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Guide to the John Wilson Papers

OSB MSS 45

by Diane J. Ducharme

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview 3
Requesting Instructions 3
Administrative Information 3
  Immediate Source of Acquisition 3
  Conditions Governing Access 4
  Conditions Governing Use 4
  Preferred Citation 4
  Processing Information 4
JOHN WILSON, 1785-1854 4
Scope and Contents 4
Collection Contents 6
  Series I: Correspondence, 1810-1844 6
    ANDERSON, JAMES 6
    ANDERSON, JOHN 6
    BALLANTYNE, JAMES, 1772-1833 6
    BALLANTYNE, JOHN, 1774-1821 6
    BLAIR, ALEXANDER 6
    BLISS, ROBERT 6
    CONSTABLE, ARCHIBALD, 1774-1827 6
    LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO. 6
    MANNERS AND MILLER 6
    MUNDY AND SLATTER 6
    PARKER, JOSEPH 7
    SMITH, JOHN, JR. 7
    VINCENT, C. 7
    WILSON, JOHN, 1785-1854 7
  Series II: Other Papers, 1811-1812 8
Selected Search Terms 9

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: OSB MSS 45

CREATOR: Wilson, John, 1785-1854

TITLE: John Wilson papers

DATES: 1810-1844

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.41 linear feet (1 box)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of correspondence concerning the publication and subscription sales of Wilson's works, especially his long poem "The Isle of Palms" (1812). In addition to letters between Wilson and the Glasgow booksellers John Smith and Son, there are also letters from subscribers, other booksellers, and customers to John Smith concerning the availability and distribution of the poem, including James and John Ballantyne and Longmans Ltd. The collection also contains a poem by Wilson, "Lines Raised to the memory of the Rev. James Grahame," and a subscription list for "The Isle of Palms."

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.wilsonj

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.wilsonj.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased on the James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Fund, 1974. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The John Wilson Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

John Wilson Papers. James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

This finding aid was produced in part from a previously existing card set in the Manuscripts Catalog, or from another inventory. All pertinent bibliographical information has been retained.

JOHN WILSON, 1785-1854

John Wilson was born in Paisley on May 18, 1785, and was educated at Glasgow University and Magdalen College, Oxford, from which he received his M.A. in 1810. He then took up residence at Elleray in Windermere, married Jane Penny, and devoted himself to writing poetry. *The Isle of Palms, and Other Poems*, was published in 1812.

In 1815 Wilson lost his inheritance due to a relative's mismanagement and returned to Scotland, where he was called to the bar in 1815. But his first interest continued to be literature, and in 1817 he joined with William Blackwood and John Gibson Lockhart to found *Blackwood's Magazine*. An ardent Tory, in 1820 Wilson was appointed to the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University through the support of his political allies. Despite the controversy that greeted his appointment, Wilson won respect as a dedicated and inspiring lecturer.

Wilson continued to be a prolific and frequent contributor to *Blackwood's* until the death of his wife in 1837. Some of his more popular pieces were collected and published as *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* (1822) and *Noctes Ambrosianae*, which appeared posthumously.

Wilson retired from his professorship in 1851 due to ill-health, and died in Edinburgh on April 3, 1854.

Scope and Contents

The John Wilson Papers contain correspondence and a few other papers mostly relating to the publication of Wilson's first book, *The Isle of Palms*. The papers span the dates 1810-1844 and are organized into two series.

Series I, *Correspondence* , is housed in folders 1-26 and arranged alphabetically by correspondent. The majority of the letters are addressed to the Glasgow booksellers John Smith & Son and concern the publication and distribution of *The Isle of Palms*. Correspondents include other booksellers; subscribers to the first edition; and customers of the Glasgow firm. Individual letters have been more fully described in the box and folder listing.

Folders 16-26 contain letters from Wilson himself to John Smith, Jr., who became a friend as well as a business associate. The first 28 letters date from 1810-1812 and are mostly concerned with Wilson's poetry

and his keen interest in all aspects of the publication and sales of his first work. The remainder are briefer but contain personal news, requests for shipments of books and magazines, and occasional comments on Wilson's work for *Blackwood's*.

