

**The New York Public Library
Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Guide to the

Alexandre Vattemare papers

1817-1889 (bulk 1839-1864)

MssCol 3149

Compiled by Julia Todd, June 1988

Summary

Creator: Vattemare, Alexandre, 1796-1864

Title: Alexandre Vattemare papers, 1817-1889 (bulk 1839-1864)

Size: 4.24 linear feet (14 boxes)

Source: Gift of John Bigelow

Abstract: Collection consists of correspondence, book lists, reports, newsclippings, and other papers pertaining mainly to Vattemare's interest in international library exchange and the formation of public libraries. Correspondence, 1817-1889, is with academic institutions, museums, libraries, government agencies, officials, and friends in the U.S. and Europe and concerns Vattemare's system of international exchange between libraries. Also, lists of books and documents, reports to and by Vattemare, exhibition registers, and scrapbook of clippings regarding international library exchange.

Access: Apply to Manuscripts and Archives Division for access at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>.

Preferred citation: Alexandre Vattemare papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Creator history

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, Elipahalet 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

The Alexandre Vattemare papers are organized into the following series:

- I. Correspondence, 1838-1864
- II. Letterbooks, 1853-1864
- III. Writings and Reports, 1841-1850 and undated
- IV. Personal Miscellany, 1839-1843 and undated
- V. Checklists of Books, Documents, and Journals Exchanged

Key terms

Subjects

Exchange of publications
Libraries -- France
Libraries -- History -- 19th century
Libraries -- United States
Library cooperation

Occupations

Philanthropists

Names

Edwards, Everett, 1794-1865
Vattemare, Alexandre, 1796-1864

Special formats

Scrapbooks

Container list

I. Correspondence, 1838-1864

Letters arranged by Place of Origin

- r.1 [b.1] Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Cuba, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, and Italy
- r.2 [b.2] Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Persia, Portugal, Russia, Sardinia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, The Two Sicilies, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey
- r.2 [b.2] United States: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland
- r.2 [b.3] United States: Massachusetts, Michigan
- r.3 [b.3] United States: New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York.
- r.4 [b.4] United States: New York, New York State Library, North Carolina
- r.4 [b.5] United States: Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C.
- r.5 [b.6] United States: Washington, D.C.

Letters arranged by Name of Correspondent

- r.5 [b.6] A-G
- r.5 [b.7] H-O
- r.6 [b.7] P-Y, unknown correspondents

II. Letterbooks, 1853-1864

- r.7 [b.8] Nov. 19, 1853-Dec. 30, 1854
- r.7 [b.8] Jan. 2, 1855-Dec. 2, 1855
- r.8 [b.8] Dec. 4, 1855-Nov. 5, 1856
- r.8 [b.9] Nov. 10, 1856-Jan. 30, 1857 (Gap: Feb.-June 1857)
- r.9 [b.9] July 2, 1857-Sept. 12, 1857
- r.9 [b.9] Sept. 14, 1857-June 21, 1858
- r.9 [b.10] June 23, 1858-Sept. 20, 1859
- r.10 [b.10] Sept. 22, 1859-June 13, 1861
- r.10 [b.10] June 25, 1861-Apr. 4, 1864

III. Writings and Reports, 1841-1850 and undated

- r.11 [b.11] Prospectus for the Central Agency for International Literary Exchange
- r.11 [b.11] First Annual Report of the Proceedings of the Central Agency for International Literary Exchange, 1848 (Ms. draft. 17 pp.)
Made by C. Moreau for Vattemare
- r.11 [b.11] 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., 1849 (Ms. draft. 24 pp.)
- r.11 [b.11] First Report of Alexandre Vattemare to the Honorable Chairman of the Joint Committee (of Congress) on the Library of Congress, 1850 Mar 1 (Holograph draft. 15 pp.)
- r.11 [b.11] Vattemare Report to the Honorable Chairman of the Joint Committee (of Congress) on the Library of Congress., 1850 (Holograph draft. 7 pp.)

III. Writings and Reports, 1841-1850 and undated... (cont.)

- r.11 [b.11] 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... , Undated (Holograph Ms. 7 pp.)
- r.11 [b.11] 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., Undated
- r.11 [b.11] Farewell to Canadians, 1841 Mar 12
- r.11 [b.11] Farewell to Americans, 1841 Jun 7
- r.11 [b.11] Miscellaneous Writings

IV. Personal Miscellany, 1839-1843 and undated

- r.11 [b.11] Letter to Vattemare
- r.11 [b.11] Musical Score
- r.11 [b.11] Poem to Vattemare
- r.11 [b.11] Visitors Registers to M. Vattemare's collection of drawings from the 7th to the 30th of November, 1839.
- r.11 [b.11] Scrapbook of clippings, 1839-1843

V. Checklists of Books, Documents, and Journals Exchanged

- r.11-12 Checklists in English and French of official documents (10 volumes)
- r.11 [b.12] Académie de Medicine
- r.11 [b.12] Bibliothèque Imperiale
- r.11 [b.12] Books Sent to and From Belgium
- r.11 [b.12] Congressional Digest
- r.11 [b.12] Ministère de l'Instruction Publique
- r.11 [b.12] Ministère de l'Interieur
- r.11 [b.12] Ministère de la Marine
- r.11 [b.12] Ville de Bordeaux
- r.11 [b.12] Ville de Nantes
- r.11 [b.12] Ville de Paris
- r.11-12 [b.13] Book Lists (2 volumes)
- r.11-12 [b.13] Listes des Journaux aux États-Unis, 1840
- r.11-12 [b.13] American Historical and Literary Curiosities. . .
- r.11-12 [b.13] Lists of Books Exchanged (3 folders)
- r.11-12 [b.14] Book Lists (2 volumes)