



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection 227B

Lea & Febiger
Records

1785-1982 (bulk 1796-1882)
217 boxes, 205 vols., 140 lin. feet

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Abstract

In 1785, Mathew Carey (1760-1839) founded Mathew Carey & Company, one of Philadelphia's earliest publishing houses. The firm began printing a variety of works, but by the late 1830s, it specialized in scientific and medical publications. During the 1800s, the firm changed its name a number of times. It became M. Carey & Son in 1817, when Mathew's son, Henry C. Carey, joined the firm. In 1821, Carey's son-in-law, Isaac Lea, joined the firm and it became M. Carey & Sons. The senior Carey retired in 1824, and shortly thereafter the partnership became Carey, Lea & Carey, when younger son Edward L. Carey joined the firm. In 1829, Edward Carey left to form a bookselling partnership with Abraham Hart. In 1833, William A. Blanchard became a partner and the firm became, briefly, Carey, Lea & Blanchard. In 1836, Henry C. Carey retired and the firm was known as Lea & Blanchard until 1851. That year Isaac Lea withdrew in favor of his son, Henry Charles Lea, and the firm became Blanchard & Lea, which it remained until Blanchard's retirement in 1865. Thereafter, the firm bore only the Lea name until 1907 when Lea's sons joined with Christian Febiger to form the partnership of Lea & Febiger. The company was sold to Waverly, Inc. in 1990.

The Lea & Febiger records span almost two hundred years and document the history of the organization from its inception in 1785 to the early 1980s. The collection consists primarily of correspondence and business volumes such as letterbooks, daybooks, journals, ledgers, cost books, and warehouse books. There are also several "records books" that contain copies of the firm's letters and agreements.

Background note

The publishing firm of Lea & Febiger, which distributed primarily medical works, had its roots in the company founded in Philadelphia in 1785 by printer and bookseller Mathew Carey (1760-1836). Carey was born in Dublin, Ireland, and arrived in America in 1784 with nine years of experience as a printer and publisher under his belt. When the Marquis de Lafayette, who had met Carey a few years earlier in Paris, learned of his arrival in America, he sent Carey a check for \$400 with which to establish his own business. Naturally, Carey chose publishing and bookselling. Among his early publications were the *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, the *Columbian Magazine*, and the *American Museum*, none of which were very successful. With the outbreak of yellow fever in Philadelphia in 1793, Carey took the opportunity to publish his own work entitled *The*

history of the yellow fever of 1793, which marked the beginning of his venture into medical publishing. During the course of his career, Carey published dozens of medical works; however, he also published novels and works by Mason L. Weems, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, and Sir Walter Scott, among others. Additionally, his company printed broadsides, atlases, bibles, and political titles, including some of his own writings such as *Vindiciae Hibernicae* (1819), *New Olive Branch* (1820), and *Essays of Political Economy* (1822). Carey devoted his life to political economics after he left the publishing business in the early 1820s.

Between 1785 and 1816, Carey's firm changed names several times based on his partners of the time. But by 1817, the firm had become a family business called M. Carey & Son with the addition of Carey's first son, Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879). When Carey's son-in-law Isaac Lea, who became a well-known naturalist and conchologist, joined them in 1821, the company briefly became known as M. Carey & Sons. The senior Carey retired the early 1820s, and shortly thereafter the firm became H. C. Carey & I. Lea, followed by Carey, Lea & Carey, when younger son Edward L. Carey joined the firm. In 1829, Edward Carey left to form a bookselling partnership with Abraham Hart. In 1833, William A. Blanchard became a partner and the firm became, briefly, Carey, Lea & Blanchard. In 1836, Henry C. Carey retired in favor of a career in political economics and the firm was known as Lea & Blanchard. Under the tutelage of Isaac Lea and William Blanchard, the firm continued its tradition of medical publishing and expanded into scientific and economic works, such as Henry C. Carey's *Principles of Political Economy*.

In 1851, Isaac Lea withdrew from the business and made his son Henry Charles Lea (1825-1909), who had worked for the firm since 1843, a full partner. William Blanchard remained and the firm became Blanchard & Lea. In his history of Lea & Febiger, author R. Kenneth Bussy described Henry C. Lea as "a Renaissance man, who was a giant despite his frail health and small stature."¹ Despite suffering a nervous breakdown in his twenties, he studied numerous subjects, from Latin and poetry to magic and witchcraft to chemistry and botany. He authored several works, including *Superstition and Force* (1856), *Studies in Church History* (1883), and *History of the Inquisition of Spain* (1906-1908).

