

# Guide to the Cogswell Family Papers

MS 141



compiled by Mary C. LaFogg

January 1978

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
(203) 432-1735  
(203) 432-7441  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 141

**CREATOR:** Cogswell family

**TITLE:** Cogswell family papers

**DATES:** 1740-1924

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 2 linear feet (4 boxes, 1 folio)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The papers of nine members of the Cogswell family and related branches, spanning nearly 200 years, are included in this collection. The principal elements are three sets of correspondence: the letters between the Reverend James Cogswell and his son, James, which deal with the son's experiences as a surgeon during the American Revolution; the correspondence of Harriet Broome Cogswell Mott and her husband, Robert Willis Mott, largely made up of courtship letters, 1817-1819, but also including a detailed letter on preparations for the winter of 1823; and the correspondence between Stella Mott Onderdonk and her husband, William Handy Onderdonk, also largely courtship letters, 1839-1843. Their correspondence of later years includes a description by William Onderdonk of a trip to Cuba in 1865. Miscellaneous family items are comprised of a will, school certificates, diaries, clippings, and other memorabilia.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0141>

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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.0141>.

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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

Gift of Mrs. Vernon Mann Simonds, 1941.

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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

Cogswell Family Papers (MS 141). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

### JAMES COGSWELL, 1720-1807

James Cogswell, the youngest son of Samuel and Ann Denison Cogswell, was born in Saybrook, Connecticut, January 6, 1720. His family moved to Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1724, and Cogswell spent his youth in that town. He graduated from Yale with the Class of 1742. After graduation, he studied theology with the Reverend Solomon Williams and on December 28, 1774, Cogswell became the pastor of the church at Canterbury, Connecticut. He remained at Canterbury for twenty-seven years.

During those years he married and raised his family. On April 24, 1745, Cogswell married Alice Fitch (1725-1772). James and Alice Cogswell had five children: James (1746-1792), Alice (1749-1772), Samuel (1754-1790), Mason Fitch (1761-1830) and Septimus (1769-1773).

Reverend Cogswell resigned his pastorate at Canterbury on November 5, 1771. The following February he accepted the office of pastor at Scotland Parish, in Windham, Connecticut. Two months later, Alice Fitch Cogswell died. A year later, Reverend Cogswell married Martha Lothrop Devotion (1715?-1795). She was the widow of Cogswell's predecessor in Windham, the Reverend Ebenezer Devotion. After twenty-two years of marriage, Martha died on December 6, 1795. On May 5, 1797, Cogswell married Irene Ripley Hebard [Hibbard?] (d. 1804).

Upon Irene's death in 1804, Cogswell resigned his ministerial duties at Scotland and retired to his son Mason's home in Hartford, Connecticut. He died there on January 2, 1807.

\* \* \* \* \*

### JAMES COGSWELL, 1746-1792

James Cogswell, the oldest son of James and Alice Fitch Cogswell, was born in Canterbury, Connecticut, on July 31, 1746. He studied medicine and began his practice in Preston, Connecticut. The American Revolution

interrupted his career. Cogswell served as army surgeon at Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the battle of Bunker Hill.

On August 8, 1776, he married Elizabeth Davenport (1756-1779). They settled in Stamford, Connecticut. James and Elizabeth Cogswell had one child, Alice (1777-1850). As the war progressed, Cogswell was again called upon to aid the patriot cause with his services. During the years 1776 and 1777, he was assigned as regimental surgeon to General Gold Selleck Silliman, who was on duty at New York with the Connecticut militia. While at New York, Cogswell's younger brother, Mason Fitch, served as his assistant.

Elizabeth Cogswell died on November 15, 1779. When the war ended, Cogswell returned to Stamford. He married Abigail Lloyd (1751-1830) on May 18, 1783. The Cogswells subsequently moved to New York. They had four children: James Lloyd (1784-1831), Sarah Lloyd (b. 1786), John Lloyd (1789-1831) and Harriet Broome (1790-1843).

Cogswell continued his medical practice at New York with Mason Fitch serving as his assistant. For a time they both maintained an apothecary business. James Cogswell contracted yellow fever while attending a stricken patient; he died on November 20, 1792.

