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Guide to

**George Willis Cooke Papers
1838-1923**

FM.MS.T.6

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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 materials in this collection were purchased in 1939 from Goodspeed's Bookshop by Clara Endicott Sears.

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RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS

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

GEORGE WILLIS COOKE (1848-1923)

George Willis Cooke was a Unitarian minister, writer, and lecturer on religious, social, and literary subjects. In his day he was regarded as the best living authority on New England Transcendentalism, a philosophical and social movement that originated in the eastern United States in the late 1820s and early 1830s, and which held that divinity pervades all nature and humanity. Transcendentalists held progressive beliefs on feminism and communal living.

Cooke was born in Comstock, Michigan, on 23 April 1848. His scholastic training was unremarkable. He attended local district schools and worked on his father's farm. At nineteen, he briefly attended Olivet College before studying for two years at the Liberal Institute in Jefferson, Wisconsin.

After a brief career in teaching, Cooke entered the Theological School in Meadville, Pennsylvania. In 1872, he was ordained a Unitarian minister and married Lucy Nash of Chester, Wis. During his career he held pastorates at Sheboygan, Wis.; Grand Haven, Mich.; Indianapolis, Indiana; Sharon, Dedham, and East Lexington, Massachusetts; and Dublin and Frankestown, New Hampshire.

In 1899, Cooke began to devote all his time to writing, lecturing, and teaching courses at the Rand School of Social Science in New York, and the Boston School of Social Science. Cooke was an apostle of liberalism in religion and social reform. He promoted the idea of collectivism: democracy in politics, cooperation in industry, and motherhood in religion.

Cooke was a keen, appreciative, and widely informed literary critic. His books are marked by careful scholarship, keen discernment and good spirit. His writings are mainly expository and interpretive. He is best known for his book *Unitarianism in America* (1902), for many years considered the standard work on 19th-century Unitarianism, and for his works on Transcendentalist authors. Works published by Cooke on Transcendentalists and Transcendentalism include: *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy* (1887); *Early Letters of George William Curtis to John Sullivan Dwight* (1898); *John Sullivan Dwight: A Biography* (1898); and *A Historical and Biographical Introduction to Accompany The Dial* (1902).

After his first wife died, George Willis Cooke married the Unitarian minister Rev. Mary Leggett (1851-1938) on his seventy-fifth birthday (23 April 1923). He died at their home in Revere, Mass., one week after the marriage.

[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/georgewilliscooke.html>]

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

The George Willis Cooke Papers (1838-1923) are included in the Fruitlands collections of Transcendental manuscripts because of Cooke's reputation as a Transcendentalist scholar. The bulk of the papers in this collection relates to Cooke's writings and lectures on Transcendental topics. There is very little information contained in the papers concerning Cooke's personal life or his work as a Unitarian minister.

The Cooke Papers are arranged in eight series. **Series I, Correspondence re: Ralph Waldo Emerson**, consists primarily of letters written in response to Cooke's inquiries for information on Emerson for his book, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy*, published in 1881. The responses include requests from overseas for books by Emerson and letters of invitation to lectures about Emerson. Cooke also sent his manuscript to the Emerson family for fact-checking and corrections. Thus, there is a long letter from Ellen Emerson (5 May 1881) with corrections to Cooke's manuscript, and a note from Edward Emerson inviting Cooke to attend the private service held for the family before the public funeral (28 April 1882). All but one of these letters include transcripts.

Series II, Correspondence re: John S. Dwight, includes letters written to/by/re: John S. Dwight by a variety of correspondents. (Dwight was the director of the school at Brook Farm and a noted musical critic.) These were acquired by Cooke during his research for his biography of Dwight, *John Sullivan Dwight: Brook-Farmer, Editor, and Critic of Music: A Biography*, published in 1898. Topics covered in these letters include George W. Curtis's engagement, visiting plans, musical meetings, and lectures. Also included is a poem by Dwight. A smaller amount of material consists of responses to inquiries made by Cooke about Dwight. Two letters that comment on Cooke's biography of Dwight finish the series. The majority of the letters in this series include transcripts. More information on John S. Dwight can also be found in the Brook Farm Papers.

