

**Benjamin Titus Roberts Family Papers**  
**A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress**



**Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**2022**

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82058719>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms009135>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2009  
Revised 2022 February

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Benjamin Titus Roberts Family Papers

**Inclusive Dates:** 1832-1971

**Bulk Dates:** 1870-1900

**ID No.:** MSS58719

**Creator:** Roberts, Benjamin Titus, 1823-1893

**Extent:** 7,300 items

**Extent:** 40 containers

**Extent:** 15.8 linear feet

**Extent:** 34 microfilm reels

**Language:** Collection material in English

**Location:** Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82058719>

**Summary:** Clergyman and founder of the Free Methodist Church of North America. Family and general correspondence, diaries, notebooks, speeches and writings, and other papers of Benjamin Titus Roberts and members of his family concerning family and domestic matters; the Free Methodist Church of North America; the Chili Seminary, later A. M. Chesbrough Seminary and Roberts Wesleyan College, North Chili, N.Y.; South America; and matters relating to the allied Rice, Sellev, and Stowe families.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

### People

Rice family.

Roberts family--Correspondence.

Roberts family.

Roberts, Anna A. Rice, 1854-1881. Anna A. Rice Roberts papers. 1854-1881.

Roberts, Benjamin Titus, 1823-1893.

Roberts, Benjamin Titus, 1823-1893. Benjamin Titus Roberts papers, 1844-1895.

Roberts, Benson Howard, 1853-1930. Benson Howard Roberts papers. 1875-1924.

Roberts, Ellen Lois Stowe, 1825-1908. Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts papers. 1839-1907.

Roberts, Emma Sellev, 1856-1931. Emma Sellev Roberts papers. 1875-1906

Roberts, George Lane, 1852-1924. George Lane Roberts papers. 1869-1902.

Sellev family.

Stowe family.

### Organizations

A.M. Chesbrough Seminary (North Chili, N.Y.)

Chili Seminary (North Chili, N.Y.)

Free Methodist Church of North America.

Methodist Episcopal Church. Genesee Annual Conference.

### Subjects

Methodism.

Methodist Church--Clergy.

Methodist Church--Missions--Liberia.

Methodist Church--Missions--South Africa.

Methodist Church--Missions.

Methodist Church--New York (State)

Methodist theological seminaries--New York (State)--North Chili.

Practice of law--New York (State)--Rochester.

Practice of law--Pennsylvania--Bradford.

Religion.  
Spirituality.

#### **Places**

Bradford (Pa.)--Commerce.  
Rochester (N.Y.)--Commerce.  
South America--Description and travel.

#### **Occupations**

Clergy.

## **Acquisition Information**

The papers of Benjamin Titus Roberts, clergyman and founder of the Free Methodist Church of North America, and his family were donated to the Library of Congress in 1979 and from 1992 to 1993 by Fannie W. Zahniser, widow of Roberts's biographer, Clarence H. Zahniser. Additional material was given to the Library in 2005 and 2006 by Marvin Zahniser, son of Clarence H. Zahniser and Fannie W. Zahniser.

## **Processing History**

The papers of the Benjamin Titus Roberts family were arranged and described by Paul Ledvina in 1983. The collection was expanded and revised by Karen Linn Femia in 1997. The finding aid was revised in 2009. Additional material was processed and the finding aid revised by Pang H. Xiong in 2022.

## **Transfers**

Photographs have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of the Benjamin Titus Roberts Family Papers. Patrons are encouraged to contact the Prints and Photographs Division in advance of a research visit.

## **Copyright Status**

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Benjamin Titus Roberts and his family is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

## **Access and Restrictions**

The papers of the Benjamin Titus Roberts family are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

## **Microfilm**

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on 34 reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. *To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.*

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Benjamin Titus Roberts Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Notes

### Benjamin Titus Roberts

Date	Event
1823, July 25	Born, Gowanda, N.Y.
1842-1844	Legal apprentice with Henry Link, Little Falls, N.Y.
1848	Graduated, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn. Admitted to the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church
1849	Married Ellen Lois Stowe
1850	Ordained a deacon
1852	Ordained an elder
1858	Expelled from the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church
1860	Organized Free Methodist Church, Pekin, N.Y. (now Free Methodist Church of North America) Began publication of <i>The Earnest Christian</i>
1860-1893	First General Superintendent, Free Methodist Church
1866	Founded the Chili Seminary, later A. M. Chesbrough Seminary and now Roberts Wesleyan College, North Chili, N.Y.
1866-1890	Editor, <i>Free Methodist</i>
1893, Feb. 27	Died, Cattaraugus, N.Y.