Series II, *Other Papers* , contains a holograph of Wilson's "Lines Raised to the Memory of the Rev. James Grahame;" copies of sonnets and of "The Endless Stream," all by Wilson; and a copy of the 1812 subscription list for *The Isle of Palms*.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1810-1844

0.30′ (0.75 box)

Series I, *Correspondence*, is alphabetically arranged by correspondent.

	ANDERSON, JAMES	
b. 1, f. 1	2 ALS to John Smith, Jr.; Edinburgh About John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Feb
	ANDERSON, JOHN	
b. 1, f. 2	2 LS (in another hand), to John Smith, Jr.; Edinburgh About the arrival of copies of John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Feb, n.d.
	BALLANTYNE, JAMES, 1772-1833	
b. 1, f. 3	4 LS (in another hand) to John Smith, Jr.; Edinburgh On the printing of John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1811–12
	BALLANTYNE, JOHN, 1774-1821	
b. 1, f. 4	5 LS (in another hand) to John Smith, Jr.; Edinburgh On John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1811–12
	BLAIR, ALEXANDER	
b. 1, f. 5	"To John Wilson" Holograph verse letter.	[1810?]
	BLISS, ROBERT	
b. 1, f. 6	ALS to John Smith, Jr.; Oxford Agrees to be placed on the subscription list of John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Feb 12
	CONSTABLE, ARCHIBALD, 1774-1827	
b. 1, f. 7	ALS to John Smith, Jr.; Edinburgh On John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Feb 18
	LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.	
b. 1, f. 8	ALS to John Smith, Jr.; London On John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Feb 22
	MANNERS AND MILLER	
b. 1, f. 9	2 ALS to John Smith, Jr.; Edinburgh Discusses the sale of John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Mar, Jul
	MUNDY AND SLATTER	

MUNDY AND SLATTER (continued)

b. 1, f. 10	Letter to John Smith, Jr., Oxford On the publication of John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Feb 11
	PARKER, JOSEPH	
b. 1, f. 11	ALS to John Smith, Jr.; Oxford On his subscription to John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1812 Feb 11
	SMITH, JOHN, JR.	
b. 1, f. 12	Letter (draft) to John Ballantyne; Glasgow Discusses John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1811 Oct 2
b. 1, f. 13	ALS to John Wilson; Glasgow On the proofs of John Wilson's *Isle of Palms*.	1811 Oct 17
b. 1, f. 14	8 letters (holograph, draft) to John Wilson; Glasgow Discussing Wilson's publications.	1810-20
	VINCENT, C.	
b. 1, f. 15	ALS to John Smith, Jr.; Oxford Mr. Cooke has no objection to affixing his name to the publication of Mr. Wilson.	1812 Feb 11
	WILSON, JOHN, 1785-1854	
b. 1, f. 16-21	28 ALS to John Smith, Jr., Elleray On the publication of *The Isle of Pines* and personal matters.	1810–12
b. 1, f. 22-26	26 ALS to John Smith, Jr.; Edinburgh Letters discuss his publications and personal life.	1815-44

Series II: Other Papers, 1811-1812

0.11′ (0.25 box)

Series II, *Other Papers*, is arranged alphabetically by title.

b. 1, f. 27	″Lines raised to the memory of the Rev. James Grahame″ Holograph.	[1811 or later]
b. 1, f. 28-29	″Sonnets″ Holograph. With ″The Endless Stream″ and several holograph fragments.	[1811 or later]
b. 1, f. 30	Subscription list for *The Isle of Palms* Manuscript copy. Signed by John Ballantyne, Manners and Miller, Archibald Constable, John Anderson, and William Blackwood.	[1812]

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

Authors and publishers -- Great Britain -- 19th century
Booksellers and bookselling -- Scotland -- Glasgow
Publishers and publishing -- Scotland -- History -- 19th century

Occupations

Booksellers and bookselling -- Scotland

Names

Ballantyne, James, 1772-1833
Ballantyne, John, 1774-1821
Constable, Archibald, 1774-1827
Wilson, John, 1785-1854

Corporate Body

Longman (Firm)

Contributors

Wilson, John, 1785-1854
Smith, John, approximately 1784-1871