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#### SAMUEL COGSWELL, 1754-1790

Samuel Cogswell, son of James and Alice Fitch Cogswell, was born in Canterbury, Connecticut, on May 23, 1754. His father prepared him for college, and he graduated from Yale in 1777.

Cogswell joined the Continental Army and fought throughout the Revolution. He remained with his brigade until November, 1783. After the war ended, Cogswell began a mercantile business in Lansingburg, New York.

In 1784, he married Mary Backus. Samuel and Mary Cogswell had three children: Mason Backus (1787-1790), James Fitch (1789-1862) and Maria (1790-1870). Cogswell's business was unsuccessful, and he had to give it up. He then decided to study medicine. Before he could embark upon a new career, he was killed in a hunting accident on August 20, 1790.

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#### MASON FITCH COGSWELL, 1761-1830

Mason Fitch Cogswell, son of James and Alice Fitch Cogswell, was born in Canterbury, Connecticut, on September 28, 1761. He graduated from Yale College in 1780. His chosen profession was medicine. Mason served as assistant to his brother James, both during the Revolutionary War and afterwards at New York.

In 1789, Mason opened his own practice in Hartford, Connecticut, where he soon distinguished himself as a surgeon. He pioneered the technique of removing a cataract from the eye by extracting it whole, rather than breaking it, as had been done until that time.

On April 13, 1800, he married Mary Austin Ledyard (1775-1849). Mason and Mary Cogswell had five children: Mary Austin (1801-1868), Elizabeth (1803-1856), Alice (1805-1830), Mason Fitch (1809-1865) and Catharine Ledyard (1811-1882).

It was through an affliction which rendered his daughter Alice deaf and dumb, when she was six years old, that Dr. Cogswell made another significant contribution to medicine. Largely because of Cogswell's influence, Thomas Gallaudet visited Paris, where he learned as much as he could about the work taking place in France to educate children handicapped by deafness. Gallaudet returned to America in 1816, with an assistant, Laurent Clerc. Shortly afterwards, Gallaudet, Clerc and Cogswell established the Hartford Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb as the first institution of its kind in the United States.

Cogswell remained active in the medical profession throughout his life. He served as president of the Connecticut Medical Society from 1812 to 1822. Cogswell died in Hartford on December 10, 1830.

Please note that the bulk of the Mason Fitch Cogswell Papers are in the Beinecke Rare Book Library. The Laurent Clerc Papers are in Manuscripts and Archives. Consult Orbis and the reference staff for further information.

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#### ALICE COGSWELL FISHER, 1777-1850

Alice Cogswell Fisher, daughter of James and Elizabeth Davenport Cogswell, was born in Stamford, Connecticut, June 15, 1777. She married Samuel Fisher (1777-1856) on August 22, 1805. For the first five years of their marriage they resided in Wilton, Connecticut. In 1812, they moved to Morristown, New Jersey. Finally, in 1816, they settled in Paterson, New Jersey.

Samuel and Alice Fisher had six children: Elizabeth D. (1806-1871), James Cogswell (1808-1880), Catherine Avery (b. 1810), Harriet Cogswell (1812-1831), Samuel Ware (1814-1874) and Mary D. (1817-1865). Alice Cogswell died in Orange, New Jersey, on May 9, 1850.

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#### JAMES LLOYD COGSWELL, 1784-1832

James Lloyd Cogswell, son of James and Abigail Lloyd Cogswell, was born in Stamford, Connecticut, on April 26, 1784. He married Sarah Burr Sherwood (1788-1830) on May 2, 1819. They resided at Lloyd's Neck, Long Island. James and Sarah Cogswell had three children: Sarah B. (1820-1875), James A. (1822-1837) and Mary Ledyard (1824-1841). James Lloyd Cogswell died on January 5, 1832.

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#### JOHN LLOYD COGSWELL, 1789-1831

John Lloyd Cogswell, son of James and Abigail Lloyd Cogswell, was born in New York City, in 1789. He served in the United States Army during the War of 1812. On October 31, 1821, he married Love B. Coffin (1792-1857). They resided at Lloyd's Neck, Long Island. John and Love Cogswell had five children: John T. (1823-1866), Charlotte Broome (b. 1825), Samuel F. (1827-1858), Alice Fisher (b. 1829) and Mason Fitch (1830-1832). John Lloyd Cogswell died on April 13, 1831.