Henry C. Lea was also a political activist and reformer. During the Civil War, he published several pamphlets for the Union League in Philadelphia, of which he was also a member. He was fervently opposed to slavery and supported the recruitment of African American troops to fight in the Union army. A staunch Republican and loyal Philadelphian, he sought to end political corruption in his party and fought against the building of City Hall at Broad and High (now Market) Streets (which he believed was financed through shady contracts.) In 1880, he was named president of the National Republican League; and, in 1891, co-founded the Reform Political League of Pennsylvania, with Herbert Welsh as its president. He remained an active writer and historian until his death in 1909.

William Blanchard retired from publishing in June 1865, and his place in the firm was taken by his son, Henry Blanchard. For just under three months, the company was

¹ R. Kenneth Bussy, *Two Hundred Years of Publishing* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1985), 81.

known again as Lea & Blanchard, until health problems caused Henry to resign his position. Thereafter, Henry C. Lea continued the company under his name until 1880, when Henry made his son and employee, Charles M. Lea, a partner in the firm. Henry C. Lea's Son & Company remained in business for five years. Declining health led Henry C. Lea to retired from the business in 1885, at which time, another of his sons, Arthur H. Lea, became a partner, and the firm became Lea Brothers & Co. The final change of the company's name, before it was sold over eighty years later, occurred in 1908 when Christian Carson Febiger (1845-1930) and the Lea brothers formed the partnership of Lea & Febiger.

Christian Carson Febiger descended from Colonel Hans Christian Febiger (1749-1796), who served during the Revolutionary War. The Febiger and Lea families intersected when Febiger's son, Christian Carson Febiger (d. 1829) married Isaac Lea's sister, Hannah Gibson Lea (1794-1817). In 1865, Febiger's grandson, Christian Carson Febiger, went to work for the Carey family publishing house when it was run by Henry C. Lea and the Blanchards. He became a partner in the firm several decades later and retired in 1915.

That same year, Febiger's partners, Charles and Arthur Lea, also retired from the publishing business. The firm retained the Lea & Febiger name and was carried on by Isaac Lea's grandson, Van Antwerp Lea (b. 1882), and Febiger's son, Christian (1875-1945). Under these men, and in later years, the firm focused on publishing medical works, and became one of the leaders in medical publishing.

In 1990, Lea & Febiger, still controlled by Mathew Carey's and Isaac Lea's descendants, was sold to Waverly, Inc., which published books on medicine and allied health.

Scope & content

The Lea & Febiger records document the history of the publishing firm, which did business across the United States and in the Caribbean and Canada. The collection spans almost two hundred years, from 1785 to the early 1980s, and consists primarily of correspondence and business volumes such as letterbooks, daybooks, journals, ledgers, cost books, and warehouse books. There are also several "records books" that contain copies of the firm's letters, contracts, and agreements. Most of the records contain information on general business matters, such as payment of invoices, shipping details and disputes, and subscription requests. There is little personal correspondence, except for letters between members of the Carey and Lea families, which appear consistently between the years 1785 and 1822 but vary in breadth and depth. And many correspondents often infused their business letters with candid observations or personal thoughts. Letters from the firms' agents include reports on market conditions, and some correspondence concerns paper making, binding, and book-related problems. Occasionally, letters include details on economic or social topics, such as establishing schools in new territories of the country.

The collection is not arranged into series; rather, correspondence is arranged alphabetically by year and volumes are arranged in rough chronological order according

to firm. There are fairly complete sets of letters for the years 1785 to 1822, 1850 to 1856, and 1859 to 1880. These runs cover the active careers of Matthew Carey, Henry Charles Lea, and, to a lesser degree, William Blanchard. Most material from the years 1823 to 1849 and 1857 to 1858 can only be found in volumes; however, there is a box (Box 155) of photocopies of correspondence dating from the 1820s and 1830s, which includes letters from James Fenimore Cooper and papers concerning copyright transfer.

The material pertaining to Mathew Carey is housed in a total of one hundred and forty-one boxes and thirty-eight volumes. Among the records are incoming correspondence, letterbooks that contain copies of outgoing letters, and financial volumes. Correspondence dating from 1785 to 1796 is housed together alphabetically; later correspondence is arranged by year, and then alphabetically within each year. Please note that during Carey's tenure his business changed names several times but there are no such distinctions made on the folders. All correspondence dating from 1785 to 1816 is filed under the heading "Mathew Carey correspondence."² Letters dating from 1817 to 1820 are filed under "M. Carey & Son." Correspondence from 1821 is filed under "M. Carey & Son(s)."