### Family Members Represented in the Benjamin Titus Roberts Family Papers

- Titus Roberts (1803-1881) married Sally Ellis (1803-1896)
- Benjamin Titus Roberts (1823-1893) married Ellen Lois Stowe (1825-1908)
  - Benson Howard Roberts (1853-1930) married Emma J. Sellew (1856-1931)
  - George Lane Roberts (1852-1924) married Anna A. Rice (1854-1881)
  - Charles Stowe Roberts (1856-1923) married Susan Lowden (b.1859)
  - Benjamin Titus Roberts Jr. married Sadie B. Kidwell
  - Samuel Roberts

## Scope and Content Note

The family papers of Benjamin Titus Roberts cover the years 1832-1971, with the bulk of the collection dating from 1870 to 1900. Roberts was the founder of the Free Methodist Church of North America and also of the Chili Seminary of North Chili, New York, renamed the A. M. Chesbrough Seminary in 1885 and Roberts Wesleyan College in 1949. Although the collection contains the papers of many family members, the largest sections consist of the papers of Roberts's wife, Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts, and their son, Benson Howard Roberts. Their papers document the development of the Free Methodist Church and of the seminary at North Chili. The papers are organized into the following series: [Anna A. Rice Roberts Papers](#), [Benjamin Titus Roberts Papers](#), [Benson Howard Roberts Papers](#), [Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts Papers](#), [Emma J. Sellew Roberts Papers](#), [George Lane Roberts Papers](#), [Other Family Members](#), and [Additions](#).

The papers of [Benjamin Titus Roberts](#) consist chiefly of diaries, notebooks, and family and general correspondence. A few items document his religious activities. Among the more informative manuscripts are letters to his wife Ellen in the family correspondence series of her papers. More correspondence of Benjamin Titus Roberts can be found in the family and general correspondence and the correspondence with overseas missionaries in the [Addition](#) series. A correspondence file in the papers of [Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts](#) relates the activities of her husband, four of their sons and their wives, and various personalities associated with the Free Methodist Church.

The papers of [Benson Howard Roberts](#), clergyman and principal of the A. M. Chesbrough Seminary, and his wife, [Emma J. Sellew Roberts](#), consist chiefly of general correspondence relating to the operation of the school. There are also research notes for Benson's biography of his father, *Benjamin Titus Roberts: A Biography*.

The papers of [George Lane Roberts](#) concern his law practice, real estate ventures, and his brief residence in South America. The papers of his first wife, [Anna A. Rice Roberts](#), consist chiefly of correspondence with the Rice and Roberts family members and with her friends.

[Additions](#) were incorporated into the collection in 1997 and 2022. The 1997 Addition includes correspondence of various family members, booklets documenting the dissension and division within the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1850s, and correspondence and documents concerning the overseas missionary work of the Free Methodist Church during the 1880s and 1890s. There are lengthy letters to Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts and Benjamin Titus Roberts from various missionaries stationed in India and Africa, particularly in South Africa and Liberia. The 2022 Addition includes the correspondence of Lydia B. Lane, Benjamin Titus Roberts, Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts, other family members, and acquaintances. Topics include the Free Methodist Church, immorality, Methodism, religious fanaticism, spirituality, updates about family affairs, and women as preachers. Hazel B. Sager's correspondence and a bill of sale from 1971 help document the provenance of this collection.

## Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged in eight series:

- [Anna A. Rice Roberts Papers, 1869-1881](#)
- [Benjamin Titus Roberts Papers, 1844-1895](#)
- [Benson Howard Roberts Papers, 1875-1924](#)
- [Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts Papers, 1843-1907](#)
- [Emma J. Sellew Roberts Papers, 1875-1906](#)
- [George Lane Roberts Papers, 1869-1902](#)
- [Other Family Members, 1832-1906](#)
- [Additions, 1839-1971](#)

# Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-3 REEL 1-2	<p><b><u>Anna A. Rice Roberts Papers, 1869-1881</u></b></p> <p>Family and general correspondence, printed matter, school papers, and reports.</p> <p>Family and general correspondence arranged chronologically. Printed matter, school papers, and reports arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX 4-9 REEL 2-11	<p><b><u>Benjamin Titus Roberts Papers, 1844-1895</u></b></p> <p>Diaries, notebooks, family and general correspondence, speeches and writings, financial records, memoranda, and printed matter.</p> <p>Diaries, notebooks, family and general correspondence, and speeches and writings arranged chronologically. Financial records, memoranda, and printed matter arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX 10-15 REEL 11-15	<p><b><u>Benson Howard Roberts Papers, 1875-1924</u></b></p> <p>Family and general correspondence, papers from the A. M. Chesbrough Seminary, financial records, memoranda, notebook, and printed matter.</p> <p>Family and general correspondence, and papers from the A. M. Chesbrough Seminary arranged chronologically. Financial records, lists, memoranda, notebook, and printed matter arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX 16-28 REEL 16-28	<p><b><u>Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts Papers, 1843-1907</u></b></p> <p>Diaries, notebooks, family and general correspondence, cards, invitations, notes, memoranda, and writings.</p> <p>Diaries, notebooks, and family and general correspondence arranged chronologically. Cards, invitation, notes, memoranda, and writings arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX 29-30 REEL 28-29	<p><b><u>Emma J. Sellew Roberts Papers, 1875-1906</u></b></p> <p>Family and general correspondence.</p> <p>Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 31-35 REEL 29-32	<p><b><u>George Lane Roberts Papers, 1869-1902</u></b></p> <p>Family and general correspondence, financial records, printed matter, legal papers, awards and certificates, invitations, and school papers.</p> <p>Family and general correspondence arranged chronologically. Financial records, printed matter, legal papers, awards and certificates, invitations, and school papers arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX 36-37 REEL 33-34	<p><b><u>Other Family Members, 1832-1906</u></b></p> <p>Correspondence and miscellany.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by name of family member and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 38-40 not filmed	<p><b><u>Additions, 1839-1971</u></b></p> <p>Correspondence, financial records, journal, notes, bill of sale, marriage notice, and printed matter.</p> <p>Arranged chronologically by year of addition and therein alphabetically by topic or type of material.</p>

# Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 20,293

Container	Contents
<b>BOX 1-3 REEL 1-2</b>	<b>Anna A. Rice Roberts Papers, 1869-1881</b> Family and general correspondence, printed matter, school papers, and reports. Family and general correspondence arranged chronologically. Printed matter, school papers, and reports arranged by type of material.
<b>BOX 1 REEL 1</b>	Family correspondence, 1871-1881, undated (6 folders)
<b>BOX 2 REEL 1-2</b>	General correspondence
<b>BOX 2 REEL 1-2</b>	1869-1877 (5 folders)
<b>BOX 3 REEL 2</b>	1878-1880, undated
<b>BOX 3 REEL 2</b>	Miscellany
<b>BOX 3 REEL 2</b>	Programs, printed matter, etc., 1871-1879
<b>BOX 3 REEL 2</b>	School papers and reports, 1870-1872
<b>BOX 4-9 REEL 2-11</b>	<b>Benjamin Titus Roberts Papers, 1844-1895</b> Diaries, notebooks, family and general correspondence, speeches and writings, financial records, memoranda, and printed matter. Diaries, notebooks, family and general correspondence, and speeches and writings arranged chronologically. Financial records, memoranda, and printed matter arranged alphabetically by type of material.
<b>BOX 4 REEL 2-6</b>	Diaries and notebooks
<b>BOX 4 REEL 2-6</b>	1852-1871 (5 folders)
<b>BOX 5 REEL 7-9</b>	1872-1880 (4 folders)
<b>BOX 5 REEL 7-9</b>	Family correspondence
<b>BOX 5 REEL 7-9</b>	1848-1872 (2 folders)
<b>BOX 6 REEL 9</b>	1873-1886 (7 folders)
<b>BOX 7 REEL 9-10</b>	1887-1893, undated (2 folders)
<b>BOX 7 REEL 9-10</b>	General correspondence
<b>BOX 7 REEL 9-10</b>	1856-1887 (3 folders)
<b>BOX 8 REEL 10-11</b>	1888-1893, undated (3 folders)
<b>BOX 8 REEL 10-11</b>	Speeches and writings, 1844-1857, undated (4 folders)
<b>BOX 9 REEL 11</b>	Miscellany, circa 1850-1895
<b>BOX 9 REEL 11</b>	Bills and receipts

