

American Antiquarian Society

Manuscript Collections

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**NAME OF COLLECTION:**

Comstock Family, Papers, 1782-1904; 1931-1939

**LOCATION:**

Mss. boxes "C"  
Folio vols. "C"  
Oversize mss. boxes "C"

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**SIZE OF COLLECTION:**

4 manuscript boxes; 9 folio volumes; 1 oversize folder (15 items)

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**SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON COLLECTION:**

For biographical information, see Cyrus Ballou Comstock, *Some Descendants of Samuel Comstock ...* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1905), p. 55, 100-101, 165

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**SOURCE OF COLLECTION:**

Gift of William J. McKee, Jr., 1981. Mr. McKee also gave to the Society two albums of family photographs; a painting of the hongs at Canton, dated c. 1850; and a portrait of Capt. William Comstock. See also the accessions for 1986 additional gift.

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**COLLECTION DESCRIPTION:**

Benjamin Comstock (1747-1828) was born, lived, and died in Providence, R.I. He is also known for purchasing a sizeable quantity of land from the Ohio Company in 1792. He married, on 28 January 1776, Mary Winsor (1755-1825), daughter of Rev. Joseph Winsor of Gloucester, R.I. They had nine children: Jesse (1777-1821), who married Ann Weeden; Joseph (1778-1778); Samuel (1778-1778); Sally Brown (1780-1873), who married Samuel Comstock; Joseph (1783-1820); Anna Brown (1784-1868), who married Samuel Thurber; William; Samuel (1789-1815); and Benjamin (1792-1806).

Capt. William Comstock (1787-1873), the seventh child of Benjamin and Mary (Winsor) Comstock, commanded the popular steamer *Fulton* and was president of the Bank of Commerce in Providence. He married, on 28 August 1808, Bethiah Gorham ( -1821). They had six children: Catherine Gorham (1809-1901), who married Benjamin Weeden Gorham; William (1812-1812); Eliza; Mary Winsor (1816-1889), who married Samuel Almy; Moses Eddy (1818-1818); and Julia (1821-1821).

Capt. Comstock married second, on 19 September 1824, Harriet Pearson (1803-1882). They had five children: Harriet Ellen (1825-1827); Harriet (1828- ), who married Byron Sprague; William; Richard Williams; and Anna Louisa (1836- ), who married Edward Augustus Balch.

Eliza Comstock (1814-1859) married first, on 14 July 1834, William Waite Comstock (1810-1834). They had no children. She married, second, Thomas Peck Bucklin ( -1870). They had ten children. Bucklin co-owned Bucklin and Crane Company, a clipper-ship line in New York City.

William Comstock (1831-1859), a merchant in the China trade from 1849 to 1859, went to China in 1849 to work with the general merchant and commission business of Augustine Heard (1785-1868). Comstock worked as an agent and later partner with the firm of Augustine Heard and Company of Foochow and Canton, an outfit that exported

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to a number of countries. The company was actually managed by Heard's four nephews, including Augustine Heard, Jr. (1827-1905) and John Heard (1824-1894). Comstock worked closely with his brother-in-law, Thomas Peck Bucklin, whose clipper ships carried much of the tea, oils, fabrics, rattan, and opium that Comstock exported from Foochow, Canton, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Macao to various countries. Comstock was apparently planning to return to Providence in 1859 due to poor health but it is believed that he drowned in the Indian Ocean during the voyage.

Richard Williams Comstock (1834- ) was a partner in the Rhode Island Horseshoe Company of Providence and Buffalo, N.Y., and owned a line of yachts and a wharf in Providence. He married, on 18 November 1874, Cornelia Babcock Pratt. They had three children. Their second child and only daughter, Alice Louise, married Clarence Saunders Brigham (1877-1963).

This collection contains boxes of business and family correspondence and legal documents, folio volumes of letters and accounts, and a folder of oversized documents. Filed in the graphic arts department are two large albums of family photographs, mostly nineteenth century.

The boxes include early Comstock family land deeds, shares in stock, etc. of Benjamin Comstock and his brother, Jeremiah Comstock (1742-1817), as well as estate settlements in Providence, and genealogical material. There are letters to his land agent, David Putnam ( - ), concerning his lands in northwestern Ohio during the 1820s and 1830s, and their disposition after his death.

The papers of Capt. William Comstock include two folio volumes and several folders. One folio volume is an account book, for the period 1815 to 1839, concerning his sloop and steamboat line in Providence, with some personal accounts and building rentals. The volume also contains newsclippings relating to fires and murders, c. 1850. The other folio volume is a letterbook, for the period 1841 to 1849, which contains letters written to his company agents, captains, et al. concerning the operations of his steamship line (e.g., pick-ups and deliveries, passengers and fares, etc.) and the tough competition of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877). There are many addressed to Charles Overing Handy ( - ), company president.

