

Guide to the Sylvanus Dyer Locke Papers

MS 327



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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 327

CREATOR: Locke, Sylvanus Dyer, 1833-1896

TITLE: Sylvanus Dyer Locke papers

DATES: 1859-1957

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 10.17 linear feet (27 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of correspondence, letterbooks, patents, and printed material which relate to Sylvanus Dyer Locke's patented self-binding harvester and other inventions. Correspondents include attorneys, patent solicitors, and other manufacturers of farm equipment and heavy machinery. Some materials also relate to Sylvanus D. Locke, Jr. and the Locke Steel Chain Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut. The additions to the papers contains family correspondence, photographs, and academic reports of the Locke children as well as materials relating to the family business.

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased in 1964. Gift of National Museum of American History, 1998. Gift of Gary Charland, 2018, In Memory of John A. Charland, Jr. Gift of Gregory Wynn, 2020.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Sylvanus Dyer Locke Papers (MS 327). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Sylvanus Dyer Locke was born in Otsego County, New York on September 11, 1833. In 1870, while working for the Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine Company of Hoosick Falls, New York, Locke succeeded in building an automatic reaper and binder. Locke served one term in the New York state legislature (1883-1885). He was also the inventor of a train car coupling device and a machine for manufacturing detachable steel link belting. Locke died in 1896.

Scope and Contents

The Sylvanus Dyer Locke Papers consist of correspondence, letterbooks, patents, and printed material which document the last twenty years of Sylvanus D. Locke's life in Hoosick Falls, New York, and relate primarily to his inventions, particularly his self-binding harvester and his detachable steel link belting. Correspondents include attorneys, patent examiners and solicitors, and other manufacturers of farm equipment and heavy machinery. Some material also concerns Sylvanus D. Locke, Jr. and the Locke Steel Chain Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The papers, which the Yale Library purchased in 1964, are arranged in three series:

- I. LETTERPRESS COPYBOOKS, 1877-1893
- II. GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1875-1917
- III. TOPICAL FILES, 1859-1942

The papers date from 1859 to 1942 but the bulk of the material is business correspondence of Sylvanus Locke from 1876 to 1896.

Series I contains nine volumes of Sylvanus Locke's "private" letterbooks, which include both outgoing business and family letters dating from 1877 to 1893. The letters begin several years after Locke had

secured a patent for his automatic reaper and binder. Business correspondence focuses on the protection of this patent from infringement by manufacturers of farm machinery such as the H.M. McCormick Company. Correspondents include patent examiners and solicitors such as J.G. Parkinson. Some correspondence concerns Locke's other inventions. There are also letters to Locke's brothers, wife, and children and letters concerning domestic bills, medical treatments and expenses, and the children's education. Indexes in the letterpress volumes serve as a guide to correspondents in both Series I and II.

Series II contains Locke's incoming correspondence from 1876 to 1877 and from 1887 to 1896. Correspondents and subjects included in Series II are similar to those in Series I. Many incoming letters filed under 'L' relate to the Locke family. For the years 1893 to 1896 the series also includes copies of Locke's outgoing letters. Correspondence after 1896 relates to Sylvanus Locke, Jr. and the Locke Steel Belt Company. This correspondence is, however, fragmentary. Series II also contains numerous bills and receipts of the Locke family. At the end of the series are several folders of similar correspondence which is unarranged and marked "Miscellaneous." The series concludes with two boxes of incoming and outgoing telegrams mounted in volumes.

Series III is composed of printed material, photographs, and memorabilia, the majority of which relates to Sylvanus Locke and his inventions. The largest quantity of material is in the folders "Patents," which contain printed copies of Locke's patents for his inventions as well as patents of others for similar devices. The printed material includes advertising circulars, sales catalogues, and price lists for harvesting machinery. Also in these folders are printed legal documents relating to patent litigation in Locke's behalf and writings by Locke including a description of his automatic car coupler. An address delivered by Locke before the New York State Assembly (folder 176) is one of the few documents in the papers relating to Locke's term in the New York legislature.

Arrangement

Arranged in three series and three additions: I. Letterpress Copybooks, 1877-1893. II. General Correspondence, 1875-1917. III. Topical Files, 1859-1942.

