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Manuscripts and Archives

Guide to the Jay Family Papers

MS 917

July 2008

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 917

CREATOR: Jay family

TITLE: Jay family papers

DATES: 1772-1901

BULK DATES: 1801–1901

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.25 linear feet (3 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Papers of five generations of the descendants of John Jay, chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, through his eldest son, Peter Augustus Jay. John Jay is represented by nine letters beginning in 1801 at the time of his retirement. These chiefly discuss his health and family matters. Early legal papers include several documents regarding the manumission and sale of slaves in the possession of the family. The correspondence (1801-1805) of Peter A. Jay, particularly with the political philosopher, Augustus Brevoort Woodward, discusses contemporary politics in the emerging republic. Peter Jay's family letters discuss personal matters and describe the epidemics between 1819 and 1836 in New York City, where he worked as a lawyer. The letters of his daughter, Mary Rutherfurd Jay Prime, are interesting for their description of social life in New York City in the 1820s and 1830s. Several Civil War letters to her daughter, Mary Rutherfurd Prime, are also in the papers. The largest volume of papers was left by the fifth generation and consist entirely of school materials of John Jay (1875-1928, Yale 1898) and trace his career at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire and his college years at Yale (1894-1898). Included are correspondence, poetry, course notebooks, printed memorabilia and photographs.

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Requesting Instructions

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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

Gifts from Mrs. Stephen Landon, 1944, Margaret Rutherfurd Jay, after 1928, Whitehead Duyckinck, Pierre Jay, Thomas M. Debevoise, and Mrs. Roger Connolly.

Custodial History

The early family letters seem to have been collected by Peter A. Jay, since they include numerous drafts of letters by him. After his death, apparently, they passed to his daughter, Mary Rutherfurd (Jay) Prime. A note from her daughter, Mary Rutherfurd Prime, states that the latter received them from her father, Frederick Prime, in 1883.

The papers were given to Yale in piecemeal fashion, beginning in 1932. Most of the papers arranged as "Jay Family: general" , approximately 160 items, were the gift of Mrs. Stephen Landon in 1944.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Jay Family Papers (MS 917). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Related Materials

Additional papers of Mary (Duyckinck) Jay, including materials concerning the Jays and further materials concerning the manumission of her slaves, are in the Duyckinck Family Papers, Manuscript Group No. 1059.

The papers of John's brother, Pierre Jay (1870-1949; Yale 1892), mostly concerning his reparation payments work in Berlin in the 1920s, are a separate collection, Manuscript Group No. 660.

Biographical / Historical

John Jay (1745-1829): chief justice of the United States Supreme Court and governor of New York.

Peter Augustus Jay: B.A., Columbia, 1794; admitted to the bar, 1797, and formed a partnership with Peter Jay Munro; transmitted the document for the Louisiana Purchase from France to U.S.; held many political posts in New York.

John Jay: B.A., Yale, 1898; involved in banking and brokerage firms in New York.

Scope and Contents

These papers consist of family letters and other papers, representing five generations of the Jay family of New York City and Westchester County, New York. Families related by marriage include the Banyer, Clarkson, Dawson, Dubois, Livingston, Prime and Rutherfurd families. In addition, there are references in the letters to the Jays' illustrious neighbors and acquaintances, including James Fenimore Cooper (in letters 1826-35), Caroline Le Roy (especially in 1829, when she became Daniel Webster's second wife), and the Clinton, Stuyvesant and Van Rennselaer families. The papers of the first four generations of Jays (circa 175 items, 1772-1901) are organized chronologically under the heading "Jay Family: general." These papers include correspondence --mostly exchanges between family members -- and a few manuscripts, clippings, and legal and financial papers.

The earliest and most important figure in the papers is John Jay (1745-1829), chief justice of the United States and governor of New York. Letters to and from him (in "Jay Family: general") begin in 1801, at the time of his retirement from public life and removal to Bedford, N.Y. Apart from a brief discussion of this transition, his nine letters (1801-05) to his son Peter concern errands and family matters, with only infrequent comments on national events. There is also a draft of a letter (1805 May 2) which he wrote as churchwarden of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Bedford and North Castle, asserting "the Rights of the Laity" in regard to the calling of a priest. After 1805, family letters occasionally speak of John Jay's health, but the collection contains no further materials produced by him.

