

Fowler and Wells phrenological character readings, ephemera, and printed material

Ms. Coll. 1418

Finding aid prepared by Cory Austin Knudson.

Last updated on March 30, 2020.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2019 October 2

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	American Institute of Phrenology.
Creator	Butler, David P.
Creator	Fowler and Wells.
Creator	Fowler, Lorenzo Niles
Creator	Fowler, Orson Squire
Creator	Sizer, Nelson
Creator	Wells, Samuel Robert
Title	Fowler and Wells phrenological character readings, ephemera, and printed material
Call number	Ms. Coll. 1418
Date [inclusive]	1840-1910
Extent	0.4 linear foot (1 box)
Language	English
Abstract	This collection contains materials related to the study and practice of phrenology, specifically as espoused by American phrenologists Orson Squire Fowler, Lorenzo Niles Fowler, Charlotte Fowler Wells, Lydia

Folger Fowler, and Samuel Roberts Wells, who together make up the company Fowler and Wells. Fowler and Wells was the most prolific disseminator of phrenological materials throughout the nineteenth century. The materials in this collection range from extended, personal analyses of individuals, to advertisements and ephemera about phrenological publications, to original editions of the *American Phrenological Journal*.

Cite as:

Fowler and Wells phrenological character readings, ephemera, and printed material, 1840-1910, Ms. Coll. 1418 Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887), the figure behind most of the materials in this collection, was largely responsible for popularizing the pseudoscience of phrenology in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. He and his brother, Lorenzo Niles Fowler (1811-1896) became avid students of phrenology in the early 1830s, establishing an office in New York City in 1835 where they published materials on phrenology, cast and sold phrenological models, and administered phrenological analyses. The "phrenological Fowlers," as they were known, established another office in Philadelphia in 1838, where they would publish the *American Phrenological Journal* from 1838 to 1842, after which the majority of their operations would move back to New York City. The *American Phrenological Journal* would continue to be published until 1911. Joined by their sister, Charlotte Fowler Wells (1814-1901), her husband Samuel Roberts Wells (1820-1875), and Lorenzo's wife Lydia Folger Foster (1823-1879)--who would become the second woman to earn a medical degree in the U.S.--the family would establish the company Fowler and Wells in 1844 (variously referred to as "Fowlers and Wells," "Fowlers and Wells Co.," "Fowler and Wells Publishers," and "Fowler and Wells Phrenological Cabinet" throughout its history). Fowler and Wells was the largest and most influential disseminator of phrenological materials until the practice of skull-analysis, central to phrenology, was definitively debunked and fell out of favor in the twentieth century.

"The doctrines of the phrenologists may be briefly summed up as follows," writes L.F. Barker in 1897, "They believed that the brain, as a whole, is the organ of the mind, and that it is made up of multiple organs, each mental capacity displayed by an individual depending upon the development of its corresponding organ in the brain. The form of the skull was thought to depend upon its relations to the brain within it" ("The phrenology of Gall and Flechsig's doctrine of association centres in the cerebrum." *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bull* 70 [1897]: 8). Founded by German-born Viennese physician Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) and named by his student Johannes G. Spurzheim (1776-1832), phrenology is best known for the practice of manually examining the skull for bumps and indentations that supposedly

indicate certain character traits. Initially popularized as a social activity among middle-class British men in the early nineteenth century, skull-analysis would fall out of favor in the 1850s until Lorenzo Fowler revitalized the practice in Britain a decade later. Spurzheim and his British acolyte, George Combe (1788-1858), would attempt to bring phrenology to the United States in the 1830s with a series of lectures delivered primarily to scientific elites.

It was not until Orson Squire Fowler and Lorenzo Niles Fowler began delivering lectures and publishing their own material on phrenology that the pseudoscience would achieve the vast popularity it did over the course of the nineteenth century, both in the U.S. and elsewhere. The Fowlers made phrenology legible for the general public, lecturing for broad audiences where attendees would be examined and provided with a pamphlet containing the easily-readable results of their analysis as well as accessible information about the study and practice of phrenology (examples of these pamphlets can be found in Manuals.) In 1863, Lorenzo Niles Fowler would relocate to Great Britain, establish the Fowler Institute at Ludgate Circus in London that same year, and later found the British Phrenological Association in 1886, an organization that endured until 1967. Famous in their own time, Fowler and Wells conducted phrenological examinations of such figures as Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, and Walt Whitman.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains materials related to the study and practice of phrenology, specifically as espoused by American phrenologists Orson Squire Fowler, Lorenzo Niles Fowler, Charlotte Fowler Wells, Lydia Folger Fowler, and Samuel Roberts Wells, who together make up the company "Fowler and Wells" (variously rendered as "Fowlers and Wells," "Fowlers and Wells Co.," "Fowler and Wells Publishers," and "Fowler and Wells Phrenological Cabinet.")