Collection Contents

Series I: LETTERPRESS COPYBOOKS, 1877-1893

This series is arranged chronologically by volume. Each volume contains an alphabetical index of correspondents.

b. 1, f. 1-3	1877-1882	1877-1882
b. 2, f. 4-6	1883-1889	1883-1889
b. 3, f. 7-9	1889-1893	1889-1893

Series II: GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1875-1917

The series is arranged in alphabetical divisions. Within each division the correspondence is arranged chronologically.

b. 4, f. 10-13	A	1887-1916
b. 4, f. 14-19	B	1876-1917
b. 4, f. 20-26	C	1876-1913, undated
b. 5, f. 27-30	D	1876-1915
b. 5, f. 31-34	E	1876-1916
b. 5, f. 35-36	F	1876-1915, undated
b. 5, f. 37-39	G	1876-1916
b. 5, f. 40-48	H	1876-1913, undated
b. 6, f. 49-51	I	1888-1916
b. 6, f. 52-53	J	1876-1911
b. 6, f. 54-55	K	1876-1916
b. 6, f. 56-69	L	1876-1916, undated
b. 7, f. 70-76	M	1876-1916
b. 7, f. 77-80	N	1879-1916
b. 7, f. 81-83	O	1887-1915
b. 7, f. 84-88	P	1876-1891
b. 8, f. 89-97	P	1893-1916, undated
b. 8, f. 98	Q	1888-1897
b. 8, f. 99-104	R	1876-1908
b. 8, f. 105-108	S	1876-1879
b. 9, f. 109-118	S	1887-1916, undated
b. 9, f. 119-123	T	1877-1915, undated
b. 9, f. 124-125	U	1893-1916
b. 9, f. 126-127	V	1877-1894

b. 10, f. 128-130	V	1895-1897
b. 10, f. 131-142	W	1875-1912, undated
b. 10, f. 143	Y	1877-1913
b. 10, f. 144-146	Miscellaneous	1875-1888
b. 11, f. 147-154	Miscellaneous	1889-1910
b. 11, f. 155	Unidentified	undated
b. 12, f. 156-170	Telegrams	1871-1886
b. 13, f. 171-175	Telegrams	1886-1887

Series III: TOPICAL FILES, 1859-1942

This series is arranged in alphabetical order by record type.

b. 14, f. 176	Address before the New York State Assembly	1884
b. 14, f. 177	Bar certificate	1861
b. 14, f. 178	Clippings	1887, 1896, undated
b. 14, f. 179	Examination	1891
b. 14, f. 180	Genealogy	undated
b. 14, f. 181-199	Patents	1859-1901
b. 14, f. 200	No folder	
b. 15, f. 201-202	Patents	1873, 1881
b. 15, f. 203-204	Photographs	undated
b. 15, f. 205-213	Printed material	1873-1891
b. 16, f. 214-219	Printed material	1892-1942, undated
b. 17, f. 220-221	Transactions, financial [ledger, daybook]	1877-1880

Accession 1999-M-049: Additional Material

The accession is comprised of correspondence, photographs, and report cards relating to Sylvanus Dyer Locke's work, and his family, in Hoosick Falls, New York between 1876 and 1896. The bulk of the material dates from 1888 to 1893. The papers illustrate both the business interests of Locke and his family responsibilities, especially concerning the education and conduct of his three children. They also relate to Sylvanus Locke Jr. and the Locke Steel Belt Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Automatic Binding Harvester Company		
b. 1, f. 1	1872-1892	1872-1892
b. 1, f. 2	1893 English	1893
b. 1, f. 3	1894-1896	1894-1896
b. 1, f. 4-5	Purchase of cyprus trees, Florida	1893
b. 1, f. 6	Drive chains, patent	1891
b. 1, f. 7	Locke Steel Belt Company	1899-1909
Sylvanus D. Locke, Jr		
b. 1, f. 8	Photograph	1893
b. 1, f. 9	Correspondence [with father]	1886-1893
b. 1, f. 10	Report cards	1887-1888
John Parker Locke		
b. 1, f. 11	Correspondence [with father]	1888-1893
b. 1, f. 12	Report cards	1887-1888
Lilla Locke		
b. 1, f. 13	Photograph	undated
b. 1, f. 14	Correspondence [with father]	1890
b. 1, f. 15	Report cards	1887
b. 1, f. 16	Mrs. Sylvanus D. Locke [correspondence with husband]	1893-1898
b. 1, f. 17	Sylvanus D. Locke [correspondence with brothers]	1888-1893
b. 1, f. 18	Family bills	1892-1900
b. 1, f. 19	Family correspondence [miscellaenous]	1888-1898
b. 1, f. 20	Miscellaneous	