Other early papers include a bill of sale for a Jay family slave (1794), and several papers concerning John Jay's sister-in-law, Mary (Duyckinck) Jay (1736-1824); a receipt and a resolution of thanks for her donation of silver plate to Christ Church, Rye (1818), and three documents regarding the manumission of two of her slaves, in accordance with her will (1824).

The second generation is represented in the papers by John's eldest son, Peter A. Jay (1776-1843), and by his second daughter, Maria (Jay) Banyer (1782-1856). The letters to and from Maria, who remained in Bedford, often report on her father's health. Peter's early letters (1801-05) are frequently concerned with politics, and at times reflect a distrust of the Republic as well as the Republicans--due, perhaps, to his father's experience. Shortly after John Jay's retirement, in a letter (1801 Jun 17) to his friend, the political philosopher Augustus Brevoort Woodward (1774-1827), Peter speculates on the possibility that America will suffer a revolution like that in France, and seeks to qualify Woodward's faith in common sense. Other Woodward letters (one letter to Peter, 1801, and drafts of eight letters from Peter, 1801-05) discuss natural science and the legal profession as well as politics. In other correspondence during these years, Peter speaks of his poor health and of various treatments, including travel--to Italy and France in 1803, and to Bermuda in 1804. Two letters, 1805, refer to the shooting of Alexander Hamilton by Aaron Burr.

Peter Jay's later letters (1816-37), mostly to family members, are more concerned with local and family news, and seldom discuss politics or Jay's work as a lawyer in New York City. In letters ranging from 1819 to 1836, he writes of the epidemics of yellow fever, smallpox, cholera, influenza and measles which struck the city. There are two personal notes (1824, 1827) to Peter and his wife, Mary Rutherfurd (Clarkson) Jay, from the Rev. John Stanford (1754-1834), a well-known prison chaplain and reformer.

Most of the papers from the third generation concern Peter's second child, Mary Rutherfurd (Jay) Prime (l810-1835). Her chief correspondents are three aunts, Maria (Jay) Banyer in Bedford, N.Y., and Mary and Louisa M. Rutherfurd in Edgerston, N.J. The aunts were especially interested in Mary's social life,

and, in letters beginning in 1825, they slyly tease and question her. This bantering tone rises to a climax in 1829, when Mary became engaged to Frederick Prime (1807-1887), a lawyer in New York City; after their marriage, the aunts' letters begin to inquire after Mary's younger sisters more frequently. Besides courtship-- which in Mary's social class involved "beaux" paying visits to "belles", and balls and costume balls--the letter discuss fashion, society gossip, and current reading; and sometimes turn easily from these topics to pious reflections. The aunts often refer wistfully to the excitements of Mary's metropolitan life, and contrast their country existence--lamenting its dullness, but trying to tempt Mary to visit them for the sake of healthful air or sleighing.

Another major subject of discussion, in Mary's and other letters from the 1820s and 1830s, is travel, particularly to vacation spots. Besides several tours of New York state, various correspondents write of Montreal; Philadelphia and other parts of Pennsylvania; Baltimore; Washington,D.C.; White Sulphur Springs, Virginia; Charleston, S.C.; England; and Italy.

Also represented in the papers of the third generation is John Jay (1817-1894), a prominent lawyer and diplomat, and son of Peter's brother, William Jay. There are two letters by him (1875, 1886). The more important one is to Thomas McElrath (1807-1888), concerning their "most difficult labours" together in 1873, in connection with the U. S. Commission to the International Exhibition in Vienna.

There are fewer letters from the fourth generation. The central figure here is Mary Rutherfurd Prime (born 1830), eldest daughter of Mary Rutherfurd (Jay) and Frederick Prime. The few Civil War papers include a letter to her (1861 May 18) from Gen. Lorenzo Thomas (1804-1875), regarding the presentation of a regimental standard made by the Primes and other ladies.

