Finding Aid for the Society of Noviomagus Records, 1828-1892

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Finding Aid for the Society of Noviomagus Records, 1828-1892

Collection number: 2061

UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections
Manuscripts Division

Los Angeles, CA

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Society of Noviomagus Records,
Date (inclusive): 1828-1892
Collection number: 2061
Creator: Society of Noviomagus
Extent: 2 boxes (1 linear ft.)
Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library. Dept. of Special Collections.
Los Angeles, California 90095-1575

Abstract: The Society of Noviomagus was founded in 1828 in England by a small circle of members of the Society of Antiquaries. The collection consists of correspondence, invitations, minutes of meetings, holographs of both serious and humorous addresses, membership rosters of the Society, and colored engravings and ink and wash drawings.

Correspondence includes letters from Henry Stevens and copies of letters from William Gladstone and Lord Randolph Churchill to Henry Stevens, Jr.

Physical location: Stored off-site at SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections Reference Desk for paging information.

Language: English.

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Restrictions on Access

COLLECTION STORED OFF-SITE AT SRLF: Advance notice required for access.

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Biography

The Society of Noviomagus was founded in 1828 in England by a small circle of members of the Society of Antiquaries; meetings featured dinner, drinking, and usually a “roasting” of one of the members, who included: Thomas Saunders, Samuel Carter Hall, Joseph Durham, George R. Corner, William Henry Brooke, Thomas Crofton Croker, Alfred John Kempe, Robert Lemon, William Jerdan, James Robinson Planche, George Godwin, Sir Francis Graham Moon, Henry Stevens, and John Noble.
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Scope and Content
Collection consists of correspondence, invitations, minutes of meetings, holographs of both serious and humorous addresses, membership rosters of the Society of Noviomagus, as well as colored engravings and ink and wash drawings. Correspondence includes letters from Henry Stevens and copies of letters from William Gladstone and Lord Randolph Churchill to Henry Stevens, Jr.

Expanded Scope and Content
(Description of the Archive prepared by Stevens, Stiles & Son)
The Society of Noviomagus or Noviomagian Club was founded in 1828 by a small circle of members of the Society of Antiquaries. In addition to having a keen interest in antiquarian pursuits, each member of the Noviomagus had to have a sharp sense of humor and a trained palate since the group met many times a year (more frequently in the early years) for dinner, merriment, wines, beer, and liquors. At the sundry meetings a member was usually ridiculed by his peers, and the more scathing the ridicule, the more heartily the attacker was praised; and the butt of the ridicule, of course, had the opportunity to respond in kind. Members were given titles not always consistent with their professions, and they were fined for failure to attend the dinner-meetings, which often were combined with a visit to some site of archaeological or historical significance.

Membership was never large, but it was always select; and members had the privilege of bringing guests, provided, of course, that the guests were able to take the “roasting” laid out by the regular members. Among the guests taken in hand by Henry Stevens was John Fiske, the American historian, who wrote to his wife an account of the occasion, saying in part: “The Lord High toasted ‘our brilliant American guest,’ but pitched into me, according to the rules of ‘Noviomagus’, and said that he never did see a decent American, but that I was the meanest American he had ever set eyes on, and had written altogether the most insufferably tedious and worthless book. Whereupon I rose and replied to the toast, saying that it would have to be a cussed mean American who wasn’t equal to any ten Englishmen, high or low, and I must say that of all the unmannerly snobs I had ever come across the Lord High was the worst....” (Wyman Parker, Henry Stevens of Vermont, Amsterdam, N. Israel, 1963, p.264). Fiske, of course, was not the only American to be invited as a guest of the Noviomagians; Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Buchanan, George Peabody, among others, were some of the distinguished Americans hosted (roasted and toasted, no doubt) by the Noviomagians. Henry Stevens had also invited a fellow Vermonter and collector, one Lucius E. Chittenden, who was in London in 1871 on patent business. Chittenden was an active collector of Vermontiana and Vermont imprints and apparently spent some hours with Henry talking books as well as buying some. Chittenden has left an account of his day with the Noviomagus. On July 1, 1871, the Noviomagians spent a full day in Oxford, visiting the Bodleian, Christ Church, the Ashmolean Museum and dining with one of the aldermen, Mr. Spiers. As soon as he was introduced to the Noviomagians, Chittenden was in for some typical ribbing: “Stevens: Tell your friend from the States, with the bowie knife, that he will find a third class car farther down the platform.” (Recorded in a scrapbook kept by Chittenden and part of the Chittenden Papers at the University of Vermont).