## Benjamin Titus Roberts Papers, 1844-1895

Container	Contents
BOX 9 REEL 11	Deeds, bonds, and mortgages (2 folders)
BOX 9 REEL 11	Estates and inventory lists
BOX 9 REEL 11	Genesee Camp Ground Association, court case
BOX 9 REEL 11	Lists, memoranda, and writings of others
BOX 9 REEL 11	Printed matter
BOX 10-15 REEL 11-15	<b>Benson Howard Roberts Papers, 1875-1924</b> Family and general correspondence, papers from the A. M. Chesbrough Seminary, financial records, memoranda, notebook, and printed matter. Family and general correspondence, and papers from the A. M. Chesbrough Seminary arranged chronologically. Financial records, lists, memoranda, notebook, and printed matter arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 10 REEL 11-12	Family correspondence, 1875-1905, undated
BOX 10 REEL 11-12	General correspondence
BOX 10 REEL 11-12	1879-Sept. 1896 (4 folders)
BOX 11 REEL 12	Oct. 1896-Nov. 1898 (6 folders)
BOX 12 REEL 12-13	Jan. 1899-Dec. 1900 (5 folders)
BOX 13 REEL 13-14	Jan. 1901-Sept. 1903 (5 folders)
BOX 14 REEL 14-15	Oct. 1903-1924, undated (6 folders)
BOX 15 REEL 15	Miscellany
BOX 15 REEL 15	Bills and receipts, 1898-1903 (2 folders)
BOX 15 REEL 15	Lists, memoranda, and notebook
BOX 15 REEL 15	Printed matter
BOX 16-28 REEL 16-28	<b>Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts Papers, 1843-1907</b> Diaries, notebooks, family and general correspondence, cards, invitations, notes, memoranda, and writings. Diaries, notebooks, and family and general correspondence arranged chronologically. Cards, invitation, notes, memoranda, and writings arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 16 REEL 16-18	Diaries and notebooks
BOX 16 REEL 16-18	1852-1897 (6 folders)
BOX 17 REEL 18-19	Undated fragments
BOX 17 REEL 18-19	Family correspondence
BOX 17 REEL 18-19	1843-1873 (7 folders)
BOX 18 REEL 19-20	1874-1878 (7 folders)
BOX 19 REEL 20	1879-1881 (6 folders)



## Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts Papers, 1843-1907

Container	Contents
BOX 21 REEL 20-21	1882-1888 (5 folders)
BOX 21 REEL 21-22	1889-1907, undated (7 folders)
BOX 22 REEL 22	General correspondence
BOX 22 REEL 22	1844-1871 (8 folders)
BOX 23 REEL 23	1872-1878 (6 folders)
BOX 24 REEL 24	1879-1880 (4 folders)
BOX 25 REEL 24-25	1881-1886 (6 folders)
BOX 26 REEL 26	1887-1893 (5 folders)
BOX 27 REEL 27	1894-1907 (5 folders)
BOX 28 REEL 27-28	Undated (4 folders)
BOX 28 REEL 27-28	Miscellany, circa 1849-1904
BOX 28 REEL 27-28	Cards, invitations, etc.
BOX 28 REEL 27-28	Notes, memoranda, and writings
BOX 29-30 REEL 28-29	<b>Emma J. Sellew Roberts Papers, 1875-1906</b> Family and general correspondence. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 29 REEL 28-29	Family correspondence
BOX 29 REEL 28-29	1875-1903 (4 folders)
BOX 30 REEL 29	1904-1906, undated (2 folders)
BOX 30 REEL 29	General correspondence, 1891-1906, undated (3 folders)
BOX 31-35 REEL 29-32	<b>George Lane Roberts Papers, 1869-1902</b> Family and general correspondence, financial records, printed matter, legal papers, awards and certificates, invitations, and school papers. Family and general correspondence arranged chronologically. Financial records, printed matter, legal papers, awards and certificates, invitations, and school papers arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 31 REEL 29-30	Family correspondence, 1869-1902, undated (5 folders)
BOX 31 REEL 29-30	General correspondence
BOX 31 REEL 29-30	1872-1877 (2 folders)
BOX 32 REEL 30	1878-1899, undated (6 folders)

