

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Alexandre Vattemare (1796-1864)

Papers, 1817-1889

**Compiled by Julia Todd
June 1988**

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Summary

Main Entry: Vattemare, Alexandre, 1796-1864

Title: Alexandre Vattemare Papers

Size: 14 boxes,

Source: Gift of John Bigelow

Abstract: Alexandre Vattemare (1796-1864) was born in Paris in 1796. He was a ventriloquist, impersonator, the founder of a system of international library exchange, an advocate for the establishment of public libraries, and instrumental in the founding of the Boston Public Library. He devoted his energies to the dissemination of knowledge and to the advancement of understanding between countries by a system of international interlibrary exchange of books, documents, and art objects. This collection consists primarily of correspondence about this work with various interested parties, supporters and donors.

Biographical Note

Alexandre Vattemare (1796-1864) was a ventriloquist, impersonator, the founder of a system of international library exchange, an advocate for the establishment of public libraries, and a founder of the Boston Public Library. Born in Paris in 1796, he early showed a natural talent for ventriloquism, but due to parental objections he began the study of medicine rather than a career on the stage. After having been commissioned to attend wounded soldiers in 1814, Vattemare was taken prisoner in Berlin where he impressed many influential people with his abilities as a ventriloquist and impersonator. He began his career with a tour of Germany, and went on to become extremely popular throughout Europe and Great Britain, making many important social connections.

During the course of his travels Vattemare was struck by the number of unused duplicates of books and documents in libraries and museums. He was also concerned by a general lack of public access to library resources. He decided therefore, to devote his energies and the considerable fortune he had made as an entertainer to the dissemination of knowledge and to the advancement of understanding between countries by a system of international interlibrary exchange of books, documents, and art objects. His idea found many supporters and was implemented throughout Europe between 1827-1839.

Vattemare made two trips to the United States. He came first to New York City in 1839, and then continued to Washington carrying letters of recommendation. Vattemare was at first discouraged by the almost total lack of public libraries everywhere in the country, but with enthusiasm and hard work he spread interest in his projects. In 1840 Congress passed legislation favorable to international exchange. In 1841 Vattemare came to Boston, where he initiated the process of establishing a public library. He returned to France in the summer of 1841.

He again visited the United States from 1847 to 1849. At this time he was organizing the Central Agency for International Literary Exchange in Paris. In 1848 the first legislation enabling the formation of a public library in the United States was passed, due at least partially to Vattemare's efforts. The Boston Public Library was founded in 1852 and opened in 1854; Vattemare contributed a collection of books from France. In 1853, 130 libraries from around the world contributed to Vattemare's system. As many as 300,000 volumes are said to have been exchanged between the United States and France alone. In addition, Vattemare collected a personal library of approximately 10,000 books of Americana. These were bought by the city of Paris and called the Fonds Vattemare. Unfortunately, this library disappeared after his death. An admirer of America, Vattemare was responsible for the participation of the United States in the International Exposition in Paris in 1856.

During the last years of his life Vattemare's system came under governmental and organizational auspices. After his death in 1864, his papers were sold by his heirs to John Bigelow, Consul of the United States at Paris. Many years later, Bigelow presented the collection as a gift to the New York Public Library.

Scope and Content Note

Nearly all of the Correspondence pertains to Vattemare's system of international exchange between libraries. The first group of chiefly incoming letters is from academic institutions, museums, libraries, and government agencies and officials. These letters are arranged by country of origin. More than 20 countries and 20 U.S. states are represented. There is considerable correspondence with the New York State Library. Book lists places can also be found filed here as well.

The next group of letters is arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent. However, there is considerable overlap with the correspondence in the first group. Correspondents include: John Quincy Adams (who introduced Vattemare's scheme to the House of Representatives in 1840), A. D. Bache, Thomas Hart Benton, Sir John Bowring, Orestes Augustus Brownson, George Catlin, Howell Cobb, Lew Cole, Thomas Cole, John Jordan Crittenden, Orville Dewey, James C. Dobbin, William Alexander Duer, Lady Elgin, William Hemsley Emory, Edward Everett, James Ferguson, Maunsell Bradhurst Field, Hamilton Fish, Le comte de Gasparin, Duff Green, Simon Greenleaf, N. K. Hall, Ferdinand Rudolph Hassler, Joseph Hume, Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter, James Chamberlain Jones, Benton Jones, Joseph Camp Griffith Kennedy, Le Marhu, Francis Lieber, Horace Mann, W. L. Marcy, John Young Mason, Matthew Fontaine Maury, Charles Fenton Mercer, Samuel George Morton, John Neal, R.L. Norris, Eliphalet Nott, Eliza Susan Quincy, Josiah Quincy, John G. Palfrey, Joel Robert Poinsett, James Renwick, William Cabell Rives, Robinet, James Rush, Harry Shelton Sanford, W.W. Seaton, Cardinal Severoli, Benjamin Silliman, Benjamin Silliman, Jr., Charles W. Skinner, John Stuart Skinner, Joseph Smith, Jared Sparks, John Canfield Spencer, Isaac Stevens, Charles Samuel Stewart, Charles Sumner, Roger Brooks Taney, George Ticknor, Francis Wayland, Daniel Webster, Horatio Hastings Weld, Henry Wheaton, Edwin Percy Whipple, Henry Alexander Wise, Obadiah Wise, Leonard Woods, and Silas Wright.