The membership roster included well-known and accomplished men from numerous fields and professions. Some of the members were:

Thomas Saunders (1814-1809) metropolitan police magistrate and author of many legal works.
Samuel Carter Hall (1800-1877) author and editor of the Art Union Monthly Journal, later called the Art Journal.
Joseph Durham (1814-1877) sculptor and Associate of the Royal Academy.
George R. Corner (1801-1963) antiquarian and solicitor, author of many articles in archaeology.
William Henry Brooke (d. 1860) portrait painter and book illustrator.
Thomas Crofton Croker (1798-1854) clerk at the Admiralty, author of Popular Songs of Ireland (1839), Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland (1825), and one of the founders of the Camden Society and the Percy Society.
Alfred John Kempe (1785?-1846) antiquarian on the staff of the Gentleman’s Magazine and author of archaeological/antiquarian works.
Robert Lemon (1800-1867) archivist in the State Paper Office and editor of some of its collections.
William Jerdan (1782-1880) dramatist, composer, wrote the libretto for von Weber’s Oberon and sundry books including The Conqueror and His Companions, 2 vol. (1874).
George Godwin (1815-1888) architect, editor, Fellow of the Royal Society, and author of various works including Buildings and Monuments, Modern and Mediaeval (1848).
Sir Francis Graham Moon (1796-1871) publisher and printseller, acknowledged leader in the print business in 19th century London.
Other members were, inter alios, William Knight, Samuel Cooper, John Richards, William H. Rosser, John Bowyer Nicholls, John Rouse, John Noble, and Henry Stevens and later his brother Benjamin Franklin Stevens.

This collection of the Noviomagian Society from 1828, the year of its inception, to 1892 constitutes the archive of the organization and includes not only correspondence but also invitations to meetings, declinations of invitations written mostly with tongue-in-cheek humor, holographs of both serious and humorous addresses presented at the sundry meetings of the organization. In this archive are membership rosters, bills for the various meetings, which included dinner, wines and liquors, holograph verse contributed by members, hoax letters, and a variety of serio-comic letters and papers.

In addition to holograph material the archive contains colored engravings of the paintings in Baston House, kent, and of Sir John Frost; ink and wash drawings, and an uncledor map of the defenses along the Thames during the Armada scare of 1588, a wash (?) of “Hoke-Poke,” “King of the Cannibals,” etc. Among the correspondence are copies of letters from William Gladstone and Lord Randolph Churchill, father of Sir Winston, both addressed to Henry Stevens, Jr., and written on Stevens’ own letterhead! The collection contains also letters from Henry Stevens dated 1857 February 17, 1859 January 7, 1860 February 15, April 14 (2), 1855 January 30. Although the archive is not complete, it is strongest for the early years of its existence, 1828-1833, with good holdings for the period 1855 to 1860. Numerous printed ephemera are in the collection, most of which were finely printed at the Chiswick Press and are both handsome and very scarce: these include menus, membership lists, and programs.

An excellent record of the Society is found in the minutes of meetings kept with considerable care. The collection includes minutes of the following meetings:

1830: January 21, February 18, March 18, April 1, May 6, June 3, June 21, November 25, December 23.
1831: January 27, February 3, March 17, April 21, May 19, June 20, June 27 (anniversary), December 8.
1832: January 19, February 16, March 26, April 12, May 22, June 26 (anniversary), December 11.
1833: February 1, February 22, March 29, April 26, May 31, July 1 (anniversary).
1834-1854: n/a.
1855: January 17, February 21 (James Buchanan a guest), March 21, April, October 26, November 21, December 20.
1856: January 14 (Peabody as guest of Stevens), February 20, March 19, April 25, November 19.
1858: January, February 17, March, April, July 1, November, December.
1859: January, February, March, July (Nathaniel Hawthorne was guest), November 16.
1860: June 30, November 29, December 19, December 21.
1861-1879: n/a.
1880: December 15.
1892: December 3.

Very little has been written about the Noviomagus, and this collection provides the nucleus for a history of this fascinating group of genial antiquarians. The collection is in three parts: one bound volume for the early years with detached covers, and two boxes.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Society of Noviomagus--Archives.
Antiquarian booksellers--England--Societies, etc.--Archival resources.
Related Material
Henry Stevens Papers (Collection 801). Available at the Department of Special Collections, UCLA.

Records. 1828-1982
Creator/Collector: Noviomagian Society
Physical Description: (2 boxes)
Scope and Content Note
Includes correspondence, invitations, minutes of meetings, and membership rosters.
Supplementary material exists in the Henry Stevens Papers (Collection 801). Available at the Department of Special Collections, UCLA.