## George Lane Roberts Papers, 1869-1902

Container	Contents
BOX 33 REEL 31	Miscellany, circa 1875-1900
BOX 33 REEL 31	Bills and receipts (3 folders)
BOX 33 REEL 31	Cards, invitations, and programs
BOX 34 REEL 31-32	Cards, invitations, and programs
BOX 34 REEL 31-32	Legal papers, certificates, and awards
BOX 34 REEL 31-32	Newspaper clippings (2 folders)
BOX 35 REEL 32	Newspaper clippings
BOX 35 REEL 32	Printed matter
BOX 35 REEL 32	School papers, notebooks, etc. (2 folders)
BOX 36-37 REEL 33-34	<b>Other Family Members, 1832-1906</b> Correspondence and miscellany. Arranged alphabetically by name of family member and chronologically therein.
BOX 36 REEL 33	Lane, George and Lydia, 1832-1865
BOX 36 REEL 33	Roberts, Benjamin T., Jr.
BOX 36 REEL 33	Correspondence, 1871-1902, undated (2 folders)
BOX 37 REEL 33-34	Bills and receipts, miscellany
BOX 37 REEL 33-34	Roberts, Charles Stowe, 1875-1906
BOX 37 REEL 33-34	Roberts, Sally Ellis, 1884-1888
BOX 37 REEL 33-34	Roberts, Samuel, 1871-1874
BOX 37 REEL 33-34	Roberts, Susan Lowden, 1903
BOX 37 REEL 33-34	Roberts, Titus, 1847-1856, 1881, undated
BOX 38-40 not filmed	<b>Additions, 1839-1971</b> Correspondence, financial records, journal, notes, bill of sale, marriage notice, and printed matter. Arranged chronologically by year of addition and therein alphabetically by topic or type of material.
BOX 38	1997 Addition
BOX 38	Correspondence
BOX 38	<i>The Earnest Christian</i> , 1892-1898, undated
BOX 38	Miscellaneous, 1883, 1890-1899, 1934
BOX 38	Roberts, Anna A. Rice, 1870-1874
BOX 38	Roberts, Benjamin Titus
BOX 38	General, 1851, 1867-1879, 1883-1893
BOX 38	With Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts, 1852, 1879-1887, undated
BOX 38	Roberts, Benson Howard, 1893-1906
BOX 38	Roberts, Ellen Lois Stowe, 1851-1906, undated (2 folders)
BOX 38	Financial records, 1866-1868, 1877-1879, 1895-1898
BOX 38	Journal, Benjamin Titus Roberts's trip to England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1888
BOX 38	Mission work

## Additions, 1839-1971

Container	Contents
BOX 38	Correspondence, 1872, 1883-1907, undated (4 folders)
BOX 38	Printed matter, 1897-1906, 1918, 1928, 1954, undated
BOX 38	Obituary notices, Benjamin Titus Roberts, 1893
BOX 38	Printed matter, 1842, 1856-1860, 1885, 1900, undated
BOX 39	2022 Addition
BOX 39	Bill of sale, family papers of Benjamin Titus Roberts sold by Hazel B. Sager to Clarence H. Zahniser, 1971
BOX 39	Correspondence
BOX 39	Lane, Lydia B., 1846-1849, 1861
BOX 39	Roberts, Benjamin Titus
BOX 39	Family, 1846-1861, 1870, 1891, undated
BOX 39	General, 1860-1867, 1879
BOX 39	Roberts, Ellen Lois Stowe
BOX 39	Family, 1839-1848, 1859-1878, 1884-1888, 1894 (3 folders)
BOX 39	General, 1840-1849, 1859-1866, 1884-1888, undated
BOX 40	General, 1840-1849, 1859-1866, 1884-1888, undated (3 folders)
BOX 40	Sager, Hazel B., 1957
BOX 40	Newspaper clipping, marriage notice of Benjamin Titus Roberts and Ellen Lois Stowe, 1849
BOX 40	Notes, undated