

Guide to the Eli Whitney Papers

MS 554



compiled by Diane E. Kaplan

August 1996

Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
mssa.assist@yale.edu
<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Requesting Instructions	3
Administrative Information	4
Immediate Source of Acquisition	4
Conditions Governing Access	4
Conditions Governing Use	4
Preferred Citation	4
Existence and Location of Copies	4
Biographical / Historical	4
Scope and Contents	6
Collection Contents	8
Series I. Correspondence, 1716, 1785-1927, undated	8
Series II. Land Records, 1775-1877, undated	14
Series III. Cotton Gin Papers, 1794-1959, undated	16
Series IV. Firearms Papers, 1801-1915, undated	17
Series V. Personal Papers, 1771-1914, undated	18
Oversize	21
Copy Negatives	22
Accession 2018-M-0059. Additional material, 1806	24
Selected Search Terms	25

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
mssa.assist@yale.edu
<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

CALL NUMBER: MS 554

CREATOR: Whitney, Eli, 1765-1825

TITLE: Eli Whitney papers

DATES: 1716-1959

BULK DATES: 1785-1881

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 10 linear feet (16 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of correspondence and business papers relating to Eli Whitney's interests in developing the cotton gin and the manufacture of firearms employing a system of interchangeable parts. The papers include land records relating to the acquisition of property for the mill site, patents on inventions, account books and other financial records, and contracts and drawings concerning firearms production. Also included in the papers are records of Eli Whitney's estate, papers of Eli Whitney's nephews and son who succeeded him in producing firearms, and personal papers of Whitney and other Whitney family members.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0554>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0554>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

- b. box
- f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Susan B. Whitney, Elizabeth Fay Whitney, Mrs. Leonard G. Sanford, Mrs. Thomas M. Debevoise, and Mrs. Earl M. Knight in 1941 and 1953. Gift of Anne S. Sharpe, 2018.

The Yale University Library acquired the Whitney Papers through gifts in 1941 and 1953 from Eli Whitney's great-granddaughters, Susan Brewster Whitney, Elizabeth Fay Whitney, Henrietta Edwards Whitney Sanford, Anne Farnam Whitney Debevoise, and Frances Pierrepont Whitney Knight.

Conditions Governing Access

The entire collection, with the exception of Accession 2018-M-0059 and Box 15 of copy negatives, is available on microfilm. Patrons must use FILM HM 219 instead of the originals.

Conditions Governing Use

Unpublished materials authored or otherwise produced by the creator(s) of this collection are in the public domain. There are no restrictions on use. Copyright status for other collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

Preferred Citation

Eli Whitney Papers (MS 554). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Existence and Location of Copies

Entire collection, with the exception of Box 15 of copy negatives, is also available on microfilm (6,857 frames on 7 reels, 35mm.) from Scholarly Resources, Inc., Wilmington, Delaware.

Biographical / Historical

Eli Whitney was born in Westborough, Massachusetts, the son of Eli and Elizabeth (Fay) Whitney. As a boy, Whitney was occupied with all manner of manufacturing schemes, and he persuaded his father to let him continue in mechanical work rather than in preparation for college. He made and repaired violins in the neighborhood, worked in iron, and at the age of fifteen began the manufacture of nails in his father's shop. He continued this enterprise for two winters, even hiring a helper to fill his orders. When the demand for nails declined at the close of the Revolutionary War, he turned to making hatpins and almost monopolized that business in his section of the state. By the time he was eighteen his ideas regarding a college education had changed, but when he broached the subject to his father the latter thought him too old to begin the preparatory studies and, furthermore, was not then in a position to provide the necessary funds.

Whitney's mind was made up, however, and to obtain the funds he taught school in Grafton, Northboro, Westboro, and Paxton, and with the money thus earned attended Leicester Academy, Leicester, Massachusetts, during the summer. He entered Yale College in May 1789, at the age of twenty-three. During his three years there he studied diligently, and to augment the funds sent him by his father repaired apparatus and equipment about the college. After his graduation in the autumn of 1792, having decided

to become a lawyer, Whitney went South to accept a position as tutor in a gentleman's family, with the understanding that he could devote a portion of his time to reading law.

On the boat which he took to Savannah he met the widow of General Nathanael Greene, with her family and Phineas Miller, the manager of her plantation. On his arrival at Savannah, Whitney learned that his prospective employer had hired another tutor, and Mrs. Greene invited him to be her guest. He gratefully accepted and began his law studies, grasping every opportunity to show his appreciation for the kindness of his hostess by making and repairing things about the house and plantation.

