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**Guide to**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson Papers  
1837-1882**

**FM.MS.T.5**

**by Jane E. Ward**

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Extent: 6 folders

Linear feet: 2 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 purchases and donations prior to 1929.

### **OWNERSHIP & LITERARY RIGHTS**

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### **CITE AS**

Ralph Waldo Emerson Papers, Fruitlands Museum. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center.

### **RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS**

This collection is open for research. Restricted Fragile Material may only be consulted with permission of the archivist.

## **RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803-1882)**

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on 25 May 1803 in Boston, Massachusetts. His father, William Emerson (1769-1811), was a minister of the First Unitarian Church in Boston and his mother was Ruth Haskins (1768-1853), the daughter of a Boston merchant. Prior to becoming the minister of the First Church, William Emerson preached at Harvard, Mass. Emerson's education began early, and his childhood and youth were filled with books and study. Emerson attended Harvard University from 1817 to 1821 and began to keep a journal. He would continue this practice throughout his life. Like his father and forefathers before him, Emerson looked toward a career as a clergyman. He attended Harvard Divinity School in 1825 and was sanctioned to preach in 1826.

In 1829, Ralph Waldo Emerson took his first and only pastorate at the Second Church in Boston. In the same year, he married his first wife, Ellen Tucker; she died three years later in 1831 of consumption. Following her death, he gave up his pastorate and broke with the Church in 1832. Emerson's religious beliefs and particularly a conflict over the Lord's Supper caused the break.

Following this break with the Church, Emerson sailed to Europe. Here he met Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth, and his interest in Transcendental thought flourished. In 1834, he returned to Concord and became friends with Margaret Fuller, Amos Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. He remarried in 1835, to Lydia Jackson, and embarked on his career as a lecturer and writer.

In 1836, Emerson published *Nature* based on his early lectures. It was in this essay that he set forth the basic principles of Transcendentalism, a philosophy that took hold in the United States in the late 1820s and early 1830s, closely related to Unitarianism. Transcendentalists believed that nature and people were inherently good, and that society and institutions had corrupted the purity of the individual, therefore people were at their best when truly self-reliant and independent. He also attracted attention through his orations at Harvard in 1837 and at the Harvard Divinity School in 1838. This last oration—in which he discounted biblical miracles and proclaimed that Jesus was not God—caused such an uproar that he was not invited back to Harvard for 30 years.

In 1840, Emerson and his circle of Transcendentalists began to publish *The Dial*, a journal to promote Transcendental thought. Emerson took over the editorship of the journal from Margaret Fuller in 1842 until its demise in 1844.

Between 1841 and 1844, Emerson published two volumes of *Essays* based on his lectures. These publications enhanced and spread his reputation to Europe. In 1847, he went to London to lecture; he also traveled to Paris where he met many of his contemporaries. Upon his return to the United States he continued his career as a lecturer and writer.

During the 1850s and 1860s, Emerson's chief occupation of the mind was politics. He turned his attention to abolitionism and sided heavily with the North in the Civil War. During this time, he

also helped form the literary association called the Saturday Club. In the following decade, Emerson went into mental decline, and his intellectual contributions dwindled as he settled into a quiet life in Concord. Ralph Waldo Emerson died of pneumonia in Concord on 27 April 1882.

[Sources: 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 for this biographical section as well as for item level information. Also used: <http://uudb.org/articles/ralphwaldoemerson.html>; <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ralph-Waldo-Emerson> ]

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was a renowned essayist, lecturer, and one of the principal creators of Transcendental thought. He was a close friend of the Alcott family and though he did not participate as a member in the Fruitlands experiment, he did maintain a strong interest in the experiment and its members. The Ralph Waldo Emerson Papers (1837-1882) were of interest to the Fruitlands Museum founder, Clara Endicott Sears, due to Emerson's connection with Transcendentalism, and the Fruitlands Con-Sociate community.

The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence written by Emerson during the years 1837 to 1864. Chiefly the correspondence pertains to Emerson's trusteeship of the Fruitlands farm following the disbanding of the members. After the demise of the community, he took charge as Charles Lane's trustee and attempted to collect mortgage and interest payments. Much of the correspondence details the collection of these payments from Joseph Palmer. There are some receipts included in the correspondence. (For more information on Charles Lane and Joseph Palmer, see the Charles Lane Papers and the Joseph Palmer Papers.)

