
Chapman Family Correspondence and Other Documents

Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego

Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego

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9500 Gilman Drive

La Jolla 92093-0175

spcoll@ucsd.edu

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Descriptive Summary

Languages: English

Contributing Institution: Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego

9500 Gilman Drive

La Jolla 92093-0175

Title: Chapman Family Correspondence and Other Documents

Creator: Chapman (Family : 1808- : Chapman, J. G. (John Gadsby), 1808-1889)

Creator: Chapman, J. G. (John Gadsby)

Creator: Chapman, Conrad Wise

Identifier/Call Number: MSS 0048

Physical Description: 1.5 Linear feet (10 oversize folders)

Date (inclusive): 1791-1898

Abstract: A small collection of the family papers of American painter John Gadsby Chapman (1808-1898), consisting mostly of letters to Chapman from colleagues and associates, and correspondence with his son, Conrad Wise Chapman. Of special interest are Conrad Chapman's letters to his family, written while he served in the Confederate army during the Civil War.

Related Materials

A scrapbook containing John G. Chapman's designs in wood is housed at the Virginia State Library, Richmond.

Scope and Content of Collection

A small collection of the family papers of American painter John Gadsby Chapman (1808-1898), consisting mostly of letters to Chapman from colleagues and associates, and correspondence with his son, Conrad Wise Chapman. Of special interest are Conrad Chapman's letters to his family, written while he served in the Confederate army during the Civil War. The collection also includes a number of letters dating from the 1890s written by Conrad to his brother John; a letter from the U.S. Congress regarding John Gadsby Chapman's commission for the Capitol rotunda; a letter written by American painter Thomas Sully (1783-1872), dated 1830; and letters documenting everyday 19th century life, including the sale of slaves and a description of the Washington homestead in Fredericksburg, VA.

The collection is arranged in two series: 1) CORRESPONDENCE and 2) ENGRAVINGS.

Custodial History

The Chapman Family Papers were collected by Conrad's brother, John Linton Chapman. He gave the materials as a gift to Helen Kaley, a friend of the family. Mrs. Kaley carried the materials with her as she moved throughout the U.S., finally donating the collection to the UC San Diego Library in 1972.

Biography

John Gadsby Chapman (1808-1889) was an American painter. Born in Alexandria, Virginia, he was a pupil of George Cooke and C. B. King. A student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, he was elected a member of the National Academy in 1836.

Chapman worked in New York City and Washington, D.C., and gained a successful reputation as a painter of historical scenes and portraits. He also produced wood engravings and etchings, and often contributed pictures to Harper Brothers' publications. His *American Drawing Book*, published in 1847, became a standard text. Among Chapman's most famous works were his illustrations for Harpers' Bible and his painting "The Baptism of Pocahontas," commissioned by the U.S. Congress for the Capitol rotunda.

In 1848 Chapman returned to Italy, where he established a studio in Rome and raised his family. He eventually returned to the United States in 1884, and died in New York. Among his children were his daughter Mary and his two sons, John Linton Chapman and Conrad Wise Chapman.

Conrad Wise Chapman (called "Cooney") also became a painter. After living in Rome and Paris, Conrad left for America in 1861 to join the Confederate army. He served in the 3rd Kentucky Regiment and later as Ordnance Sergeant in the 59th Virginia Regiment. In 1863, as a result of his mother's ill-health, he took a furlough and travelled to Italy. Between December 1863 and March 1864, under the command of General P.G.T. Beauregard in Charleston, Chapman was assigned to draw coastal fortifications, resulting in a series of paintings that included images of Fort Sumter. After the war, he led a nomadic life in Texas and Mexico, eventually going back to Italy. By 1896 he was in Mexico again, and by 1898 he was married and living in Richmond, Virginia. He also developed a reputation as a photographer.

Preferred Citation

Chapman Family Correspondence and Other Documents, MSS 48. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego.

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Digital Content

Correspondence from this collection has been digitized.

[Items available online](#)

Subjects and Indexing Terms

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives, Confederate

Painters -- America -- Manuscripts

Engravings -- 19th century

Chapman, J. G. (John Gadsby) -- Correspondence

Chapman, Conrad Wise -- Correspondence

Chapman, John Linton -- Correspondence

Chapman (Family : 1808- : Chapman, J. G. (John Gadsby), 1808-1889) -- Archives

Sully, Thomas -- Correspondence

CORRESPONDENCE

Scope and Content of Series

Series 1) CORRESPONDENCE

This series is primarily comprised of letters exchanged by John Gadsby Chapman and his son, Conrad. The letters, dating from the years 1861 to 1865, provide details on the Civil War and Conrad's experiences in the Confederate army. These include a set of undated drafts which form an extended diary in letter form. In his letters, Conrad writes of forced marches, sleeping on wet straw, and the daily routine of camp life. Sometimes he describes the beauty of the landscape, or the picturesque groupings of officers and men around the camp fires. These written descriptions are augmented by Chapman's Civil War drawings, some of which (in the form of engravings) are included in the collection.

The collection also includes a number of letters dating from the 1890s written by Conrad to his brother John; a letter from the U.S. Congress regarding John Gadsby Chapman's commission for the Capitol rotunda; and letters documenting everyday 19th century life, including the sale of slaves and a description of the Washington homestead in Fredericksburg, VA.

Oversize FB-363,
Folder 1

General correspondence to John Gadsby Chapman 1820 - 1833

<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb46100094>









General note

Assorted letters from peers and associates. Items of interest include: an 1833 letter describing the ruins of General George Washington's childhood home in Fredericksburg, VA, including a sketch of the dwelling (presumably Ferry Farm); an 1833 letter discussing the sale of a slave family (the slave Syphax, accused of an unidentified transgression, and his wife and son) from the Washington family at Claymont to the Chapmans; and a letter from the joint committee of Congress tasked to appoint artists to decorate the rotunda of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Oversize FB-363,
Folder 2

General correspondence to John Gadsby Chapman 1844-1857

<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb1333529c>

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- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 10 **Letter from Thomas Sully to John Gadsby Chapman 1830 February 14** 
<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8091271w>
General
Sully comments on Chapman's work, suggesting ways in which the younger artist can pursue his career, and provides details on activities in the contemporary American art community.
- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 3 **Correspondence between Conrad Wise Chapman and his family 1860-1862** 
<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb4848920m>
General
12 leaves.
- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 4 **Correspondence between Conrad Wise Chapman and his family 1862** 
<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb15724401>
General
7 leaves.
- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 5 **Correspondence between Conrad Wise Chapman and his family 1863** 
<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb83301818>
General
16 leaves.
- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 6 **Correspondence between Conrad Wise Chapman and his family 1865** 
<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb50536995>
General
14 leaves.
- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 7 **Conrad Wise Chapman's undated drafts of letters circa 1865** 
<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb1811351x>
General
10 leaves.
- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 8 **Letters from Conrad Wise Chapman to John Linton Chapman 1896-1898** 
<http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8569091v>
General
8 leaves.
- Oversize FB-363,
Folder 9 **Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Chapman and other papers between 1791 and 1879**  <http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb5292610f>
General
Includes a document in Italian, a partial transcription from John Smith's *The General Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles The fovrth Booke* , and an inventory of the estate of Thomas Chapman.

ENGRAVINGS

Scope and Content of Series

Series 2) ENGRAVINGS

Works by both John Gadsby and Conrad Wise Chapman, presumably copied by engravers from original paintings or illustrations.

Oversize MC-038-06 **Assorted engravings**

General

12 after paintings by John Gadsby Chapman, 3 after paintings by Conrad Chapman; page from the *Daily South Carolinian*, 1863 June 16.