During the winter a group of gentlemen who had served under General Greene in the Revolution came to visit Mrs. Greene, and one evening were discussing the deplorable state of agriculture in the South. Large areas of land were unsuitable for growing of rice or long-staple cotton, although they yielded large crops of green seed cotton. This was an unprofitable crop, however, because the process of separating the cotton from its seed by hand was so tedious that it took one workman a whole day to obtain a pound of staple. One of the gentlemen remarked that the agricultural troubles of the inland portions of the South would be eliminated if some machine could be devised to facilitate the process of cleaning the green seed cotton. Mrs. Greene, there upon, who had observed Whitney's ingenuity with tools, suggested that he was the person to make such a machine, and forthwith he turned his attention to the problem. Within ten days he had designed a cotton gin and completed an imperfect model in accordance with his plan. He experimented with this model, and by April 1793 had built a larger, improved machine with which one person could produce fifty pounds of cleaned cotton in a day.

Having indicated the means to the end sought by Mrs. Greene's friends, thus fulfilling in part his many obligations to her, Whitney intended to resume his study of the law, but he was persuaded by Phineas Miller to continue work on the cotton gin with a view to patenting the idea and engaging in the manufacture of the new machine. The two men drew up a partnership agreement on May 27, 1793, to engage in the patenting and manufacturing of cotton gins and to conduct a cotton ginning business. Meanwhile the knowledge that Whitney had built a machine to clean cotton spread and multitudes came from all quarters to see the gin. Before Whitney could secure his patent a number of imitations were in successful operation.

Whitney returned to New Haven to perfect, patent, and manufacture his gin as soon as possible. He first made oath to the invention on October 28, 1793, obtained his patent March 14, 1794, and immediately began making cotton gins and shipping them to Miller in Georgia. The partners planned to buy the cotton seed themselves, gin it, and sell the product, because they felt that, protected by a patent, they could maintain a monopoly. This policy proved to be extremely disadvantageous, however, for they could not produce enough machines to gin the rapidly increasing crops and competitors' machines were rapidly being put into operation.

The most formidable rival machine was that of Hodgen Holmes, in which circular saws were used instead of the drum with inserted wires of Whitney's original machine. Whitney later proved that the idea of such teeth had occurred to him, but it was some years before he established his right over the Holmes gin. The partners had difficulty in raising money and had to pay interest rates of from twelve to twenty-five percent. Furthermore, word came from England that manufacturers were condemning the cotton cleaned by Whitney's gins on the ground that the staple was injured. This news brought their business and the thirty gins operating in Georgia to a two year standstill while Miller and Whitney worked to prove this judgement in error.

In 1797 the first infringement suit was tried unsuccessfully, and it was not until 1807 that Whitney obtained a favorable decision. This decision was confirmed by several subsequent decisions, and thenceforth Whitney's patent was not questioned. Meanwhile, however, in 1795 his shops had been destroyed by fire; the legislatures of South Carolina and Tennessee which in 1801 and 1802 respectively had voted to purchase patent rights suddenly annulled the contracts; and in 1803 Miller died, disappointed and broken by the struggle.

Whitney continued alone for nine years more, and in 1812 made application to Congress for the renewal of his patent. In spite of the logical arguments which he advanced in his petition, the request was refused. There is probably no other instance in the history of invention of the letting loose of such tremendous

industrial forces so suddenly as occurred with the invention of the cotton gin. In 1792 the United States exported 138,328 pounds of cotton; in 1794, the year Whitney patented his gin, 1,601,000 pounds were exported; the following year, 6,276,000 pounds; and by 1800, the production of cotton in the United States had risen to 35,000,000 pounds of which 17,790,000 were exported. Yet Whitney received practically no return for the invention which was due to him alone.

He was a clear-sighted business man as well as an inventor, however, and was quick to realize the mistake he and Miller had made in attempting to monopolize the ginning business. He was so thoroughly convinced that he would never obtain any money from his invention of the cotton gin that as early as 1798 he made up his mind that he had to turn to something else. He chose the manufacture of firearms, and on January 14, 1798, obtained from the federal government a contract for "ten thousand stand of arms" to be delivered in two years. Whitney was not a gunsmith, but he proposed to manufacture guns by a new method, his aim being "to make the same parts of different guns, as the locks, for example, as much like each other as the successive impressions of a copper-plate engraving." This was perhaps the first, certainly one of the first suggestions of the system of interchangeable parts which has been of tremendous significance in industrial development.