Other correspondents include John S. Dwight, William H. Furness, and James R. Lowell. Subjects detailed in these letters include Amos Bronson Alcott, the literary club known as the Saturday Club, and the Congressional Bill for the National Academy of Literature and Art. All of the correspondence in folder 1 was microfilmed in December 1984, roll 22, item 2.

Emerson's correspondence has been extensively published in *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, eds. Ralph L. Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton, 9 vols. to date (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939- ).

The deeds are for Fruitlands property beginning in 1840. While the earlier deeds do not involve Emerson, it was thought best to keep all the deeds together, so the history of the property could be shown. The first four deeds in the folder, 1840-1845, were microfilmed in Dec. 1984, roll 22, no. 1; the last deed, 1846, is on roll 22, item 2.

The papers include a manuscript page from a sermon that Emerson preached on the life of Dr. Ezra Ripley. (More information on Ezra Ripley, Emerson's stepfather, is available in the Old

Manse Manuscript Collection.) This item was microfilmed in December 1984, roll 22, item 2. Also included in these papers are two printed copies of Emerson's "An Oration, Delivered Before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837." One (in an individual slipcase) is the first edition, published in Boston by James Munroe and Co., in 1837. The other is the second edition, published in Boston by Munroe in 1838. Also here is a cabinet-card photograph of Emerson, copyrighted in 1882, but the image probably dates from around 1860.

More information on Ralph Waldo Emerson is available in the George Willis Cooke Papers, as these contain correspondence from the Emerson children discussing their father. See also the Old Manse Manuscript Collection.

The materials in Folder 1 are arranged chronologically, except for the 17 Aug 1846 receipt, which is framed, and therefore is placed out of sequence in Folder 2.

Folder	Item	Contents	Date
<b>CORRESPONDENCE FROM EMERSON</b>			
1	1	Letter to Nathan Hale, Editor, <i>The Daily Advertiser</i> . Original and typed transcript. Emerson's attempt through publication in the <i>Boston Daily Advertiser</i> to defend Amos Bronson Alcott and his first two volumes of "Conversations with Children on the Gospels."	1837 [Mar 23?]
1	2	Letter to Nathan Hale. Typed transcript only (combined with the transcript of the above item). Another attempt by Emerson to have his defense of Alcott's "Conversations with Children on the Gospels" published in a Boston paper.	1837 Mar 24
1	3	Letter to John S. Dwight. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. "I was at East Lexington yesterday and explained my wish to relinquish the charge of the pulpit to Mr. Morrill,... They are very glad to know that you are disposed to come..."	1838 Feb 19
1	4	Letter to Abel Adams. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. The ship <i>Messenger</i> is delayed. Alcott is ready to sail and "is not advantaged by waiting perhaps 25 days." Wishes to book him on an earlier voyage, unless it is cheaper to go by the <i>Messenger</i> .	1842 Apr 19
1	5	Letter to [Elizabeth] Peabody. 3 pp. Original and typed transcript. Alcott left a book at Munroe's shop; Emerson desires her father to forward the book and possibly another for him or Thoreau to Concord.	1842 Dec 1
1	6	Letter to John S. Dwight at Brook Farm. 4 pp. Original and typed transcript. Will not contribute to a journal committed to one man or patron (French philosopher Francois Marie Charles Fourier).	1845 Apr 20
1	7	Letter from Willard Dickenson [Dickinson?] and Ellis Harlow to Emerson. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. Notification of proposed settlement of dispute with Silas Dudley, on south side of farm, 15 Aug. On reverse: overwritten, apparently from agent, re. farms for sale in neighborhood and offer to show them.	1845 Aug 11