There is a folder of five personal letters for the period 1856 to 1867. Three letters, written during the period 3 April to 19 May 1856, from his son, Richard Williams Comstock, are in regard to Richard's broken leg and stay at the U.S. Hospital in San Francisco, Calif. One mentions an earthquake. Another letter from Richard, dated 15 December 1858, regards his trip back to Baltimore, Md., from Hampton Road, Va. The final letter is from Capt. Comstock's grandson, Thomas Peck Bucklin, Jr. (1837- ), in regard to Capt. Comstock's eightieth birthday.

There are two folders of legal papers (mostly land deeds) and several folders of business correspondence for the period 1843 to 1870. The majority of his business correspondence is with Bucklin and Crane Co. of New York and with R. E. Lockwood ( - ) of Comstock's New York office of his schooner and steamer company. Some of the letters concern the competition with Vanderbilt, while others concern his son William in China.

The papers of Richard Williams Comstock include business correspondence concerning the Rhode Island Horseshoe Company and its Buffalo, N.Y., office, mostly from general manager C. H. Perkins ( - ). There are also several letters from Capt. John C. Silva ( - ) relating to the sailing of Comstock's line of yachts, as well as letters related to the buying and selling of yachts for his line in Providence.

There are two folders of business papers that include land deeds, accounts, receipts, a copy of his mother's will, and an unidentified brief travel journal concerning Vermont and New Hampshire, dated 1850.

The bulk of the collection, however, consists of personal and business correspondence and business papers of William Comstock, Jr. There are fascinating details of the clipper-ship trade, the buying of goods in a politically troubled China, the controversial trade in opium (1854-1855), references to several rebel uprisings and Comstock's brush with death during one of them in 1856, his varied investments, the plans of the dwelling house/office building erected by A. Heard and  
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Co. in Foochow (1855-1856), and other details of a merchant's life in China during the middle part of the nineteenth century.

His personal correspondence to and from his parents, other family members, and friends concern his life and activities in China, the political conditions in China, uprisings in Foochow, details of his trip home (1857) and his trip back to China (1858) including descriptions of London, Egypt, Malta, and Shanghai.

His business correspondence includes letters of Bucklin and Crane, and his brother-in-law, Thomas P. Bucklin; the Heards; Augustine Heard and Company agents and clerks including Albert Deacon, J. J. Dixwell, R. L. Everett, C. A. Fearon, E. L. Lanca, William Nott, E. F. Parker, and George F. Weller; Baring Bros. of London, who handled Comstock's investments, including his investment in the government of Bengal (1852-1853); and Pale Hubbell Co. of Manila.

His business papers include shipping records (e.g., goods shipped, ships' invoices, expenses of shipping, etc.), bills receivable, profits and losses, accounts of sales, storage and auction costs, receipts, prices current, bills of lading, insurance policies, passports, bank drafts, and personal expenses and shares in the company.

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American Antiquarian Society

Manuscript Collections

Comstock Family, Papers, 1782-1904; 1931-1939

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Benjamin Comstock, Estate Papers, 1824-1854  
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Folder 4 1829  
Folder 5 1830 - 1834  
Folder 6 1838 - 1845  
Folder 7 1846 - 1854

Capt. William Comstock, Family Correspondence, 1856; 1858; 1867  
Folder 8 1856; 1858; 1867

Capt. William Comstock, Legal Papers, 1817-1882  
Folder 9 1817 - 1846  
Folder 10 1848 - 1882

Capt. William Comstock, Business Correspondence, 1843-1870  
Folder 11 1843 - 1847  
Folder 12 1848 April - August  
Folder 13 1848 September - December  
Folder 14 1849 January - April  
Folder 15 1849 May - June  
Folder 16 1849 July - September  
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Folder 18 1850 February - March  
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Folder 20 1850 July - October  
Folder 21 1850 November - 1851 January  
Folder 22 1851 February - March  
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Folder 24 1851 June; 1855 January - October  
Folder 25 1855 November - 1856  
Folder 26 1857 - 1858  
Folder 27 1859 - 1866 April  
Folder 28 1866 September - 1870

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William Comstock, Jr., Family Correspondence, 1849-1859  
Folder 1 1849 - 1851  
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Folder 10 1858 October - December  
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William Comstock, Jr., Business Correspondence, 1849-1854

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Folder 13	1850 July - 1851 February
Folder 14	1851 March
Folder 15	1851 April - May
Folder 16	1851 June - October
Folder 16	1851 June - October
Folder 17	1851 November - December
Folder 18	1852 January - April
Folder 19	1852 May - October
Folder 20	1852 November - 1853 January
Folder 21	1853 February - March
Folder 22	1853 April - June
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Folder 25	1854 January - February
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Folder 29	1854 July 13 - 18
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Folder 28	1857 April 18 - June 20
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William Comstock, Jr., Business Correspondence, 1855-1858 June