This collection is arranged in four series I. Phrenological readings; II. Advertisements and printed ephemera; III. Manuals; and IV. Journals. Phrenological readings contains eight extensive, handwritten phrenological reports on individuals, five of which are written by "Prof. O.S. Fowler" (Orson Squire Fowler), one by D.P. Butler (David P. Butler), one by L.N. Fowler (Lorenzo Niles Fowler), and one by Nelson Sizer. These range in date from 1855 to 1880. This series also contains one handwritten letter from Orson Squire Fowler dated March 27, 1851, which appears to have originally accompanied a phrenological reading.

Series II. Advertisements and printed ephemera contains two book lists distributed by Fowler and Wells, two certificates of agency for local distributors of Fowler and Wells publications, various advertisements for personal readings and Fowler and Wells publications, two full-collor printed portraits (one of O.S. Fowler, one of "Chas. Benton, manager"), and several other articles relating to Fowler and Wells. Most of the materials included here are undated. Also included in this series is an extensive "Catalogue of Portraits, Busts, and Casts of the American Institute of Phrenology," written by Charlotte Fowler Wells and Nelson Sizer, which contains many phrenological readings of figures ranging from anonymous criminals to U.S. presidents, mostly performed through analyses of paintings depicting the figures in question.

Series III. Manuals contains eleven illustrated instructional manuals for the use of self-instruction on phrenology in general and skull-examination in particular. These pamphlets were given to audience members who underwent analysis at the Fowlers' lectures. Notably, they contain both general information about phrenology as well as the specific results of their analyses in specially-designed tables or in the

margins of the text, where examiners would pencil in numbers indicating the strength of the examinee's various faculties. These range in date from 1846 to 1900.

Series IV. Journals contains nine editions of the *American Phrenological Journal*, published between April 1847 and January 1848, as well as the "Phrenological and Physiological Almanac for 1848" and two other phrenological pamphlets published by Fowler and Wells in 1901 and 1910 respectively.

This collection would be of interest to researchers studying popular publications on phrenology in general, Fowler and Wells in particular, as well as the practice of phrenological analysis, specifically in the U.S.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2019 October 2

Finding aid prepared by Cory Austin Knudson.

Access Restrictions

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Source of Acquisition

Sold by Freeman's (Philadelphia), lot 218 at auction, 19 April 2016. Formerly owned by Leroy Egan of Sewickley, Pennsylvania.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

At Cornell University: Fowler and Wells families papers, 1807-1968, 1836-1901(bulk), Collection Number: 97

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- The American Phrenological Journal.

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Advertisements
- Manuals (instructional materials)
- Printed ephemera

SUBJECT(S)

- Phrenology
- Pseudoscience
- Publishers and publishing

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
SERIES I. PHRENOLOGICAL READINGS, 1851-1880.	1	1

SERIES II. ADVERTISEMENTS AND PRINTED EPHEMERA.

	Box	Folder
For the <i>American phrenological journal</i> and <i>The phrenological journal</i> , 1852-1853, undated.	1	2
For Fowler and Wells Co. and S.R. Wells Co., 1837, 1879-1902.	1	2
Other phrenological advertisements (includes <i>Catalogue of portraits, busts, and casts in the Cabinet of the American Institute of Phrenology</i> prepared by C.F. Wells and Nelson Sizer), 1885, undated.	1	3

SERIES III. MANUALS.

	Box	Folder
<i>Synopsis of phrenology and phrenological developments</i> (3 copies), 1846-1855.	1	4
<i>The phrenological guide designed for students of their own character</i> , 1847.	1	4

<i>The illustrated self-instructor in phrenology and physiology</i> (2 copies), 1850-1852.	1	4
<i>The phrenological delineator and compendium of phrenology</i> , 1860.	1	5
<i>Wells' new descriptive chart for the use of examiners</i> (3 copies), 1895, undated.	1	5
<i>Fowler's new chart for the use of examiners</i> , 1900.	1	5

SERIES IV. JOURNALS.

	Box	Folder
<i>American phrenological journal</i> , volume IX no. 3-4, 6, 8-12, and volume X no. 1, 1847-1848.	1	6
<i>The human nature library</i> , no. 42, 1901 January.	1	7
<i>Phrenological and physiological almanac for 1848</i> , 1848.	1	7
<i>Phrenological journal and science of health</i> , volume 123, no. 2, 1910 February.	1	7