Cooke published several works on the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*, and **Series III, Correspondence re: *The Dial***, consists primarily of responses to his requests for information. Correspondents include Amos Bronson Alcott, F. H. Hedge, James Freeman Clarke, Charles A. Dana, George W. Curtis, and C. P. Cranch. Most of these correspondents discuss their contributions to *The Dial*. Also included in this series are several requests for information, and some comments on Cooke's manuscript about *The Dial*. The majority of the letters in this series include transcripts.

Series IV, Correspondence re: Cooke's Other Writings, covers a variety of topics, including poetry, woman ministers, and Unitarianism. Most of the correspondence is in response to Cooke's requests for information. Also included are letters of recommendation and letters discussing ideas for new books. Correspondents include James Freeman Clarke, Thomas W. Higginson, Edward Everett Hale, Julia Ward Howe, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Most of the

letters in this series include transcripts. Also in this series is a partial manuscript, undated, which appears to be in at least two different hands. It is unclear if it is connected to any of the letters.

Series V, Copyright Contracts, consists of three copyright contracts from two different publishers: one for Cooke's biography of Emerson and one for Cooke's work on George Eliot from James R. Osgood & Co.; and one for Cooke's work *Poets and Problems*, from Ticknor and Company, along with an 1884 letter from Osgood & Co.

Series VI, Correspondence re: Lectures, reflects the time Cooke spent conducting lecture courses and recruiting lecturers for various organizations. This series consists of correspondence discussing speaking appointments, and responses to Cooke's lectures. Also included are responses from invited lecturers discussing topics, fees, and travel arrangements. Correspondents include Lucy Stone, Alice Stone Blackwell, Mary A. Livermore, Franklin B. Sanborn, Lucy Larcom, Clara Barton, Horace Greeley, Julia Ward Howe, and Edward W. Emerson. The majority of the letters in this series include transcripts.

Series VII, General Correspondence, concerns correspondence addressed to Cooke that does not fall into any of the above categories. Types of information contained in this series are discussions of Unitarianism, libraries, and the Ticknors of Boston. The bulk of the letters are from Edward Everett Hale. Most of the letters in this series include transcripts.

A letter from John Greenleaf Whittier to Bayard Taylor (1876) does not appear to have any connection to Cooke and has been removed.

Series VIII, Ephemera, consists of a flyer advertising a lecture series conducted by Cooke on "Representative American Authors" from 1887; and an obituary notice (1 May 1923) for Cooke clipped from an unknown newspaper, with a transcript.

Folder	Item	Contents	Date
Series I. Correspondence re: Ralph Waldo Emerson			
Extent: 2 folders			
Dates: 1880-1906			
1	1	Correspondence re: Emerson.	1880-1881
1	2	Correspondence re: Emerson.	1882-1906, n.d.
Series II. Correspondence re: John S. Dwight and Cooke's Biography of Dwight			
Extent: 4 folders			
Dates: 1838-1899			
1	3	Correspondence of/to/re: John S. Dwight.	1838-1865
1	4	Correspondence of/to/re: John S. Dwight.	1869-1887, n.d.
1	5	Responses to Cooke's inquiries about Dwight.	1896
1	6	Correspondence re: biography of Dwight.	1899
Series III. Correspondence re: The Dial			
Extent: 2 folders			
Dates: 1881-1901			
1	7	Correspondence re: <i>The Dial</i> .	1881-1882
1	8	Correspondence re: <i>The Dial</i> .	1884-1901
Series IV. Correspondence re: Cooke's Other Writings			
Extent: 3 folders			
Dates: 1865-1918, n.d.			
1	9	Correspondence re: Cooke's other writings.	1865-1897
1	10	Correspondence re: Cooke's other writings.	1901-1918

Folder	Item	Contents	Date
1	11	Partial manuscript.	n.d.
Series V. Copyright Contracts			
Extent: 1 folder Dates: 1881-1886			
1	12	Contracts and letters from publishers.	1881-1886
Series VI. Correspondence re: Lectures			
Extent: 2 folders Dates: 1867-1905			
1	13	Correspondence re: lectures.	1867-1887
1	14	Correspondence re: lectures.	1888-1905, n.d.
Series VII. General Correspondence			
Extent: 1 folder Dates: 1875-1910			
1	15	General correspondence.	1875-1910, n.d.
Series VIII. Ephemera			
Extent: 1 folder Dates: 1887, 1923			
1	16	Flyer re: lecture series.	1887
1	16	Obituary of George Willis Cooke.	1923