<b>Folder</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	8	Letter to Dr. Thomas Palmer. 1 p. Original and typed transcript. Notes receipt from Joseph Palmer of \$100 in trust for Charles Lane, on note of \$400 (written at bottom of letter). Recommends payment of balance of \$400 by 18 Aug.	1847 Jun 14
1	9	Letter to Joseph Palmer. 3 pp. Original and typed transcript. Instructed by Lane to demand payment of balance of note (\$300) and interest by September 14. "About the 1 October, I shall probably sail for England..." Original letter in several pieces.	1847 Aug 7
1	10	Receipt. Original unlocated, typed transcript only. "Received one year's interest of the within For value received pay the within to Thomas Palmer on order without recourse to me."	1848 Oct 25
1	11	Letter to Dr. Thomas Palmer. 1 p. Original and typed transcript. "I remind you that I hold a note signed by Joseph Palmer...I write to you instead of your father, & beg you will have the goodness to take up the note forthwith."	1849 Aug 18
1	12	Letter to James R. Lowell. 4 pp. Original and typed transcript. Asks Lowell to bring a poem or ode for the approaching anniversary of 19 April.	1850 Mar 24
1	13	Letter to Samuel E. Sewall. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. Will call on Sewall to correct his misinterpretation of a conversation between Alcott and Emerson. Original letter contains engraving of Emerson pasted onto paper.	1850 Oct 19
1	14	Letter to Dr. Thomas Palmer. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. Received payment of \$54 interest on account of Charles Lane's mortgage.	1851 Aug 21

<b>Folder</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	15	Letter to William H. Furness. 4 pp. Original and typed transcript. "Here am I, just escaped from a task that has absorbed near six months, a labor of love, but of very questionable judgment, - Margaret Fuller's memoirs..."	1852 Jan 9
1	16	Letter to Dr. Thomas Palmer. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. Will leave Charles Lane's note and mortgage at Mr. Hoar's office. "I am much gratified to learn that this business is in a way to be closed so well."	1852 Mar 31
1	17	Letter to George S. Hillard, Esq. 2 pp. Original and typed transcript. Invitation for Hillard to attend the Saturday Club dinner. Signed by Emerson, J. R. Lowell and O. W. Holmes, Committee (all in Emerson's hand).	1864 Apr 13
1	18	Letter to James R. Lowell. 4 pp. Original and typed transcript. Has asked Longfellow to add his advice to Sumner re: bill for a National Academy of Literature & Art. Proposes meeting with Dana, Holmes, and Curtis.	[1864] Dec 12 Monday
2	1	Receipt to Charles Lane. Original [FRAMED] and typed transcript. Receipt from Joseph Palmer "one dollar in full of all demands...in respect to farm of Charles Lane in Harvard, held in trust by me for Charles Lane."	1846 Aug 17

## **DEEDS**

3	1	Deed. 1 p. Original and typed transcript. Deed of land from Willard Dickinson of Harvard, Mass., to Maverick Wyman of Harvard, Mass., for \$1.00.	1840 Dec 14
3	2	Deed. 1 p. Original. Deed of land from Maverick and Nancy Wyman of Woburn, Mass., to Samuel J. May of Lexington, Mass., for \$1800.	1843 May 25
3	3	Deed. 2 pp. Original. Deed of land from Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord, Mass., trustee of Charles Lane, to Godfrey Sparrow of Harvard, Mass., for \$350. On the reverse of this deed is a consent signed by Charles Lane and the discharge of the mortgage by Joseph Palmer, 15 May 1855.	1844 Mar 1
3	4	Deed. 1 p. Original. Deed of "all the buildings which are situated	1845 Mar 28



Folder	Item	Contents	Date
		on the farm which I heretofore sold to one Charles Lane..." from Maverick Wyman of Woburn, Mass., to Joseph Palmer of Harvard, Mass., for \$300.	
3	5	Deed. 3 pp. Original and typed transcript. Quitclaim deed for sale of Fruitlands property from Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord, Mass., agent for Charles Lane, to Joseph Palmer of Leominster, Mass., for \$1700 - at request and with signed consent of Charles Lane. This deed mentions the 1844 mortgage to Godfrey Sparrow.	1846 Aug 18

### WRITINGS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON

4	1	Holograph manuscript. 1 p. Original and typed transcript. A part of a sermon delivered on the life of Ezra Ripley, following his death. [Ripley, Emerson's stepfather, died 21 Sep 1841.] Was sent to Mr. Reynolds along with other manuscripts when Emerson edited the life of Dr. Ripley.	[1841?]
5	1	Pamphlet. "An Oration, Delivered Before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837." 1 <sup>st</sup> ed. (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1837). In slipcase.	1837
5	2	Pamphlet. "An Oration, Delivered Before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837." 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1838).	1838

### PHOTOGRAPH

6	1	Cabinet-card photograph of Ralph Waldo Emerson, possibly taken ca. 1860, but copyrighted in 1882 by Charles Taber & Co., New Bedford, Mass. 3 7/8" x 5 5/8", mounted on cardboard 4 1/4" x 6 1/2".	c1882
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