Accession 2019-M-0041: Additional Material, 1855–1896

This accession comprises correspondence and financial records of Sylvanus Dyer Locke related to his patents and use of machinery.

Correspondence

The material is arranged as received by the donor, generally chronologically and therein roughly alphabetically by name of sender, with some exceptions. For material that falls outside the alphabetical scheme, processing staff maintained original order for the material and made no attempt to refile it.

Alphabetical letter books

Letter books were previously housed in binders, which were disassembled during processing. Information taken from the spines of the binders is reflected in the folder titles. Some letter books with letters adhered to the spine have not been disassembled and remain as received from the donor.

b. 1, f. 1	Letters	1855–1873
b. 1, f. 2-4	Letter book, volume 6, A-Z	1881 January 1-1882 January 1
b. 1, f. 5	Letter book, volume 7, A-G	1882 January 1-1883 January 1
b. 2, f. 1-2	Letter book, volume 7, H-Z	1882 January 1-1883 January 1
b. 2, f. 3-5	Letter book, volume 8, A-Z	1883 January 1-1884 January 1
b. 3, f. 1-3	Letter book, volume 9, A-Z	1884 January 1-1885 January 1
b. 3, f. 4-5	Letter book, volume 10, A-Z	1885 January 1-1886 January 1

Chronological

This grouping primarily includes manuscript letters, and also includes telegrams.

b. 4, f. 1	1875 English	1875
b. 4, f. 2	1881, 1884	1881, 1884
b. 4, f. 3	1885–1892	1885–1892
b. 4, f. 4	1888 English	1888
b. 4, f. 5-8	1889 English	1889
b. 5, f. 1	1893 English	1893

Correspondence > Chronological (continued)

b. 5, f. 2-3	1894 January-March	1894 January-March
b. 5, f. 4	1895 English	1895
b. 5, f. 5	1896 English	1896
<p>Financial records</p> <p>This grouping contains bound ledger books documenting financial transactions. Materials include checks, invoices, and telegrams. Some of the checks contain explanatory notes and information on goods purchased.</p>		
b. 6, f. 1-2	Bank checks	1880-1887
b. 7, f. 1-2	Bank checks Box 7, folder 2 includes explanatory notes in the margins of the checks.	1891-1896
b. 8, f. 1	Ledger book with invoices	1882

Accession 2020-M-0033: Additional Material, 1870–1957

Forty-five photographs of members of the Locke family, including Sylvanus Dyer Locke, Ellen Josephine Locke, Norman Walter Locke, Helen Locke Norman, John Parker Locke, Sylvanus Dyer Locke, Jr., Lilla Josephine Locke, Norman Wentworth Locke, "Virgil Parker, Brother of Mrs. S.D. Locke [Ellen Josephine Locke]," Helen Scott Locke, "Mamie (Sister of Helen G. Scott Locke)," and "Aunt Bess - John Scott's mother, at East Lyme." Photograph subjects also include Edwin P. Young, "The Three Johns - Grandpa Comstock, Uncle John Comstock, Uncle John Scott," John Paul Young, Abram Baldwin, Plymat [?] Mattoon, Lewis Lauerbrei, and J.E. Gomez of Bogota Colombia, as well as several unidentified people. Also includes one silhouette image, 1957, of an unidentified person.

b. 1, f. 1-2

Photographs of members of the Locke family and others

Circa 1870–1920,
1957

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Agricultural machinery
Business
Harvesting machinery
Patents -- United States

Geographic Names

Hoosick Falls (N.Y.)

Genres / Formats

Patents (license)

Occupations

Inventors
Manufacturers

Names

Locke, Sylvanus Dyer, 1833-1896
Locke, Sylvanus Dyer, 1871-

Corporate Body

Locke Steel Chain Company