were first acquired by Clara Endicott Sears beginning in 1914 for her Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, Massachusetts. Sears became interested in the Transcendentalists after acquiring land in Harvard and restoring the Fruitlands Farmhouse.

Materials continued to be collected by the museum throughout the 20th century. In 2016, Fruitlands Museum became The Trustees' 116th reservation, and these manuscript materials were relocated to the Archives & Research Center in Sharon, Massachusetts.

In Harvard, the Fruitlands Museum site continues to display the objects that Sears collected. The museum features four separate collections of significant Shaker, Native American, Transcendentalist, and American art and artifacts. The property features a late 18th century farmhouse that was once home to the writer Louisa May Alcott and her family. Today it is a National Historic Landmark.

The papers in this collection were acquired through both purchase and donation prior to 1925.

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RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS

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CHARLES LANE (1800-1870)

Charles Lane was born on 31 Mar 1800 in England. Very little is known about the first 30 years of his life. During the 1830s he worked in London as a commercial journalist and as editor and manager of the *London Mercantile Price Current*. During this time Lane met John Pierrepont Greaves and became part of the reform circle led by Greaves. The group was interested in spiritual affairs and communal education. In 1838, Greaves opened an experimental school at Ham Common in Surrey; he named the school Alcott House (after Amos Bronson Alcott).

By 1841, Lane had settled at Alcott House as a teacher. Lane was in sympathy with Alcott's educational, spiritual, and abolitionist ideas. He had written to Alcott in 1839 and the two met on Alcott's trip to England in 1842. By October of the same year, Lane, who was divorced, and his ten-year-old son William were sailing back to the United States with Alcott. The two men were intent upon starting a community that would practice their ideals. But money was scarce at first and Lane settled down with the Alcotts in Concord to plan the venture and find an ideal site for the community. During this time, he became acquainted with Alcott's Transcendental friends. Lane was a libertarian and an abolitionist. He held strong beliefs in voluntary government. (While Alcott was being arrested for non-payment of poll taxes, Lane initiated a series of articles in *The Liberator* describing his ideas about voluntary government.)

By May of 1843, Alcott and Lane discovered a 90-acre farm in Harvard, Massachusetts, that would become the site of their experiment. Renaming the farm Fruitlands, Lane purchased it for \$18,000 and on June 1st, the group—composed of the Alcott family of six and Charles Lane and his son—took up residence there. As the summer passed Lane wrote his friends enthusiastically about the community. Fall and the approaching winter brought problems. At the end of November, Abba May Alcott, Amos Bronson Alcott's wife, gave notice that she was removing herself and her daughters from the community. Alcott went with them and the Fruitlands community was thus disbanded.

After the dissolution of the Fruitlands experiment, Lane and his son went to live with the Harvard Shaker community in January 1844. In the summer of 1846, Lane and Joseph Palmer joined together to form the Leominster and Harvard Benevolent Association. On lands owned by the Association, individuals could be provided with room and board in exchange for their labor on the lands. Lane quickly became disillusioned with his life in the Association and resolved to return to England and Alcott House where he intended to write a short history of the Fruitlands experiment. He mortgaged the Fruitlands farm to Joseph Palmer and returned to England. Alcott House was abandoned in 1849. In 1850, Charles Lane married Hannah Bond, and they had five children. He returned to a career in journalism. He died peacefully in 1870, leaving his wife, Hannah, and at least three surviving children.

William Oldham (1789 or 90-1879) was the business manager of Alcott House. Charles Lane corresponded with Oldham during his period at Fruitlands and eventually returned to Alcott House after leaving Fruitlands and the Shaker community in Harvard, Mass. Amos Bronson Alcott visited Alcott House during his trip to England in 1842.

[Sources: <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/08/12/archives/fruitlands-memorial-to-transcendentalism-disciples-and-skeptics.html>]; <https://transcendentalism.tamu.edu/fruitlands>; <https://ivu.org/history/england19a/alcott-house.html>]

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

The Charles Lane Papers (1842-1959) are of particular importance to The Trustees due to Lane's status as one of the founders of the Fruitlands community. An earlier version of this finding aid was found within "The Guide to the Transcendentalist Manuscript Collection," and was shared with The Trustees at the time of the Fruitlands Museum acquisition. It was used as a resource.

