

# Guide to the John Cotton Smith Papers

MS 460



compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
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**CALL NUMBER:** MS 460

**CREATOR:** Smith, John Cotton, 1765-1845

**TITLE:** John Cotton Smith papers

**DATES:** 1768-1924

**BULK DATES:** 1781-1865

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 2.5 linear feet

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The papers consist of correspondence and other documents of John Cotton Smith and his family. Material relating to Simeon Smith, Cotton Mather Smith, and William Mather Smith is also included.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0460>

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## 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 <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0460>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](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

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from L. I. Twinem, 1942.

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## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

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## Preferred Citation

John Cotton Smith Papers (MS 460). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

John Cotton Smith, the younger son of the Rev. Cotton Mather Smith (Yale 1751), was born in Sharon, Connecticut, on February 12, 1765. His preparation for College was completed under the Rev. Daniel Brinsmade (Yale 1745), of Judea Society, now Washington, Connecticut.

He graduated from Yale in 1783, and immediately upon graduation he entered on the study of law in the office of the Honorable John Canfield (Yale 1762), in his native village; and the sudden death of his preceptor (in October, 1786), about the time of his admission to the bar, made an opening for his settlement in Sharon from the outset.

He married, on October 29, 1786, Margaret (or Peggy) Evertson, of Amenia, Dutchess County, New York, a neighboring town to Sharon.

In May 1793, he was first chosen to represent the town in the General Assembly; and from 1796 to 1800 he was, without interruption, a member of the Lower House. At the fall session in 1799 he was appointed Clerk; and in both sessions of the following year he occupied the Speaker's chair.

In October, 1800, at an election held to supply a vacancy caused by resignation, he was chosen by the Federalists as a Member of Congress; and he served in that capacity for six years, commanding the respect and winning the confidence of the House and of the country in a time of violent party excitement

He resigned his seat in July, 1806 in order to minister to his father's old age; and did not resume practice at the bar, but devoted himself to the management of his farm and to literary pursuits. But he was again sent to the General Assembly in the fall of the same year, when he was chosen Speaker; and he represented his native town without intermission until 1809, when he was elected to the Upper House. In October, 1809, he was appointed an Associate Judge of the Superior Court; and he reluctantly resigned this position in May, 1811, to accept the place of Lieutenant-Governor. The illness of Governor Roger Griswold (Yale 1780) during the summer of 1812 imposed unusual responsibilities on his subordinate; and the Governor's death, in October of that year, made him Acting-Governor. For the four following years, and until the political revolution of 1817 he was elected to the office of Governor, which he filled with eminent ability and faithfulness.

From this date until his death, he lived upon his estate in his native town, wholly retired from politics. Much of his time was given to religious studies, and to duties connected with various Societies in which he was an officer. He was the first President of the Connecticut Bible Society; in 1826 he was chosen President of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions but resigned the office in 1841 on account of his

infirmities, especially his deafness; the Presidency of the American Bible Society he retained from 1831 until his death.

In 1814 the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred on him by Yale College.

In 1845 he consented to preside at the Alumni meeting in New Haven, on August 20, the day before Commencement; the fatigue of the journey and the excitement of the occasion affected him unfavorably, and after his return home an illness followed, accompanied by extreme suffering, and terminated by his death, on December 7, 1845, in his 81st year.

A Eulogy pronounced before the Connecticut Historical Society in May, 1846, by the Rev. William W. Andrews (Yale 1831), of Kent, Connecticut, was published in 1847, with selections from his correspondence and Miscellanies. His portrait is preserved in the Connecticut Historical Society, and is engraved in Hollister's *History of Connecticut*. A profile by Saint-Mémin is engraved in Marion Harland's *Some Colonial Homesteads*.

Mrs. Smith died on May 10, 1837, aged 72 years.

Their only child was graduated at Yale in 1805.

Governor Smith was a man of spotless purity of character, who dignified and adorned every station to which he was called. His natural endowments were of a superior order, and he was distinguished for the uniform courtesy of his deportment. He was especially happy as a presiding officer over deliberative bodies.

He published: An Oration, pronounced at Sharon, on the Anniversary of American Independence, 4th of July, 1798. Litchfield. 8°, pp. 23. He also contributed to the first volume of *Memoirs* of the Connecticut Academy of Sciences, New-Haven, 1810 (pp. 81-82), An Account of the Whitten Plaster. His Address at the Alumni Meeting of Yale College, 1845, was printed in the *New Englander*, vol. 3, pp. 624-626 (October, 1845).