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Folder 38	1858 June 6 - 9
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William Comstock, Jr., Business Correspondence, 1858 July-1859

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Folder 3	1858 August 4 - 19
Folder 4	1858 August 20 - 25
Folder 5	1858 September 2 - 8
Folder 6	1858 September 9 - 21
Folder 7	1858 October 2 - 9
Folder 8	1858 October 10 - 25
Folder 9	1858 October 26 - November 10
Folder 10	1858 November 11 - 29
Folder 11	1858 December 2 - 9
Folder 12	1858 December 10 - 30
Folder 13	1859 January 3 - 27
Folder 14	1859 January 28 - February 13
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William Comstock, Jr., Ships' invoices,  
accounts of sales, etc., 1850 - 1858

Folder 16	1850 - 1851 April
Folder 17	1851 May - 1852 October
Folder 18	1852 December - 1853 August
Folder 19	1853 September - 1854 February
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William Comstock, Jr., Bills of lading, 1850-1853

Folder 23	1850 - 1851 July
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Folder 25 William Comstock, Jr., Insurance policies, passports,  
bank drafts, 1850 - 1859

Richard Williams Comstock, Business Correspondence, 1878-1904

Folder 26	1878 - 1879
Folder 27	1880 January - March
Folder 28	1880 April - May
Folder 29	1880 October - December; 1893 - 1894 June
Folder 30	1894 July - December
Folder 31	1895 February - April
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Folder 33	1896 October - 1897
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Richard Williams Comstock, Business Papers, 1850-1890

Folder 36	1850 - 1879
Folder 37	1880 - 1890

Folder 38 Comstock family genealogical records and letters concerning  
research on the life of W. C., Jr., 1931 - 1939

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Folio Volume

- Capt. William Comstock
- 1 Account Book, 1815 - 1839  
--concerning his sloop and steamboat line in Providence, with some personal accounts and building rentals; end of volume contains newsclippings relating to fires and murders, c. 1850
  - 2 Letterbook, 1841 - 1849  
--letters written to his company agents, captains, et al. concerning the operations of his steamship line, e.g., pick-ups and deliveries, passengers and fares, etc.; many addressed to Charles Overing Handy, company president; Cornelius Vanderbilt is often mentioned as a competitor
- Williams Comstock, Jr.
- 3 Invoice Book, 1849 - 1856 (China)  
--includes ships' invoices and some accounts pasted in volume
  - 4 Finances, 1849 - 1856 (China)  
--mostly personal finances, e.g., clothing, furniture, paintings, trips, etc.; some shipping records for A. Heard and Co.
  - 5 Ledger, 1849 - 1856 (China)  
--includes bills receivable, shipments, profits and losses
  - 6 Letterbook, 1855 - 1857 (Foochow)  
--contains business and family correspondence including letters to Bucklin and Crane, his parents et al. concerning life in China, his promotion to company partner, and political unrest culminating in an attack on himself and colleagues by Cantonese junk-builders in Foochow, 1856-1857
  - 7 Letterbook, 1854 - 1856  
--contains business correspondence including letters of Augustine Heard, Jr., and company agents relating to shipping details
  - 8 Letterbook, 1855 - 1856  
--contains business correspondence including letters of Augustine Heard, Jr., E. F. Parker et al., some containing sketches and specifications of proposed company dwelling house in Foochow
  - 9 Letterbook, 1856  
--contains business correspondence including letters of Augustine Heard, Jr. and details of ongoing political strife in China

Oversize Manuscript Folder

- 1) Deed, Jeremiah Comstock to Benjamin Comstock; 1795 February 10
- 2) Deed, Jesse Comstock to Joseph Comstock; 1809 October 13
- 3) Deed, Joseph Sheldon Cooke to Joseph Comstock; 1810 February 19
- 4) Deed, Joseph Comstock to William Comstock; 1817 April 15
- 5) Deed, Richmond Bullock, administrator upon the estate of Jesse Comstock, to Benjamin Comstock; 1822 November 13
- 6) Deed, Betsey P. Paine, widow of Comfort Paine, to William Comstock; 1836 March 10
- 7) Deed, Nathaniel Viall, Jr. and Benjamin S. Church to William Comstock; 1840 September 22
- 8) Deed, Benjamin W. Comstock to William Comstock; 1847 December 17
- 9) Deed, Benjamin W. Comstock to William Comstock; 1848 November 1
- 10) Deed, Benjamin W. Comstock to William Comstock; 1849 January 20
- 11) Insurance policy, Bucklin and Crane, Canton or Shanghai to New York; 1851 August 1
- 12) Passport, William Comstock, Jr., China; 1857 April 20
- 13) Passport, William Comstock, Jr.; 1857 December 10
- 14) Passport, William Comstock, Jr. Esqr., France and China; 1858 February 2
- 15) "Lineage of Alice Louise Comstock," Society of Colonial Dames in Rhode Island; 1902 October 3