The papers are divided into two series: the Charles Lane Papers and the William Oldham Photographs. **Series I, the Charles Lane Papers**, primarily cover the years 1842 to 1851 and consist chiefly of correspondence. The bulk of the correspondence is addressed to William Oldham at Alcott House. These letters (available in typescript form only) detail the planning for the Fruitlands community and its short existence very well. Lane discusses his acquaintance with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and the daily routine at Fruitlands, as well as the experiment's participants. Other correspondents include Abba May Alcott, Junius Alcott (Amos Bronson Alcott's brother), Joseph Palmer, and Henry David Thoreau.

The correspondence written after the demise of Fruitlands deals primarily with Joseph Palmer and Lane's attempts to collect mortgage payments. One letter to Abba May Alcott does discuss Lane's life with the Shakers and his personal philosophy.

This series also contains some verses written to Elizabeth Sewall Alcott (the third Alcott daughter) on her birthday while at Fruitlands, and a photocopy of a description written by Lane and Alcott of the Fruitlands community, which was written for *The Dial*.

Also included in this series is a typescript copy of William Harry Harland's "Bronson Alcott's English Friends." Originally placed in the Alcott Family Papers, this typescript incorporates the changes that can be seen on the typescript copy that has been retained in the Alcott Family Papers. Since most of the essay focuses on Charles Lane, and includes many letters Lane wrote to William Oldham, it was felt that a copy should be placed here as well. References to page numbers for letters that appear in Harland's manuscript refer to this typescript.

There is no information pertaining to Lane's early life or to his life after 1851. The series does include a 1958 copy of his death certificate; a snapshot of his grave in Hook Churchyard and a

snapshot of the house he built in Hook, both possibly taken ca. 1900; and an image of him, apparently reproduced from a daguerreotype. No mention is made of his marriage to Hannah Bond. The papers of Charles Lane do, however, give a detailed view of the Fruitlands experience from the point of view of one of its founders.

Other information relating to Charles Lane can be found in the Ralph Waldo Emerson Papers and the Joseph Palmer Papers.

Series II, the William Oldham Photographs, has been placed here due to the connections between Lane and Oldham: the correspondence from Lane to Oldham during the Fruitlands era, and the fact that Lane lived at Alcott House before coming to the United States and returned there in 1846 after leaving Fruitlands and the Shaker community in Harvard, Mass. This series includes a photograph of Oldham, a photograph of his gravestone, and several photographs of Alcott House.

| Folder | Item | Contents | Date |
|--|-------------|--|-------------------|
| Series I. Charles Lane Papers | | | |
| Extent: 2 folders | | | |
| Dates: 1842-1958 | | | |
| This series contains correspondence from Charles Lane to several recipients, but primarily to William Oldham at Alcott House in England. | | | |
| 1 | 1 | Letter to [Junius S. Alcott]. 2pp. Original and typed transcript. Lane asks “my dear friend” Junius to write of his activities. | 1842 Nov 28 |
| 1 | 2 | Excerpt from letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. “Mr. and Mrs. Alcott have made me very comfortable.” See Harland Mss. p. 9. | 1842 Nov 30 |
| 1 | 3 | Letter to “Brother Junius” [Alcott]. 3 pp. Original and typed transcript. Lane writes about his activities in Boston and environs. Discusses what is happening at Alcott House in London. On p. 4 of this letter is a letter to Junius of the same date by Amos Bronson Alcott. See the Alcott Family Papers for a transcription of Alcott’s letter. | 1842 Dec 26 |
| 1 | 4 | Excerpt of letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only 2 sheets). See Harland Mss. pp. 6-7, 9, 10. | 1842 Dec 30-31 |
| 1 | 5 | Excerpt of letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. “We [Alcott and Lane] spent half the day (13 th January) with Miss Margaret Fuller...” See Harland Mss. pp. 9-10. | 1843 Jan 28-30 |
| 1 | 6 | Excerpt of letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. Describes the daily routine while living with the Alcotts. “Mr. A. cannot part with me. I deem him too sincere and valuable to quit him...” See Harland Mss. pp. 10-11. | 1843 Feb 21-Mar 1 |
| 1 | 7 | Excerpt of letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. Describes seeing Fruitlands for the first time and what is on it (buildings, etc.). “This, I think you will admit, looks like an attempt at something which will entitle transcendentalism to some respect for its practicality...” See Harland Mss. p. 12. | 1843 May 31 |