Carey's letters consist of a mix of mostly business and some personal correspondence. Although many of the letters refer to business transactions, there are scattered references to current events, the economy, and the political climate. Since Mathew Carey was known for his political writings, many correspondents regaled him with their own political musings. In a letter dated 11 November 1796, Nathaniel Irwin offered this thought to Carey, "Dear Sir—Is it not a favourable time to change the distinctive names by which the parties in this State have been often [and] improperly called for eight years? Royalist [and] Republican would certainly be more expressive of the principles of the parties at this day than Federalist [and] Antifederalist." Among Carey's personal letters are those from family members, particularly his brother, James. James Carey was a newspaper editor who founded two short-lived Philadelphia papers in the late 1790s: the *Universal Advertiser* and the *United States Recorder*.

Similarly, there are other business acquaintances with whom Carey corresponded regularly, although the amount of letters from a single correspondent varies by year. Such clients include Timothy Brundige, Thomas Rainbow, James Priestly, John Wyeth, Tench Coxe, Samuel Pleasants Jr., Stephen C. and Thomas Ustick, and William Christie. In addition, Carey regularly exchanged letters with William and Robert Dickson, who, along with William's wife Mary, founded the *Lancaster Intelligencer* in 1799.

Carey was also a friend to Mason Locke "Parson" Weems, an ordained Anglican minister, bookseller, and natural salesman. Carey met Weems in the late 1790s, took notice of Weems's personable nature, and approached him to gather book orders. Weems agreed and helped Carey widen his network to include small towns he could not

² Lea & Febiger's written history, *Two Hundred Years of Publishing*, contains the following list of the firm's name changes that cover Mathew Carey's involvement: M. Carey and Company (Jan.-Mar. 1785); Carey, Talbot, and Spotswood (Mar. 1785-Feb. 1787); Mathew Carey and Company (Feb. 1787-1789); Carey, Stewart, and Company (1790-1791); M. Carey (1792-1816); M. Carey & Son (1817-Apr. 1821); M. Carey & Sons (Apr.-Dec. 1821).

otherwise reach. Weems eventually published his own writings, the most famous of which is titled *Life and Memorable Actions of George Washington* (Weems originated the story of Washington and the cherry tree.) Although the friendship between Carey and Weems was strained at times, the two corresponded regularly, and Weems's letters appear each year starting in 1796.³

Beyond the business and personal correspondence, researchers will also find occasional mailings from organizations, such as the Tammany Society, to which Carey belonged. There are also scattered announcements from other publishing companies, book dealers, and authors. In addition, there are thirty-four letterbooks (copies of outgoing letters) from the time of Carey's involvement in the firm, starting in 1788. There are also four other volumes from this time period: a costbook dating from 1800 to 1812 (Volume 11), Carey's 1802 accounts/memo book (Volume 16), and two ledgers from M. Carey & Son(s) (Volumes 34 and 37).

The firm's records from directly after Carey's retirement from the firm in the early 1820s are less complete but no less rich. There are thirteen boxes of incoming correspondence to H. C. Carey and I. Lea. As with the previous batch of correspondence, researchers will find mostly business letters, book orders, invoices, and subscriptions, with some personal letters filed under the last names Carey and Lea. There are also four H. C. Carey & I. Lea letterbooks and four ledgers. Several of these volumes are shared with either M. Carey & Sons or Carey, Lea & Carey.

There are only a few items in the collection from between April 1827 and 1850, such as copies of letters from 1836 to 1850 from author James Fenimore Cooper concerning copyright transfer. There are also three letter indexes, a Carey, Lea & Blanchard letterbook, two cost books, and five ledgers.

Correspondence picks up again in the year 1850, and there are sixty-one boxes of incoming correspondence from 1850 to 1855 and 1859 to 1860, including three boxes containing an incomplete set of letters from 1856. There are then twenty-four volumes of incoming letters dated 1861 to 1865. Again, the letters are almost entirely business related, and there are very few, if any, personal letters. Blanchard & Lea continued in the tradition of medical publishing (there are many subscriptions for the journal *Medical News and Library*), but also published works by American authors (e.g. Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allen Poe) and historical works such as Robert William Browne's series on the history of classical literature.

Henry Charles Lea, though he had worked for the family firm since 1843, apparently professed "that he was not particularly fond of the publishing business and knew little about it."⁴ Even so, he became accomplished in the field and remained at the company's head for almost fifteen years. There are ninety-three volumes of bound, incoming letters dated from 1866 to 1879; and there are an additional five letterbooks dated 1880 to 1882 from the time the firm was known as Henry C. Lea's Son & Company. The overall

³ James N. Green, *Mathew Carey: Publisher and Patriot* (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1985), 10-12.