Whitney's mechanical ingenuity and inventive capacity had been so thoroughly demonstrated, and his reputation for character was so high, that he had no difficulty in finding ten individuals in New Haven to go his bond and furnish the initial capital for the new undertaking. Purchasing a mill site just outside of New Haven, now Whitneyville, he built a factory and began the design and construction of the necessary machinery to carry out his schemes. Because of the extremely low state of the mechanic arts, his difficulties were innumerable. There were no similar establishments upon which branches of his own business might lean; there were not experienced workmen to give him any assistance; and he had to make by himself practically every machine and tool required. The expense incurred and time expended in getting the factory into operation greatly exceeded his expectations, but the confidence of his financial backers and the government seems never to have wavered. At the end of the first year after the contract was made, instead of 4,000 muskets, only 500 were delivered, and it was eight years instead of two before the contract was complete. So liberal was the government in making advances to Whitney that the final balance due him amounted to little more than \$2,200 out of the original sum of \$134,000. Whitney, however, had accomplished that which he had set out to do. Workmen with little or no experience could operate his machinery and with it turn out by the hundreds the various parts of a musket. Whitney had succeeded in reducing an extremely complex process to what amounted to a succession of simple operations. By his tenacity he so perfected the manufacture of arms that with the subsequent adoption of his system in the two federal armories, the government saved \$25,000 annually. In 1812 he entered into a second contract with the federal government to manufacture 15,000 firearms, and contracted to make a similar quantity for the state of New York, and thereafter his unique manufactory yielded him a just reward. The business which he started employed some sixty men, and at the time the works were built he erected a row of substantial stone houses for his workmen which are said to have been the first workmen's houses erected by an employer in the United States.

On January 6, 1817, in New Haven, Whitney married Henrietta Frances Edwards, who with three children survived him.

Extracted from: *Dictionary of American Biography*

Scope and Contents

The Eli Whitney Papers consist of correspondence and business papers relating to Eli Whitney's invention and patenting of the cotton gin and to his subsequent development of a system to produce firearms employing interchangeable parts. The papers include drawings for machinery, land records relating to the acquisition of property for Whitney's factory site, patents and other documents relating to the protection of Whitney's inventions, and account books and other financial and legal records relating to business and investments. The papers also document the continuing manufacture of guns at Whitney's factory after his death in 1825, under the management of his estate and later of his son Eli Whitney. In addition, the papers include personal papers of Eli Whitney and other family members.

The papers also include photocopies of documents relating to Eli Whitney located in other repositories including the Connecticut Historical Society, the Harvard College Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the National Archives, the New Haven Colony Historical Society, and the New York Historical Society. Additional photocopies of Whitney material from the Baldwin Family Papers, the Blake Family Papers, the Hillhouse Family Papers, and the Josiah Whitney Papers in the Manuscripts and Archives Department are also included in the papers. This collection of materials was assembled, in part, during the preparation of *The World of Eli Whitney* by Jeanette Mirsky and Allan Nevins. This volume relied heavily on the Whitney Papers and, as such, it gives a more thorough analysis of the Whitney Papers than can be done here.

While the Eli Whitney Papers span from 1716-1959, the bulk of the material dates from 1785-1881, or from Eli Whitney's student days at Yale through the life of his son Eli Whitney.

Other family members represented in the series by smaller quantities of papers are Whitney's wife Henrietta Edwards Whitney, her father Pierpont Edwards, brother Alfred P. Edwards, and children Francis Whitney Chaplain, Elizabeth Whitney, and Eli Whitney. Student papers from Princeton, a personal letterbook, business diary, and other financial and legal papers, as well as obituary notices comprise the papers of Eli Whitney (1820-1895) in this series.

Collection Contents

Series I. Correspondence, 1716, 1785–1927, undated

CORRESPONDENCE, Series I, is arranged in chronological order. The dates of letters to or from particular individuals can be found using the Manuscripts Catalogue in the department. The bulk of the material in the series dates from Eli Whitney's lifetime. The early correspondence includes recommendations for Whitney as a school teacher and Whitney's correspondence with his family while he was a student in Yale College. It is in this early correspondence with his family, as well as with his Yale College friend Josiah Stebbins, that Whitney describes his plans to work in the South and his subsequent meeting and time spent with the family of the late Major Nathanael Greene at Mulberry Grove, Georgia. It is to them as well that he relates his efforts to produce a model cotton gin.

The correspondence from 1793 on contains frequent references to Whitney's efforts to secure a patent for his invention and to protect this patent from infringement. Letters to family members describe trials and tribulations, but Whitney's correspondents expand to include various state and federal government officials, including Thomas Jefferson, who were involved in the various patent conflicts. The folders include letters of agreement and memorials and petitions to Congress. After his 1812 memorial to Congress for extension of his patent rights, Whitney exchanged views on patent law with Robert Fulton.