| Folder | Item | Contents | Date |
|--------|------|---|---------------|
| 1 | 8 | <p>Letter to Henry David Thoreau. Typed transcript only. Describes finding Fruitlands; wonders if Thoreau would be happier at Fruitlands than where he is, “although at present there is much hard manual labor.” Says much falls on Mrs. Alcott. Describes the plans he and Amos Bronson Alcott discussed as to building cottages, making fountains, planting gardens, etc.</p> <p>From Chapter V, “The Transcendental Period,” in <i>The American Men of Letters</i>, ed. Charles Dudley Warner (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1895): 137-140.</p> | 1843 Jun 9 |
| 1 | 9 | <p>Manuscript, Alcott and Lane to Emerson for <i>The Dial</i>, “Fruitlands.” Photocopy of only one part of original article. For extracts from letter see <i>The Dial</i>, July 1843, Vol. IV, No 1. A duplicate photocopy will be found in the Alcott Family Papers.</p> | 1843 Jun [10] |
| 1 | 10 | <p>Letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. Describes the work going on at Fruitlands since his last letter (31 May, just before everyone arrived at Fruitlands). See Harland Mss. pp. 13-14.</p> | 1843 Jun 16 |
| 1 | 11 | <p>Verses written by Charles Lane on the occasion of Beth's [Elizabeth Sewall Alcott] birthday at Fruitlands. Original and typed transcript.</p> <p>Published in Clara Endicott Sears, <i>Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands</i> (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1915), p. 94. These verses can also be found in Anna Bronson Alcott Pratt's journal copy.</p> | 1843 Jun 24 |
| 1 | 12 | <p>Excerpt of letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. Feels strongly about Fruitlands, otherwise might consider Oldham's invitation to Ham. Discusses money issues. “I think it would be better to remain here where the simple wants can be so easily met...” See Harland Mss. pp. 14-15.</p> | 1843 Jun 28 |
| 1 | 13 | <p>Letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. Discusses a visit he and Amos Bronson Alcott made to Roxbury [Brook Farm] “where there are 80 or 90 persons playing away their youth and day time in a miserably joyous frivolous manner.” See Harland Mss. pp. 16-17.</p> | 1843 Jul 30 |
| 1 | 14 | <p>Letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. Describes</p> | 1843 Sep 29 |

| Folder | Item | Contents | Date |
|--------|------|--|------------------|
| | | a trip he and Amos Bronson Alcott took to Providence, New York City, and New Haven, hoping to gather more participants for Fruitlands. Discusses mutual friends who visited while they were gone. "What is to be our destiny I can in no wise guess. Mr. Alcott makes such high requirements of all persons that few are likely to stay, even of his own family, unless he can become more tolerant of defect." See Harland Mss. pp. 18-20. | |
| 1 | 15 | Letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. All those who joined during the summer have left, "they say in consequence of Mr. Alcott's despotic manner..." Discusses money issues and the fact they need to be out of the house by next May 1. "You will perceive that I have, like yourself, a small peck of troubles; not quite heavy enough to drive me to a junction with our friends, the Shakers, but sufficiently so to put the thought into one's head..." Also mentions his son's illness. See Harland Mss. pp. 21-22. | 1843 Oct 30 |
| 1 | 16 | Letter to William Oldham. Typed transcript only. As Samuel May refused to pay the note, money has become an issue. Mrs. Alcott is withdrawing with her children and Amos Bronson Alcott does not want to separate from them. "I believe I have followed out this experiment to the ultimate." See Harland Mss. pp. 23-24. | 1843 Nov 26 & 29 |
| 1 | 17 | Letter to Henry David Thoreau. 1 p. Original and typed transcript. Lane has written something to Hecker, which would appear to be an introduction between Hecker and Thoreau. Hopes Thoreau will soon land in a position where he feels "at home." Published in <i>The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau</i> , eds. Walter Harding and Carl Bode (New York: New York University Press, 1958), p. 152. | 1843 Dec 3 |
| 1 | 18 | Letter to Mrs. A. B. Alcott. 4 pp. Original and typed transcript. Appreciates her invitation and discusses his views on what is being offered in his current situation. [Lane was at this time living with the Shakers.] | 1845 Feb 22 |
| 1 | 19 | Agreement, Joseph Palmer & Charles Lane re: Leominster Association. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. Published in Sears, <i>Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands</i> , pp. 135-36. | 1846 Aug 18 |
| 1 | 20 | Statement, Charles Lane [unsigned but in Lane's handwriting] | [1846?] |