⁴ Bussy, *Two Hundred Years*, 82.

contents of the letters remain quite similar to those seen throughout the collection: book orders, subscriptions, and inquiries. There is also a records book (Volume 194) that contains copies of author agreements and copyright notices from this time period.

The remainder of the collection consists of seventeen volumes, such as journals, ledgers, cashbooks, warehouse books, and records books, dating from 1908 to 1982.

Separation report

None.

Related materials

At HSP:

Edward Carey Gardiner collection (227A)
Penington family papers (Collection 1435)

For more information on other Philadelphia printers and publishing companies see:

Bradford family papers (Collection 1676)
William Cobbett papers (Collection 2192)
Curtis Publishing Company collection (no number)
J. B. Lippincott Company records (Collection 3104)
Philadelphia Gazette Publishing Company records (Collection 1816)
Polish Star Publishing Company records (MSS 063)

Library Company of Philadelphia materials housed at HSP:

Mathew Carey collection, Notes of the Debates of the Pennsylvania Legislature,
1785-1786
Mathew Carey papers, 1802-1826
Mathew Carey papers, 1821-1829
Mathew Carey papers, Receipt book of borrowed items, 1825-1838
Lea and Febiger records
Lea family papers

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- Bradley, Edward Sculley. *Henry Charles Lea: A Biography*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931.
- Bussy, R. Kenneth. *Two Hundred Years of Publishing*. Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1985.
- Green, James M. *Mathew Carey: Publisher and Patriot*. Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1985.
- Kaser, David. *Messrs. Carey & Lea of Philadelphia: A Study of the History of the Booktrade*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957.
- Remer, Rosalind. *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
- Wolf, Edwin, II. *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen, and Booksellers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Subjects

Antiquarian booksellers – 19th century
Books and reading – 19th century
Booksellers and bookselling – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia – 19th century
Philadelphia (Pa.) – Intellectual life – 19th century
Philadelphia (Pa.) – Politics and government – 19th century
Philadelphia (Pa.) – Social conditions – 19th century
Philadelphia (Pa.) – Social life and customs – 19th century
Publishers and publishing – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia

Baird, Henry Carey, 1825-1912
Baird, Thomas James, 1795-1842
Carey, Edward L., 1806-1845
Carey, Henry Charles, 1793-1879
Carey, Mathew, 1760-1839
Gardiner, Edward Carey, ca. 1879-1945
Gardiner, William Howard, 1875-1952
Lea, Arthur Henry, 1859-1938
Lea, Isaac, 1792-1886

Carey & Hart
Carey, Lea & Blanchard
Carey, Lea & Carey
Carey, Lea & Co.
Lea & Blanchard
Lea & Febiger
M. Carey & Son
M. Carey & Sons
Mathew Carey and Co.

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Gift of Lea and Febiger, 1930.

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], Lea & Febiger records (Collection 227B), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Processing note

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Box and volume listing

**Please note that all boxed correspondence is arranged alphabetically by correspondent's last names.

Boxes – incoming correspondence and miscellaneous letters

Box numbers	Brief description	Approximate date range	Notes
Boxes 1-18	Mathew Carey correspondence	1785-1796	All boxed correspondence filed under "Mathew Carey" that dates from 1785 to 1816 includes incoming letters written to Mathew Carey at his place of work, which changed names several times during that timespan: M. Carey and Company; Cary, Talbot, and Spotswood; Mathew Carey and Company; Carey, Stewart & Company, and M. Carey.
Box 19	Mathew Carey correspondence, A-W, and unidentified	n.d.	
Boxes 20-102	Mathew Carey correspondence	1797-1816	
Boxes 103-129	M. Carey & Son correspondence	1817-1820	
Boxes 130-140	M. Carey & Son(s) correspondence	1821	
Boxes 141-153	H. C. Carey & I. Lea correspondence	1822	
Box 154	-H. C. Carey and I. Lea correspondence, Wils-Z, and unidentified -Letter from Matthew Day to "M. Carey and Sons (firm of Carey, Lea & Carey?) dated 3 January 1828 -Undated miscellaneous letters	1822, 1828, n.d.	
Box 155	-Letters from George Washington to M. Carey, 1785, 1788; papers concerning Washington's letters, 1850, 1932, 1959, 1961, n.d. -Letter from M. Carey to his wife, 3 Aug. 1819 -Letter from Lafayette to M.	n.d.	This box contains only photocopies, no original material.