After Whitney's return to New Haven, the folders also include numerous exchanges with his partner Phineas Miller. The fortunes of Miller and Whitney are the subject of numerous letters throughout the series. Note that the letterbook of Miller and Whitney, containing copies of outgoing letters, is in Series III. After Miller's death the correspondence includes exchanges with Miller's widow, Catherine Greene Miller, and with Lemuel Kollock, the executor of Miller's estate. Letters of Catherine Greene Miller record the life of a woman managing a plantation on her own.

From the late 1790s on, the correspondence chronicles Whitney's entrance and progress in the field of firearms manufacturing. The correspondence includes numerous exchanges with government officials, such as Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, and arms inspector Decius Wadsworth, and financial backers such as James Hillhouse, as Whitney attempted to secure a contract from and produce muskets for the United States government. These exchanges include numerous details on contracts, financial advances and payments, and inspection and delivery of muskets. Letters to Josiah Stebbins at this time also give details of the developing manufacturing establishment.

During the years of the War of 1812, the files document Whitney's renewed effort to contract with the United States government for the production of firearms. The files also highlight Whitney's difficulties with Callendar Irvine, the Commissary General of Purchases, and his efforts to help Decius Wadsworth, now chief of the Ordnance Department, and Roswell Lee, the superintendent of the Springfield Armory, defend the standards used to test muskets manufactured at Springfield. The files of the early 1820s record Whitney's successful negotiation of a third contract with the government and include exchanges with Secretary of War John C. Calhoun.

The series includes numerous letters relating to Whitney family matters. Whitney's brother Josiah, a Boston merchant, is a frequent correspondent, and with him Whitney discussed the general business climate as well as matters relating to the shipment of cotton and details concerning their sister Elizabeth and her children. He reported to his sister Elizabeth Blake on her son Eli's studies at Yale and it was to Eli Whitney Blake and his brother Philo that Whitney entrusted the operation of the mill when his health failed. The series includes letters from Eli Whitney Blake concerning work on the government's contract. At the time of Whitney's death in 1825 there are letters describing his illness and passing as well as letters containing reminiscences of his life.

The correspondence after 1825 is sparser. It includes letters relating to Whitney's estate and the continuance of his business. Materials in 1847 concern the Whitney family's renewed efforts to seek some remuneration from Congress for Whitney's invention of the cotton gin. Exchanges between family members record the lives of Henrietta Whitney and her children.

b. 1, f. 1, reel 1	1716, 1785-1791	1716, 1785-1791
b. 1, f. 2, reel 1	1792	1792
b. 1, f. 3, reel 1	1793	1793
b. 1, f. 4, reel 1	1794	1794
b. 1, f. 5, reel 1	1795	1795
b. 1, f. 6, reel 1	1796 See also: box 12, folder 167	1796
b. 1, f. 7, reel 1	1797 January-April	1797 January-April
b. 1, f. 8, reel 1	1797 May-June	1797 May-June
b. 1, f. 9, reel 1	1797 July-September	1797 July-September
b. 1, f. 10, reel 1	1797 October-December	1797 October-December
b. 1, f. 11, reel 1	1798 February-May	1798 February-May
b. 1, f. 12, reel 1	1798 June-August See also: box 12, folder 167	1798 June-August
b. 1, f. 13, reel 1	1798 October-December See also: box 15, folder 185	1798 October-December
b. 1, f. 14, reel 1	1799 January-June	1799 January-June
b. 1, f. 15, reel 1	1799 July-December	1799 July-December
b. 1, f. 16, reel 1	1800	1800
b. 1, f. 17, reel 1	1801 January-February	1801 January-February
b. 1, f. 18, reel 1	1801 March-July	1801 March-July
b. 1, f. 19, reel 1	1801 August-December See also: box 12, folder 167	1801 August-December
b. 1, f. 20, reel 1	1802 See also: box 12, folder 168	1802
b. 1, f. 21, reel 1	1803 January-June	1803 January-June
b. 1, f. 22, reel 1	1803 July-November See also: box 12, folder 168	1803 July-November

b. 1, f. 23, reel 1	1804 January-April	1804 January-April
b. 2, f. 24, reel 1	1804 May-December	1804 May-December
b. 2, f. 25, reel 1	1805 February-May	1805 February-May
b. 2, f. 26, reel 2	1805 June-December A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1805 June-December
b. 2, f. 27, reel 2	1806 January-August	1806 January-August
b. 2, f. 28, reel 2	1806 September-December	1806 September-December
b. 2, f. 29, reel 2	1807 A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1807
b. 2, f. 30, reel 2	1808 January-June	1808 January-June
b. 2, f. 31, reel 2	1808 July-December	1808 July-December
b. 2, f. 32, reel 2	1809 January-July A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1809 January-July
b. 2, f. 33, reel 2	1809 August-October A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1809 August-October
b. 2, f. 34, reel 2	1809 November-December	1809 November-December
b. 2, f. 35, reel 2	1810 January-March A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1810 January-March
b. 2, f. 36, reel 2	1810 April-October A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1810 April-October
b. 2, f. 37, reel 2	1810 November-December	1810 November-December