| Folder | Item | Contents | Date |
|--------|------|---|-------------|
| | | re: his status as an Associate of the Leominster Benevolent Association. 1 p. Original and typed transcript. | |
| 1 | 21 | Letter to Joseph Palmer. 3 pp. Original and typed transcript. Discusses the Leominster Benevolent Association. Published in Sears, <i>Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands</i> , pp. 138-40. | 1846 Sep 10 |
| 1 | 22 | Letter to [Joseph] Palmer. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. Lane is in London. Discusses money issues; "I am once more adrift in consequence of the lease of our house and grounds having been sold..." [Probably referring to the shutdown of Alcott House.] Published in Sears, <i>Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands</i> , p. 143. | 1849 Sep 29 |
| 1 | 23 | Letter to Dr. Thomas Palmer. 3 pp. Original and typed transcript. Writes to Thomas as he is uncertain of reaching his father (Joseph Palmer). Asks him to discharge his claim (on Fruitlands). Published in Sears, <i>Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands</i> , p. 144. | 1851 Sep 16 |
| 2 | 1 | Certified copy of death certificate of Charles Lane, died 5 January 1870 at age 69; this copy issued 11 April 1958. | 1958 Apr 11 |
| 2 | 2 | Snapshot of Lane's grave in Hook Churchyard. | [ca. 1900?] |
| 2 | 3 | Snapshot of Lane's home in Hook. | [ca. 1900?] |
| 2 | 4 | Typescript copy of William Harry Harland's "Bronson Alcott's English Friends." Discusses James Pierrepont Greaves, William Oldham, and Henry Gardiner Wright, but the bulk of this essay concerns Lane. Published in Joel Myerson, "William Harry Harland's 'Bronson Alcott's English Friends,' " <i>Resources for American Literary Study</i> , 8 (Spring 1978): 24-60. | [1907] |
| 2 | 5 | Image of Charles Lane. Published in Sears, <i>Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands</i> , opp. p. 42. | [ca. 1850?] |

| Folder | Item | Contents | Date |
|---|------|---|-------------|
| Series II. William Oldham Photographs | | | |
| Extent: 1 folder | | | |
| Dates: 1870s?-1959 | | | |
| This series contains photographs of Oldham and of Alcott House. | | | |
| 3 | 1 | William Oldham, showing an elderly man with white hair and a full white beard. [Oldham died in 1879 at the age of 89, so the original photograph probably dates from the 1870s. This print likely dates from the early 1900s.] 2 5/8" x 3 7/8" | [1870s?] |
| 3 | 2 | William Oldham's gravestone in Kingston Cemetery, greater London. 3 1/4" x 4 1/4" | [ca. 1900?] |
| 3 | 3 | Photographic postcard of Alcott House, Ham Common, Surrey, Showing a three-story brick building with brick columns in the front of the first floor, and a columned cupola on the roof. Information written on reverse describes Alcott House as a "Home for Fatherless Children" until 1923 when the children were sent elsewhere and the home and grounds were sold. | [ca. 1923?] |
| 3 | 4 | Alcott House, known as South Lodge when this image was taken. Shows the front of the building with several cars parked in the drive. 7 1/2" x 6 1/4" | 1959 |
| 3 | 5 | Alcott House, known as South Lodge when this image was taken. Shows a closer view of the front entrance than the image above, with only two stories of the building visible, and one car on the left. 7 3/8" x 6 3/8" | 1959 |
| 3 | 6 | Alcott House, known as South Lodge when this image was taken. Shows a close-up view of the front entrance, with the gnarled tree on the left visible. 7 1/2" x 6 1/2" | 1959 |
| 3 | 7 | Alcott House, known as South Lodge when this image was taken. Shows the building from the street, with a low wall punctuated with columns at the entrance of the drive, and an unidentified man standing by the drive entrance. 7 1/2" x 8 1/2" | 1959 |