Outgoing correspondence can be found in the Letterbooks. Each volume is indexed and a folder of loose drafts precedes the volumes. Writings and Reports includes reports to Vattemare by the sub-director of the Central Agency of International Exchange, various reports and petitions of Vattemare, and Vattemare's 1841 Farewell Address to Americans. Checklists of Books and Documents and Journals, all apparently in Vattemare's hand, contain various volumes and folders of lists in English and French of materials exchanged. Among the items in the Personal Miscellany are guestbooks of visitors to the exhibit of Vattemare's collection of drawings held at the National Academy of Design in 1839 and a scrapbook of clippings, 1839-1843.

Arrangement Note

The collection consists of five series:

- I. Correspondence
- II. Letterbooks
- III. Writings and Reports
- IV. Checklists of Books, Documents, and Journals Exchanged
- V. Personal Miscellany.

Container List

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE 1838-1864

Letters arranged by Place of Origin

Box

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Cuba, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, and Italy. |
| 2 | Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Persia, Portugal, Russia, Sardinia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, The Two Sicilies, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey.

United States: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland. |
| 3 | Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York. |
| 4 | New York, New York State Library, North Carolina. |
| 5 | Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C. |
| 6 | Washington, D.C. |

Letters arranged by correspondent

- | | |
|---|------|
| 6 | A-G. |
| 7 | H-Y. |

SERIES II. LETTERBOOKS 1853-1864

- | | |
|---|---|
| 8 | Nov. 19, 1853-Dec. 30, 1854
Jan. 2, 1855-Dec. 2, 1855
Dec. 4, 1855-Nov. 5, 1856 |
|---|---|

- 9 Nov. 10, 1856-Jan. 30, 1857 (note gap Feb.-June 1857)
July 2, 1857-Sept. 12, 1857
Sept. 14, 1857-June 21, 1858
- 10 June 23, 1858-Sept. 20, 1859
Sept. 22, 1859-June 13, 1861
June 25, 1861-Apr. 4, 1864

SERIES III. WRITINGS AND REPORTS

- 11 Prospectus for the Central Agency for International Literary Exchange
- First Annual Report of the Proceedings of the Central Agency for International Literary Exchange, 1848. (Made by C. Moreau for Vattemare) Ms. draft. 17 pp.
- Second Annual Report of the Proceedings of the Central Agency for International Literary Exchange during the Year 1849 to Alexandre Vattemare by C. Moreau, Sub Director of Said Agency." Ms. draft. 24 pp.
- First Report of Alexandre Vattemare to the Honorable Chairman of the Joint Committee (of Congress) on the Library of Congress. March 1, 1850. Holograph draft. 15 pp.
- Vattemare Report to the Honorable Chairman of the Joint Committee (of Congress) on the Library of Congress." 1850. Holograph draft. 7 pp.
- To the Hon. The Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress convened. The Memorial of Alexandre Vattemare, Elector of the Department of the Seine and Oise, France... New York, n.d. Holograph Ms. 7 pp.
- To the Honorable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament Assembled The Humble Petition of Alexandre Vattemare, Electeur de Seine d'Oise, n.p. n.d.
- Farewell to Canadians, 3/12/1841
- Farewell to Americans, 6/7/1841
- Miscellaneous Writings

SERIES IV. PERSONAL MISCELLANY

1. Letter to Vattemare
2. Musical Score
3. Poem to Vattemare
4. Visitors Registers to M. Vattemare's collection of drawings from the 7th to the 30th of November, 1839.
5. Scrapbook of clippings, 1839-1843

SERIES V. CHECKLISTS OF BOOKS, DOCUMENTS, AND JOURNALS EXCHANGED

12 Checklists in English and French of official documents (10 vols.)

1. Académie de Medicine
2. Bibliothèque Imperiale
3. Books Sent to and From Belgium
4. Congressional Digest
5. Ministère de l'Instruction Publique
6. Ministère de l'Interieur
7. Ministère de la Marine
8. Ville de Bordeaux
9. Ville de Nantes
10. Ville de Paris

13 1. Book Lists (2 vols.)
 2. Listes des Journaux aux États-Unis, 1840.
 3. American Historical and Literary Curiosities. . .
 4. Lists of Books Exchanged (3 folders)

14 Book Lists (2 volumes)

Microfilm Reel List

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE 1838-1864

Letters arranged by Place of Origin

Reel

- 1 Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Cuba, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, and Italy.
- 2 Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Persia, Portugal, Russia, Sardinia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, The Two Sicilies, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey.
- United States: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan
- 3 New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York
- 4 New York (*cont'd.*), New York State Library, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C.
- 5 Washington, D.C. (*cont'd.*)

Letters arranged by correspondent

A – O

- 6 P – Z; unknown correspondents
- 7 **SERIES II. LETTERBOOKS 1853-1864**

Nov. 19, 1853-Dec. 30, 1854
Jan. 2, 1855-Dec. 2, 1855

- 8 Dec. 4, 1855-Nov. 5, 1856
Nov. 10, 1856-Jan. 30, 1857 (note gap Feb.-June 1857)
- 9 July 2, 1857-Sept. 12, 1857
Sept. 14, 1857-June 21, 1858
June 23, 1858-Sept. 20, 1859

Reel

- 10 Sept. 22, 1859-June 13, 1861
 June 25, 1861-Apr. 4, 1864
- 11 **SERIES III. WRITINGS AND REPORTS**
- SERIES IV. PERSONAL MISCELLANY**
- SERIES V. CHECKLISTS OF BOOKS, DOCUMENTS, AND JOURNALS EXCHANGED**
- 12 **SERIES V. CHECKLISTS OF BOOKS, DOCUMENTS, AND JOURNALS EXCHANGED**
 (*CONT'D*)