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#### HARRIET BROOME COGSWELL MOTT, 1790-1843

Harriet Broome Cogswell Mott, daughter of James and Abigail Lloyd Cogswell, was born in New York City on March 6, 1790. She married Robert Willis Mott (d. 1846) on September 17, 1819. They resided at Great Neck, Long Island, and had one child; Harriet Stella (1820-1902?). Harriet Cogswell Mott died on September 6, 1843.

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#### HARRIET STELLA MOTT ONDERDONK, 1820-1902?

Harriet Stella Mott Onderdonk, daughter of Robert and Harriet Cogswell Mott, was born September 13, 1820. On June 7, 1843, she married William Handy Onderdonk (1820-1882), son of Bishop Benjamin T. Onderdonk of New York. The Onderdonks resided at Great Neck, Long Island.

William H. Onderdonk, a prominent lawyer, was a member of the bar of Queens County, New York. William and Harriet Onderdonk had two children: Harriet Cogswell (1844-1881) and Robert Mott (1846-1857). William H. Onderdonk died December 11, 1882.

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## Scope and Contents

The Cogswell Family Papers, 1740 to 1902, consist of family and business correspondence, documents, writings and other papers to, from and relating to the Cogswell family of Connecticut and the collateral

and descendant families of Lloyd, Woolsey, Hillhouse, Fisher, Mott and Onderdonk. The central figures in this collection are:

James Cogswell (1720-1807)

James Cogswell (1746-1792)

Samuel Cogswell (1754-1790)

Mason Fitch Cogswell (1761-1830)

Alice Cogswell Fisher (1777-1850)

James Lloyd Cogswell (1784-1832)

John Lloyd Cogswell (1789-1831)

Harriet Broome Cogswell Mott (1790-1843)

Harriet Stella Mott Onderdonk (1820-1902?)

Arranged chronologically, the Cogswell family correspondence represented in these papers is composed of three principal exchanges: 1) correspondence of the Reverend James Cogswell and his son Dr. James Cogswell, 2) correspondence of Harriet Broome Cogswell Mott and her husband, Robert Willis Mott and 3) correspondence of Harriet Stella Mott Onderdonk and her husband, William Handy Onderdonk. Letters of five generations of Cogswells and related family members appear throughout the correspondence as well.

The correspondence for the years 1740 to 1808 consists mainly of letters to and from Reverend James Cogswell (1720-1807) and his son, Dr. James Cogswell (1746-1792). Dr. James Cogswell was an army surgeon during the American Revolution, and the letters of that period deal with his experiences during the war. Other family members whose letters appear in the correspondence for 1740 to 1808 include Abigail Lloyd Cogswell, Samuel Cogswell and Mason Fitch Cogswell.

The second segment of correspondence, covering the years 1809 to 1846, is largely that of Harriet Broome Cogswell Mott and her husband, Robert Willis Mott. Their courtship letters comprise the bulk of the correspondence for the years 1817 to 1819. The correspondence from 1809 to 1846 also contains business letters between Robert and his brother, William Mott. Among the family correspondents of this period are Abigail Lloyd Cogswell, Mason Fitch Cogswell, Sarah Lloyd Cogswell, Alice Cogswell and Charlotte Broome Cogswell. Throughout the years 1820 to 1843 there are letters exchanged by Harriet and Robert Mott. In one letter of particular interest (5 November 1823), Robert Mott wrote to his wife describing the preparations he wanted her to make at home for the coming winter months in his absence.

In the final segment of correspondence, 1839 to 1902, the chief correspondents are Harriet Stella Mott Onderdonk and her husband, William Handy Onderdonk. Their letters throughout their four year engagement comprise the bulk of the correspondence between the years 1839 to 1843. The Onderdonks were often separated from each other because of family or business trips, and the correspondence after 1843 reflects this. Of special interest is William Onderdonk's description of a trip he took to Cuba in 1865. The correspondence after 1846 is somewhat sketchy, but includes letters of other family members, among them, Samuel F. Cogswell, Charlotte Broome Cogswell and Robert M. Onderdonk. The last section of papers, one manuscript box, includes writings, wills, documents and other papers relating to the family members.

