



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the William Wadden Turner papers, 1838-1859

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	William Wadden Turner papers
Date:	1838-1859
Identifier:	NAA.1976-112
Creator:	Turner, William W. (William Wadden), 1810-1859
Extent:	1.5 Linear feet
Language:	Collection is in English and contains vocabularies, grammars, and notes on many other languages including Arabic, Welsh, Russian, Himyaritic inscriptions, the language of Blacks in Guyana, Oceanic languages and American Indian languages (Kansa, Oto, Omaha, Pawnee, Yankton Dakota, Gros Ventre, Shoshoni, Crow, Cherokee, Winnebago, Cocopa, Yuma, and Mohave).

Administrative Information

Related Materials

The National Anthropological Archives holds additional materials by William Wadden Turner in MS 101-b Navajo and Coppermine Apache vocabularies, MS 136 Comparative vocabulary of eleven Athapascan languages, compiled from other sources, and MS 1348 Phonetic system used by Turner in his comments on S.R. Riggs, *Dakota Grammar and Dictionary*.

The Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library holds Turner correspondence in the Duyckinck family papers. The Library of Congress Manuscript Division holds Turner correspondence in E.G. Squier papers.

Preferred Citation

William Wadden Turner papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The William Wadden Turner papers are open for research.

Access to the William Wadden Turner papers requires an appointment.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Biographical Note

Born in England, William Wadden Turner came to America as a child. As a young man, he began a study of languages. In this, he received assistance from Isaac Nordheimer, whom Turner helped with the preparation of his *Hebrew Grammar, Chrestomathy, and Concordance*. He studied formally at Yale University and then assisted in the reorganization of the library at Columbia University. In 1842, he was appointed to the chair

of Oriental literature at Union Theological Seminary. In New York, he was active with the American Oriental Society and the American Ethnological Society.

In 1852, Turner was appointed librarian at the United States Patent Office. He had served the Smithsonian prior to this as a linguistic consultant and, in Washington, continued this work and also undertook to reorganize and catalog the Smithsonian's library, employing his sister Jane as an assistant.

Although Turner's early specialty was Hebrew and other Near Eastern languages, his linguistic interests were world wide, and he became an authority on American languages. Little of his learning, however, was directed toward producing original works. Although he published some articles in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *Iconographic Encyclopedia*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, and *Transactions of the American Ethnological Society*, his main vocation was as translator and editor. For the Smithsonian, as an example, he imposed form on the materials that went into Stephen Return Rigg's *Grammar and Dictionary of the Dakota Language* (1851) and T. J. Bowen's *Grammar and Dictionary of the Yoruba Language* (1858).

Scope and Contents

The collection is a miscellany obtained from Jane Turner in the 1890s. Much of the material consists of draft, notes, and notebooks on a wide range of subjects including Arabic, Welsh, Russian, Himyaritic inscriptions, the language of Blacks in Guyana, music, and geometry. Also included are vocabularies of Oceanic languages and American Indian languages (Kansa, Oto, Omaha, Pawnee, Yankton Dakota, Gros Ventre, Shoshoni, Crow, Cherokee, Winnebago, Cocopa, Yuma, and Mohave), the latter including lists of southwestern languages recorded by Arthur Schott in 1859. Some of these appear to be original materials; others are from published sources; and still others may be exercises or aides-mémoire.

The correspondence consists of both incoming and outgoing letters. It is, however, small in quantity, discontinuous, and often unidentified as to correspondent. There are usually only one or two items from any given person. Correspondents include Elisa De Frondat, Theodore Dwight, Jr., Josiah W. Gibbs, Homan Hallock, Samuel S. Heldeman, William F. Lynch, Isaac Nordheimer, Edward Robinson, Sarony and Major, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and Ephraim George Squier.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Arrangement

(1) Correspondence, 1838-1859; (2) notebooks; (3) writings; (4) notes; (5) legal agreements; (6) book catalogs, prospectuses, and bibliographies; (7) miscellany

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Geometry
Language and languages
Music