Box 155 (con't)	Carey, 12 Nov. 1822 -\$400 check from M. Carey to Lafayette, 20 Sept. 1824 -Letter from James Madison to M. Carey, 27 July 1831; undated image of Madison; essay on Madison by Albert J. Beveridge, n.d. -Letters from James Fenimore Cooper and papers concerning copyright transfer, 1836-1850 Letter from William Osler, ca. 1915		
Boxes 156-163	Lea & Blanchard correspondence	1850	There are two alphabetically arranged series of 1850 letters. The first is in boxes 156-160; the second is in boxes 161-163.
Boxes 164-175	Blanchard & Lea correspondence	1851-1852	
Boxes 176-183	Blanchard & Lea correspondence	1853	There are two alphabetically arranged series of 1853 letters. The first is in boxes 176-179; the second is in boxes 180-183.
Boxes 184-216	Blanchard & Lea correspondence	1854-1856, 1859-1860	Correspondence from 1856 is incomplete. Consists mostly of last names R-Z, with three items total in L and P.
Box 217	Blanchard & Lea correspondence, A-F	1861	

Volumes – letterbooks, account books, records books, costbooks, warehouse books

Volume numbers	Brief description	Approximate date range	Notes
Vols. 1-10, 12-15, 17-30	Mathew Carey letterbooks	1788-1809, 1812, 1815-Mar. 1817	Contain copies of outgoing letters
Vol. 11	Mathew Carey cost book	1800-1812	
Vol. 16	Mathew Carey accounts/memo book	1812	
Vols. 31-32, 34-36	M. Carey & Son letterbooks	Mar. 1817-Mar. 1821	Contain copies of outgoing letters
Vol. 33	M. Carey & Son ledger	1817-1819	
Vol. 37	M. Carey & Son(s) – H. C. Carey & I. Lea ledger	1820-1824	

Vols. 38-42	M. Carey & Son(s) – H. C. Carey & I. Lea letterbooks	Mar. 1821-June 1823	Contain copies of outgoing letters
Vols. 43-44	H. C. Carey & I. Lea ledgers	1822-1825	
Vol. 45	H. C. Carey & I. Lea – Lea & Blanchard records book	1823-1846	Contains copies of author contracts and copyright agreements
Vol. 46	H. C. Carey & I. Lea – Carey, Lea & Blanchard cost book	1825-1837	
Vols. 47-49	H. C. Carey & I. Lea – Carey & Lea ledgers	1826-1831	
Vol. 50	Carey & Lea (?) index to letters	ca. 1830	
Vols. 51-52	Carey & Lea – Carey, Lea & Blanchard ledgers	1832-1838	
Vol. 53	Carey, Lea & Blanchard letterbook	June 1834-Sept. 1835	Contains copies of outgoing letters
Vol. 54	Carey, Lea & Blanchard – Blanchard & Lea cost book	1838-1853	
Vols. 55-57	Lea & Blanchard – Blanchard & Lea ledgers	1839-1853	
Vol. 58	Lea & Blanchard index to letters	1843-1850	
Vol. 59	Lea & Blanchard – Lea & Febiger records book	1847-1926	
Vol. 60	Blanchard & Lea – Henry C. Lea cost book	1853-1877	
Vols. 61-62	Blanchard & Lea – Lea Brothers & Co. warehouse books	1853-1898	
Vol. 63	Blanchard & Lea index to letters	1857-1860	
Vols. 64-81	Blanchard & Lea letterbooks	1861-1864	
Vols. 82-87	Blanchard & Lea – Henry C. Lea letterbooks	1864	
Vols. 88-175, 177-181	Henry C. Lea letterbooks	1865-1879	
Vol. 176	Henry C. Lea – Lea Brothers & Co. cost book	1878-1888	
Vols. 182-186	Henry C. Lea's Son & Company letterbooks	1880-1882	
Vol. 187	Henry C. Lea's Son & Company – Lea & Febiger records book	1883-1962 (bulk 1890-1911)	
Vol. 188	Lea Brothers & Co. – Lea & Febiger cost book	1888-1909	
Vol. 189-191	Lea Brothers & Co. warehouse books	1898-1935	

Vol. 192	Lea & Febiger royalty accounts	1908-1915	
Vols. 193-194	Lea & Febiger transfer ledgers	1908-1932	
Vols. 195-197	Lea & Febiger journals	1920-1967	
Vols. 198-202	Lea & Febiger records book	1921-1982	
Vols. 203-204	Lea & Febiger trial balance books	1938-1950	
Vol. 205	Lea & Febiger cashbook	Sept. 1942- Feb. 1943	