b. 2, f. 38, reel 2	1811 January-April	1811 January-April
b. 2, f. 39, reel 2	1811 May-September A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1811 May-September
b. 2, f. 40, reel 2	1811 October-December A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1811 October-December
b. 2, f. 41, reel 2	1812 January-March A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy. See also: box 12, folder 168	1812 January-March
b. 2, f. 42, reel 2	1812 April-June A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1812 April-June
b. 2, f. 43, reel 2	1812 July-September	1812 July-September
b. 2, f. 44, reel 2	1812 October-December	1812 October-December
b. 2, f. 45, reel 2	1813 January-April	1813 January-April
b. 3, f. 46, reel 2	1813 May-June	1813 May-June
b. 3, f. 47, reel 2	1813 July-December	1813 July-December
b. 3, f. 48, reel 2	: correspondence of Calendar Irvine and Eli Whitney	1813 October-November
b. 3, f. 49, reel 2	1814 January-July See also: box 12, folder 168	1814 January-July
b. 3, f. 50, reel 2	1814 August	1814 August
b. 3, f. 51, reel 2	1814 September-October	1814 September-October
b. 3, f. 52, reel 2	1814 November-December See also: box 15, folder 186	1814 November-December
b. 3, f. 53, reel 2	1815 January-May See also: box 12, folder 168	1815 January-May

b. 3, f. 54, reel 3	1815 June-August	1815 June-August
b. 3, f. 55, reel 3	1815 October-December	1815 October-December
b. 3, f. 56, reel 3	1816 January-August See also: box 12, folder 168	1816 January-August
b. 3, f. 57, reel 3	1816 September-December	1816 September-December
b. 3, f. 58, reel 3	1817	1817
b. 3, f. 59, reel 3	1818 January-February	1818 January-February
b. 3, f. 60, reel 3	1818 March-June	1818 March-June
b. 3, f. 61, reel 3	1818 July-November	1818 July-November
	1818 December See: box 12, folder 168	1818 December
b. 3, f. 62, reel 3	1819 See also: box 12, folder 168	1819
b. 4, f. 63, reel 3	1820	1820
b. 4, f. 64, reel 3	1821 January-August	1821 January-August
b. 4, f. 65, reel 3	1821 September-December	1821 September-December
b. 4, f. 66, reel 3	1822 January-March	1822 January-March
b. 4, f. 67, reel 3	1822 April-October	1822 April-October
b. 4, f. 68, reel 3	1822 November-December	1822 November-December
b. 4, f. 69, reel 3	1823	1823
b. 4, f. 70, reel 3	1824	1824
b. 4, f. 71, reel 3	1825 January-March	1825 January-March
b. 4, f. 72, reel 3	1825 April-December	1825 April-December
b. 4, f. 73, reel 3	1826-1829	1826-1829
b. 4, f. 74, reel 3	1830-1835	1830-1835

b. 4, f. 75, reel 3	1837-1845 See also: box 12, folder 169	1837-1845
b. 4, f. 76, reel 3	1846-1847	1846-1847
b. 4, f. 77, reel 3	1848	1848
b. 4, f. 78, reel 3	1850-1854	1850-1854
b. 4, f. 79, reel 3	1858-1860 A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1858-1860
b. 4, f. 80, reel 3	1861-1871	1861-1871
b. 4, f. 81, reel 3	1873-1897 See also: box 12, folder 169	1873-1897
b. 4, f. 82, reel 3	1901	1901
b. 4, f. 83, reel 3	1904-1912, 1922-1927	1904-1912, 1922-1927
b. 4, f. 84, reel 3	undated	undated

Series II. Land Records, 1775–1877, undated

Series II, LAND RECORDS, includes deeds, leases, quit claims, and other documents relating to property in New Haven and Hamden. The documents are arranged in chronological order. The earliest documents date from 1755, but probably came into the possession of the Whitney family as proof that a Whitney contemporary had title to the land Whitney was about to acquire. It is difficult to match contemporary descriptions of property against today's landmarks, but it seems that most of these land records relate to the site on the New Haven-Hamden border on which Whitney constructed his factory, to the site of his home, or to other acquisitions of property in New Haven. The extent of Whitney's land holdings is outlined in his will which is in Series V. Later records are negotiated by the executors of Whitney's estate, James Goodrich and Henry W. Edwards, and still later by his son Eli Whitney. These later records include the 1854 contract by which New Haven acquired the right to develop a reservoir for its water supply.