The Cogswell Family Papers were a gift of Mrs. Vernon Mann Simonds to the Yale University Library in 1941.

Additional biographical information may be found in Ephraim A. Jameson's *The Cogswells in America* and in *Yale Biographies and Annals*, by Franklin B. Dexter. There are a number of other collections in Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, which contain additional material on the Cogswell family. Please consult Orbis and the reference staff. The Mason Fitch Cogswell Papers are at the Beinecke Rare Book Library.

## Collection Contents

### Series I: CORRESPONDENCE AND OTHER PAPERS, 1740-1924

The papers are arranged within one series: CORRESPONDENCE AND OTHER PAPERS. The correspondence, in three manuscript boxes, is arranged chronologically, 1740 to 1902. The final box of miscellaneous papers is arranged chronologically, 1765 to 1924.

b. 1, f. 1-15	1740 - 1818 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.	1740 - 1818
b. 2, f. 16-33	1819-1838, 1839 January - Nov, 1840 February - Jun, 1840 September - December 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.	1819-1838, 1839 January - Nov, 1840 February - Jun, 1840 September - December
b. 3, f. 34-45	1841-1860, 1863-1886, 1896-1902	1841-1860, 1863-1886, 1896-1902
b. 3, f. 46-47	undated	undated
b. 4, f. 48	B.A. diploma awarded to Henry Lloyd	1765 May 21
b. 4, f. 49	Will of Abigail Woolsey	1770 April 4
b. 4, f. 50	Epistle to Mr. Joseph Lancaster on the Royal British System of Education by S. Whitchurch	1809 December
b. 4, f. 51	Poetry, author unknown	Circa 1809-1830
b. 4, f. 52	Farm journal and agricultural observations, Robert W. Mott	1823
b. 4, f. 53	Composition book, author unknown	Circa 1830-1840
b. 4, f. 54	Miscellaneous programs	1837, 1838, undated
	Book of lithographs with pencil sketches, author and date unknown See: <a href="#">box 4, folder 63</a>	
b. 4, f. 55	Certification of William H. Onderdonk as counsellor at law in the state of New York	1846 May 15
b. 4, f. 56	Certification of William H. Onderdonk as attorney in the state of New York	1858 July 14
b. 4, f. 57	Thermometer record [H. S. Onderdonk?]	1877-1882
b. 4, f. 58	Journal, author unknown	1904 April-November



b. 4, f. 59	<i>Father and Daughter: A Collection of Cogswell Family Letters and Diaries</i> , edited by Grace Cogswell Root English	1924 August
b. 4, f. 60	"An Hieroglyphic Epistle in Answer to That Lately Reciev'd from Pandemonium" [Harriet (Mott) Onderdonk?] English	undated
b. 4, f. 61	Medical remedies, Henry Mott	undated
	Certification of William H. Onderdonk as attorney in the Supreme Court of the state of New York. 1842 May 13 See: <a href="#">box 4, folder 63</a>	
b. 4, f. 62	Notebooks, reflections, author unknown	undated
b. 4, f. 63	Newspaper clippings	undated
b. 5	Oversize material	

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## 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

Courtship  
Families  
Home economics  
Physicians

### Geographic Names

Cuba -- Description and travel  
Latin America  
United States -- History -- Colonial period, ca.  
1600-1775  
United States -- History -- Revolution,  
1775-1783

### Genres / Formats

Diaries

### Names

Cogswell, James, 1720-1807  
Cogswell, James, 1746-1792  
Cogswell, James Lloyd, 1784-1832  
Cogswell, John Lloyd, 1789-1831  
Cogswell, Mason Fitch, 1761-1830  
Cogswell, Samuel, 1754-1790  
Fisher, Alice Cogswell, 1777-1850  
Mott, Harriet Broome Cogswell, 1790-1843  
Onderdonk, Harriet Stella Mott, 1820-1902?

### Families

Cogswell family