The material from the fifth generation, which constitutes the bulk of the collection, consists entirely of school materials of John Jay (1875-1928; Yale 1898), nephew of Mary Rutherfurd Prime and grandson of Peter A. Jay's eldest son, John Clarkson Jay. These materials, which document John's high school education at St. Paul's School, Concord, N.H. (1889-94) as well as his college years at Yale (1894-98), are arranged under the heading "John Jay, 1875-1928." They include schoolboy correspondence, poetry, course notebooks, letters to the *Yale Alumni Weekly* with news of alumni, printed memorabilia and photographs.

Collection Contents

	Jay Family: general	
	1772 English See: Oversize, box 3 folder 41	1772
b. 1, f. 1	1782, 1790, 1794	1782, 1790, 1794
b. 1, f. 2-8	1801-1805	1801-1805
	1801 English See also: Oversize, box 3 folder 41	1801
b. 1, f. 9	1814, 1816-1819	1814, 1816-1819
b. 1, f. 10-27	1822-1836	1822-1836
b. 1, f. 28	1837-1838, 1846-1847, 1856	1837-1838, 1846-1847, 1856
b. 1, f. 29	1861, [1863?], 1875, 1883, 1885-87, 1901	1861, [1863?], 1875, 1883, 1885-87, 1901
	John Jay, 1875-1928	
b. 1, f. 30	Printed letter from St. Paul's School, Concord, N.H.	1892
b. 1, f. 30	Poems: mss	1893-1894, undated
b. 1, f. 31	Notebooks kept at St. Paul's School: English, French, Greek Composition, Old Testament History; Roman History	1892-1894, undated
b. 1, f. 32	Certificates received from St. Paul's School	1891-1894
	St. Paul's School See also: Oversize, box 3 folders 42-43	
b. 2, f. 33	Correspondence	Circa 1894-1898
b. 2, f. 33	Notices, clippings re: Kappa Psi	1895-1896
	Yale Alumni Weekly	
b. 2, f. 34	Letters from alumni	1894-1896
b. 2, f. 35	Postal cards from alumni	1895
	Notebooks kept at Yale College	
b. 2, f. 36	American History (Prof. Edward Gaylord Bourne?])	1897-1898?
b. 2, f. 37	American History-Constitutional (Prof. Charles Henry Smith)	Circa 1894-1898

Notebooks kept at Yale College (continued)

b. 2, f. 38	Asiatic History (Mr. Frederick Wells Williams)	1894-1898
b. 2, f. 38	English Constitutional History (Prof. George Burton Adams)	1897-1898
b. 2, f. 39	Logic and Psychology (Profs. George Martin Duncan, George Trumbull Ladd)	1894-1898
b. 2, f. 39	Mathematics	Circa 1894-1898
b. 2, f. 40	Philosophy	Circa 1894-1898
b. 2, f. 40	Science of Society (Prof. William Graham Sumner?)	1897-1898
b. 2, f. 40	Digest in Societology [printed course handout?]	1897-1898
	Oversize	
b. 3, f. 41	Jay Family: general	1772, 1801
	John Jay, 1875-1928	
b. 3, f. 42	Scrapbook of printed matter and photographs, kept at St. Paul's School	1889-1898
b. 3, f. 43	Photographs of groups of students of St. Paul's School	1890-1894, undated

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

Burr-Hamilton Duel, Weehawken, N.J., 1804
Courtship
Epidemics -- New York (State) -- New York
Families
Lawyers
Slavery -- United States

Geographic Names

New York (N.Y.) -- Social life and customs
New York (State)
United States -- Politics and government -- 1789-1815

Names

Banyer, Maria Jay, 1781-1856
Jay, John, 1817-1894
Jay, John, 1875-1928
Jay, Peter A. (Peter Augustus), 1776-1843
Prime, Mary Rutherfurd, b. 1830
Prime, Mary Rutherfurd Jay, 1810-1835
Woodward, Augustus B. (Augustus Brevoort), 1774-1827

Families

Jay family

Corporate Bodies

St. Paul's School (Concord, N.H.)
Yale College (1887-). Class of 1898
Yale University -- Students