The material in this series is arranged in chronological order.

b. 5, f. 85, reel 4	1755-1769	1755-1769
b. 5, f. 86, reel 4	1770-1777	1770-1777
b. 5, f. 87, reel 4	1779-1786 See also: box 12, folder 170	1779-1786
b. 5, f. 88, reel 4	1787-1795 See also: box 12, folder 170	1787-1795
b. 5, f. 89, reel 4	1796-1802 See also: box 12, folder 170	1796-1802
b. 5, f. 90, reel 4	1803-1805	1803-1805
b. 5, f. 91, reel 4	1806-1809 See also: box 12, folder 170	1806-1809
b. 5, f. 92, reel 4	1810-1812 See also: box 12, folder 170	1810-1812
b. 5, f. 93, reel 4	1813-1815	1813-1815
b. 5, f. 94, reel 4	1816-1819 See also: box 12, folder 170	1816-1819
b. 5, f. 95, reel 4	1820-1827 See also: box 12, folder 170	1820-1827
b. 5, f. 96, reel 4	1828-1829	1828-1829
b. 5, f. 97, reel 4	1830-1839 See also: box 12, folder 170	1830-1839
b. 5, f. 98, reel 4	1840-1843 See also: box 12, folder 170	1840-1843
b. 5, f. 99, reel 4	1844-1850 See also: box 12, folder 170	1844-1850

b. 5, f. 100, reel 4 1852-1877, undated

See also: [box 12, folder 170](#)

1852-1877,
undated

Series III. Cotton Gin Papers, 1794–1959, undated

Series III, COTTON GIN PAPERS, includes material relating to the history of the cotton gin. The bulk of the materials concern either the business partnership of Phineas Miller and Eli Whitney or the patent for the cotton gin. Documents in the series include financial records, notes and memoranda, sketches and drawings, and printed matter. Also included are two volumes of letterbooks for Miller and Whitney. These include copies of business letters as well as of letters from Miller to Whitney. The first volume contains an index to the letters contained therein, but there is no similar index in the second volume.

The material in this series is arranged by record type and is listed in alphabetical order. The series does not include correspondence relating to the cotton gin.

b. 6, f. 101, reel 4	Miller and Whitney account book	1795-1810
b. 6, f. 102, reel 4	Miller and Whitney letterbook	1794 May-1798 June
b. 6, f. 103, reel 4	Miller and Whitney letterbook	1798 February-1803 January
b. 6, f. 104, reel 4	"Memoranda of Ginning Concerns" and letterbook of Eli Whitney (1820-1895)	1797-1799, 1842- 1843
b. 7, f. 105, reel 5	Miller, Phineas: estate papers	1804, 1806, 1818
b. 7, f. 106, reel 5	Financial records, miscellaneous	1806
b. 7, f. 107, reel 5	Newspapers and newspaper clippings See also: box 12, folder 171	1795, 1796, 1802, 1885, 1901, 1923, undated
b. 7, f. 108, reel 5	Patent: notes, remarks	1794, 1804-1812, 1845, undated
b. 7, f. 109, reel 5	Patents: printed matter, general	1805, 1807
b. 7, f. 110, reel 5	Patents: printed matter concerning legislative actions See also: box 12, folder 172	1800-1808
b. 7, f. 111, reel 5	Sketches, drawings, and photographs , n.d. See also: box 12, folder 173	
b. 7, f. 112, reel 5	Translation of a French work on machinery by A. L. Hillhouse , n.d. See also: box 15, folder 187	
b. 7, f. 113, reel 5	Miscellaneous printed matter	1822, 1898, 1915, 1959, undated

Series IV. Firearms Papers, 1801–1915, undated

Series IV, FIREARMS PAPERS, includes papers of both Eli Whitney and his son Eli Whitney, which relate to the production of guns. The bulk of the father's papers is composed of financial records relating to contracts with the government and drawings for machinery and buildings on the mill site. The numerous patents in this series are for improvements in gun manufacture during the tenure of Eli Whitney (1820-1895) as head of the gun factory.

The material in this series is arranged by record type, which is listed in alphabetical order.