After his death was published: The Correspondence and Miscellanies of the Hon. John Cotton Smith, LL.D... with an Eulogy before the Connecticut Historical Society at New Haven, May 27th, 1846, by the Rev. William W. Andrews. New York, 1847. 12°, pp. 328. Extracts from his letters to his classmate Daggett in 1800-02 were printed in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1887, iv, 375-78.

Franklin B. Dexter, *Yale College Biographical Sketches*, volume 4, pages 307-10.

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## Scope and Contents

The John Cotton Smith Papers consist of five inches of correspondence and other papers of John Cotton Smith (1765-1845; Y. 1783) and other members of his family. Most of the letters are to Smith from men who shared his political and religious interests, principally Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826) and John Davenport, Jr. (1752-1830; Y. 1770). But the papers from his governorship are mainly letters of transmittal; his major correspondence from that period is in the Connecticut Historical Society, and some of it has been published in the Society's *Collections*. The correspondence of other members of the family has two principal components: letters from college officers to William Mather Smith about bills for his sons John C. (1810-79; Y. 1830) and Gilbert L. (1814-37; Y. 1832x) and the misconduct that led to Gilbert's dismissal, 1827-30; and letters from John Cotton Smith (1810-79), U. S. Minister Resident to Bolivia, to his parents, 1858-59. Among the other papers is a copy of a college diary of John Cotton Smith (1765-1845). The original is in the Connecticut Historical Society.

The papers are arranged chronologically.

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## Collection Contents

Simeon Smith		
b. 1, f. 1	Deed from Phinehas Baldwin	1768
	Legal paper signed by John Cotton Smith	1792
b. 1, f. 2	Cotton Mather Smith: letters to John Cotton Smith [copies]	1781-1785, 1798
John Cotton Smith		
b. 1, f. 3	Diary [copy]	1782 November-1783 March
b. 1, f. 4	Correspondence	1783-1785
b. 1, f. 5 - 7	Jedidiah Morse letters to Smith A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1784-1786
b. 1, f. 8 - 9	Correspondence	1789-1796
b. 1, f. 10	"Washington in 1800 with a brief notice of the first session of Congress in that city" [by Smith?] English A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	[1800?]
b. 1, f. 11 - 12	Correspondence	1800-1813
b. 1, f. 13	Letters of transmittal regarding exchange of state statutes	1813-1815
b. 1, f. 14	Letters of transmittal and acknowledgment regarding constitutional amendments	1814-1816
b. 1, f. 15 - 18	Correspondence	1814-1830
William Mather Smith		
b. 1, f. 19 - 25	Correspondence	1827-1845
b. 1, f. 26	"Uncle John's Fourth of July Address in Amenia" English	1857
John Cotton Smith (1810-1879)		
b. 1, f. 27	Passport and certificate of appointment	1858
b. 1, f. 28 - 29	Letters to his parents	1858-1859
b. 1, f. 30	Robert Clinton Geer: letters to his father, Robert A. Geer	1864-1865
John Cotton Smith (1810-1879)		

b. 1, f. 31	Lock of hair	1879
	Engraving	undated
	Coat of arms	undated
b. 1, f. 32	Inventories and correspondence regarding loan of family silver to the Connecticut Society of the Colonial Dames of America	1895-1919
b. 1, f. 33	Miscellaneous papers	1909-1924, undated
b. 1, f. 34	Genealogical notes	undated
b. 2	Richard Storrs: letter to John Cotton Smith	1784

## **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**

Clergy  
Lawyers

### **Geographic Names**

Bolivia -- Description and travel  
Connecticut -- Governors  
Latin America  
United States -- Foreign relations  
United States -- Politics and government

### **Genres / Formats**

Diaries

### **Occupations**

Legislators  
Politicians

### **Names**

Geer, Robert A.  
Geer, Robert Clinton  
Morse, Jedidiah, 1761-1826  
Smith, Cotton-Mather, 1731-1806  
Smith, John Cotton, 1765-1845  
Smith, Simeon  
Smith, William Mather  
Storrs, Richard Salter, 1763-1819

### **Families**

Smith family

### **Corporate Body**

Yale University -- Students