b. 8, f. 114, reel 5	Financial papers: general See also: box 15, folder 188	1801–1815, 1821, undated
	Financial papers: account book of armory and personal expenses See: box 13, folder 174	1808-1816
	Financial papers: account book of armory and personal expenses See: box 13, folder 175	1811-1823
b. 8, f. 115, reel 5	Financial papers: "Certificates of Inspection of 10,000 Muskets"	1801-1809
b. 8, f. 116, reel 5	Financial papers: receipts for 10,000 muskets	1801-1809
b. 8, f. 117, reel 5	Financial papers: vouchers for muskets	1815-1824
b. 8, f. 118a, reel 5	Machinery: sketches, plans, drawings , n.d. See also: box 14, folder 176-177 ; box 15, folder 189-200	
b. 8, f. 118b, reel 5	Mill site: sketches, plans, drawings See also: box 14, folder 178 ; box 15, folder 201	1915, undated
b. 8, f. 119, reel 5	Musket production: Eli Whitney; (1765-1825) statement, notes, etc. Patents See: box 14, folder 179	1810, 1816, 1820, undated
b. 8, f. 120, reel 5	Patents	1870-1871
b. 8, f. 121, reel 5	Patents	1872-1874
b. 8, f. 122, reel 5	Patents	1877-1879
b. 8, f. 123, reel 5	Patents	1880-1881
b. 8, f. 124, reel 5	Whitney Arms, Co. See also: box 15, folder 202	1863, 1867
b. 8, f. 125, reel 5	Miscellaneous notes, lists, statements, etc. See also: box 14, folder 180	1862, 1868, 1878– 1881
b. 8, f. 126, reel 5	Miscellaneous printed matter	1803, 1808, 1822, 1823, 1853, 1869, 1885, 1893, 1906, undated

Series V. Personal Papers, 1771–1914, undated

Series V, PERSONAL PAPERS, includes papers of several family members, though the largest quantity of personal papers are those of Eli Whitney (1765-1825). These personal papers include Whitney's student notebooks and other writings from his education at Yale, a copy of a journal Whitney kept while teaching school, financial and legal papers relating to his family in Westborough, Massachusetts, and other records of his personal finances. The series also includes the papers from his estate such as his will and an inventory of his property and biographical sketches composed after his death.

Material in this series is attributed to various family members. The material is arranged by record type. Material of Eli Whitney is arranged at the beginning of the series and is followed by material of other family members. Family members are listed in alphabetical order.

Eli Whitney		
b. 9, f. 127, reel 6	Biographical sketches	1825, 1832, 1886, 1904, 1912, 1914, undated
b. 9, f. 128, reel 6	Account books	1793-1794
b. 9, f. 129, reel 6	Financial papers: checks	1823
b. 9, f. 130, reel 6	Financial and legal papers: general See also: box 14, folder 181	1771–1784, 1806–1814, undated
b. 9, f. 131, reel 6	Financial and legal papers: Jesse Potter See also: box 14, folder 181	1788, 1805–1813, undated
b. 9, f. 132, reel 6	Journal (transcript)	1788-1789
b. 9, f. 133, reel 6	Poems, n.d.	
b. 9, f. 134, reel 6	Porter, Samuel: diary and account book describing tour to the South with Eli Whitney (photocopy)	1803-1808
b. 9, f. 135, reel 6	Portraits	1792
b. 9, f. 136, reel 6	Student papers: "A Dialogue between a Justice and an Attorney"	1784
b. 9, f. 137, reel 6	Student papers: disputes	1789–1792, undated
b. 9, f. 138, reel 6	Student papers: disputes , n.d. See also: box 14, folder 181	
b. 9, f. 139, reel 6	Student papers: essay re life of deceased friend, R. Grant	[1789-1792?]
b. 9, f. 140, reel 6	Student papers: essay on suicide and other writings	1790-1791
b. 9, f. 141, reel 6	Student papers: "Extracts" (short sayings)	[1789-1792?]
b. 9, f. 142, reel 6	Student papers: extracts from essays	[1789-1792?]
b. 9, f. 143, reel 6	Student papers: greek tables	1789
b. 9, f. 144, reel 6	Student papers: mathematical theorems	[1789-1792?]

Eli Whitney (continued)

b. 9, f. 145, reel 6	Student papers: notes on astronomy	[1789-1792?]
b. 9, f. 146, reel 6	Student papers: notebook	[1789-1792?]
b. 9, f. 147, reel 6	Student papers: pocket account book	1787
b. 9, f. 148, reel 6	Student papers: miscellaneous papers	undated
b. 9, f. 149, reel 6	Miscellaneous papers	1795, undated
Eli Whitney estate		
b. 9, f. 150, reel 6	Drafts of will and related documents	1823-1826, undated
b. 9, f. 151, reel 6	Inventory of real and personal estate	1825
b. 10, f. 152, reel 6	Record book	1825-1830, 1839, 1843
Other family members		
b. 10, f. 153, reel 6	Chaplain, C. L. And Chaplain, Francis E. Whitney and family	1842-1844, 1872, 1877-1880
Edwards, Alfred P. See also: box 14, folder 183		
b. 10, f. 154, reel 6	Account book	1825
b. 10, f. 155, reel 6	Bill for sponges	1830
b. 10, f. 156, reel 6	re Percival case-testimony	1826-1827
b. 10, f. 157, reel 7	Scrapbook and Miscellaneous documents	1831-1834, 1847- 1861
b. 10, f. 158, reel 7	Edwards, Pierpont: will	1817
Whitney, Eli		
Letterbook		1842-1843
See: box 6, folder 104		
b. 10, f. 159, reel 7	Financial and legal papers	1844, 1857- 1864, 1871, 1888, undated
b. 10, f. 160, reel 7	Obituary notices	1895
b. 10, f. 161, reel 7	Student papers	1831-1841
b. 11, f. 162, reel 7	Data on lumber	1842
b. 11, f. 163, reel 7	Business diary	1852-1860
b. 11, f. 164, reel 7	Elizabeth Whitney (1819-1854): miscellaneous papers	1842, undated

Other family members (continued)

b. 11, f. 165, reel 7	Henrietta F. (Edwards) Whitney: miscellaneous papers	1861-1865, undated
b. 11, f. 166, reel 7	Miscellaneous papers unidentified	1869, undated

Oversize

b. 12, f. 167, reel 7	Correspondence	1796-1801
b. 12, f. 168, reel 7	Correspondence	1802-1819
b. 12, f. 169, reel 7	Correspondence	1837, 1882
b. 12, f. 170, reel 7	Land records	1784-1856, undated
Cotton gin		
b. 12, f. 171, reel 7	Newspapers and newspaper clippings	1795-1796, 1802, 1885, 1901, 1923, undated
b. 12, f. 172, reel 7	Patents: printed matter concerning legislative actions	1801
b. 12, f. 173, reel 7	Sketches, drawings, and photographs , n.d. See also: box 15, folder 203	
Firearms		
b. 13, f. 174, reel 7	Financial papers: account book of armory and personal expenses	1808-1816
b. 13, f. 175, reel 7	Financial papers: account book of armory and personal expenses	1811-1823
b. 14, f. 176, reel 7	Machinery: sketches, plans, drawings, n.d.	
b. 14, f. 177, reel 7	Machinery: sketches, plans, drawings, n.d.	
b. 14, f. 178, reel 7	Mill site: sketches, plans, drawings	1915, undated
b. 14, f. 179, reel 7	Patents	1858, 1867
b. 14, f. 180, reel 7	Miscellaneous notes, lists, statements, etc.	1862, 1868, 1878- 1881
Personal papers		
b. 14, f. 181, reel 7	Eli Whitney: financial and legal papers; student papers: disputes	1799-1803, 1805-1814, undated
b. 14, f. 182, reel 7	Eli Whitney estate	1825, 1841
b. 14, f. 183, reel 7	Edwards, Alfred P.: permits for sailing	1833
b. 14, f. 184, reel 7	Other family members: miscellaneous, n.d.	

Copy Negatives

Copy negatives have not been filmed.

b. 15, f. 185, reel n/a	From box 1, folder 13
b. 15, f. 186, reel n/a	From box 3, folder 52
b. 15, f. 187, reel n/a	From box 7, folder 112
b. 15, f. 188, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 114
b. 15, f. 189, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 190, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 191, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 192, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 193, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 194, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 195, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 196, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 197, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 198, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 199, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 200, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118a
b. 15, f. 201, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 118b
b. 15, f. 202, reel n/a	From box 8, folder 124

b. 15, f. 203, reel From box 12, folder 173
n/a

Accession 2018-M-0059. Additional material, 1806

b.1 Promissory note to buy a parcel of land in New Haven

1806 February
20

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Assembly-line methods
Business
Businessmen
Cotton gins and ginning
Firearms industry and trade -- United States
Patents -- United States
Plantations -- Georgia
Women -- Southern States

Corporate Bodies

New Haven Water Company
Princeton University -- Students
Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1792

Geographic Names

Georgia -- History -- 1775-1865
New Haven (Conn.) -- Commerce
Southern States -- Economic conditions
United States -- History -- 1783-1865
Westborough (Mass.)

Occupations

Inventors

Names

Blake, Eli W. (Eli Whitney), 1795-1886
Dearborn, Henry, 1751-1829
Edwards, Henry W. (Henry Waggaman),
1779-1847
Fulton, Robert, 1765-1815
Goodrich, James
Greene, Catharine Littlefield, 1755-1814
Hillhouse, James, 1754-1832
Irvine, Callender, 1775-1841
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826
Kollock, Lemuel
Lee, Roswell, 1777-1833
Miller, Phineas, 1764-1803
Stebbins, Josiah, 1766-1829
Wadsworth, Decius, 1768-1821
Whitney, Eli, 1765-1825
Whitney, Eli, 1820-1895
Whitney, Josiah, 1770-1839
Wolcott, Oliver, 1760-1833