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ACCESSION SHEET

Accession # 86 M 66

Location

C20-M-3/4
CHARTER CASE

Title. Conewago Canal Company. Records

Approximate inclusive dates 1788-1820

Date of receipt April 7, 1986

Received from Samuel J. Hough, The
Owl at the Bridge

Volume on arrival 30 boxes, 2 rolls, 4 vols. 5.5 lineal ft.

Number of boxes (after reboxing) 25 boxes, 1FB 4.5 lineal ft.

Condition Good

Restrictions N/A

Description

(SEE SEPARATE SHEETS)

Special Formats ☐ Photographs ☐ Maps ☐ Audio Tapes ☐ Films ☐ Graphics
☐ Artifacts ☐ Machine-readable records
☐ Other (list) _____

Temporary catalog card added entries
(SEE SEPARATE SHEET)

Accessioned by John D. Stinson

Date 4/15/87

ACCESSION SHEET

Conewago Canal Company

DESCRIPTION

The Conewago Canal Company was founded in 1792 by a group of seventeen Pennsylvanian investors led by Robert Morris (1734-1806) on the Susquehanna River at Conewago Falls near Columbia, Lancaster Co., Pennsylvania. Other founders included William Bingham (1752-1804), Alexander James Dallas (1759-1817), John Donaldson, Tench Francis (1730-1800), Henry Miller (1751-1824), Timothy Matlack (1730-1829), Samuel Meredith (1741-1817), and William Smith, (1727-1803). The proposal to build a canal stemmed from the realization that the growth of commerce and industry and the opening of the western lands depended upon the making of improvements in roads and inland navigation.

The Conewago Canal was the first venture of its kind to have the support of the State Legislature. The original agreement between the Company and Thomas Mifflin (1744-1800), Governor of Pennsylvania, authorized the "cutting, establishing and maintaining" of a canal with locks at Conewago Falls such that "...all persons...and their freight may thence-forth at all seasons...pass and repass...free of toll". Construction of the canal began immediately under the supervision of the engineer, James Brindley, who laid out the plans and directed the work of the laborers, stonecutters, carpenters and other workmen. The construction progressed slowly for the Company was plagued by financial difficulties. The original appropriation by the Legislature proved woefully inadequate and the shareholders were forced to rely upon themselves for funding. Some had become insolvent and were unable to pay up their subscriptions, while others were unwilling to do so since the original contract offered so few advantages.

In 1795 Samuel Meredith replaced Robert Morris as president, and Thomas Willing Francis replaced his father, Tench Francis, as treasurer. Subsequently the burden of financing the canal rested mainly upon Thomas Willing Francis, Philadelphia merchant (Willing & Francis) who raised funds by issuing his personal notes to brokers. The locks were officially opened in November of 1797 in a ceremony attended by the Governor. In 1804 the Legislature authorized the collection of a toll on the canal to help defray the costs of its maintenance.

In 1800 all but abandoned by its shareholders the Company was sold at a sheriff's auction to a purchaser (Charles Willing Hare) who represented Francis. Having become by this maneuver sole proprietor Francis proceeded to develop his property by establishing there a grist mill, distillery, and saw mill, and in 1804 he entered into partnership with Abraham Singer for the management of these properties. In 1809 Francis, Singer and others obtained permission from the Legislature to form the York and Conewago Turnpike Road Company in order to build a road from York to the head of the Conewago Falls. This road combined with the one already begun between York and Baltimore promised to open up the lucrative Baltimore markets to the produce of Western Pennsylvania. Finally, in a further attempt to enhance their investments, Francis and other investors including Caleb Kirk, John Greer and David Cassat formed the York Haven Company and petitioned the

Conewago Canal Company

DESCRIPTION (cont'd.)

Legislature for permission to lay-out and build the town of York Haven on the property adjacent to the canal "as a place for the deposit and sale of grain, lumber, and other articles brought down the River". Francis' acquisition of the Conewago Canal property was challenged in a bill of equity (1811) brought by Samuel Meredith who claimed that he had been defrauded by Francis and that he was at the time of the sheriff's sale still president of the Company. In fact the by-laws of the Company required annual elections of officers, and no meeting of the shareholders had been held since May of 1798.

The records consist of correspondence, minutes, business papers and accounts. The correspondence (1791-1820) is in chronological order. Up to and including 1801 the correspondence is primarily between shareholders and employees of the Company and includes some forty-five letters addressed to Robert Morris from the engineer, James Brindley. From 1802 on most of the correspondence concerns the founding, financing, and operation of the Conewago Canal and includes extensive correspondence of the engineer relative to the physical construction of the canal and its locks. Also included is extensive correspondence relative to the construction and operation of the 'Conewago works' which included a stone grist mill, a distillery, and sawmill, and the sales of wheat, corn, flour, hogs, whiskey and gin in the Baltimore market. There is also extensive correspondence relative to the Conewago Turnpike Road Company which proposed to build a road from York to Conewago Falls, and the political opposition to the plan in the Legislature at Lancaster by the Philadelphia merchants who feared the loss of the Susquehanna River trade to Baltimore. There is also considerable correspondence relative to the York Haven Company which sought permission from the legislature to layout the town of York Haven on the Conewago lands as a commercial center for the River trade. Included are xerox copies of out-going correspondence (1795-1813) made from the letter-books of Thomas Willing Francis (the whereabouts of the originals not being known). Correspondents include William Alexander, William Bingham, James Brindley, David Cassat, Redmond Conyningham, Alexander James Dallas, John Donaldson, William Epley, Tench Francis, Thomas Willing Francis, Charles Willing Hare, Robert Harris, Harris & Donaldson (merchants of Baltimore), Caleb Kirk, Conrad Leatherman, Timothy Matlack, Samuel Meredith, Thomas Mifflin, Henry Miller, Robert Morris, John Nicholson, William Owings, Owings & Cheston (Baltimore merchants), William Rawle, Abraham Singer, William Smith, James Thompson, Edward Tilghman, and Joseph Townsend.

The minutes (1792-1798) of meetings of the board of directors at which Robert Morris presided as president until his replacement in October 1795 by Samuel Meredith contain the original report of the engineer of his plan of the lay-out of the canal. They record the difficulty of collecting subscriptions from the shareholders resulting in board threats in December 1797 to sell off the shares of the delinquent shareholders. The last meeting occurred on May 2, 1798.

The business papers (1788-1812) which are arranged chronologically include numerous indentures, deeds, and conveyances for tracts of land near the Susquehanna River in Lancaster and York counties; agreements, petitions, reports, and other papers. Included is an official copy of the articles of agreement between the stockholders and the Governor of Pennsylvania, a draft of the by-laws of the Company, and a copy of the instrument of sale of the Company at auction (June 5, 1800). There is also an indentured

Conewago Canal Company

DESCRIPTION (cont'd.)

servant contract, a lock attendant contract, an insurance policy issued by the Insurance Company of North America, and copies of bills in the Pennsylvania General Assembly affecting the Company. There is also a copy of the bill in equity (1811) brought by Samuel Meredith in U.S. District Court against Thomas W. Francis and Francis and Francis' reply. The accounts (1792-1815) consist of miscellaneous accounts and bills and receipts in chronological order (by year only) and account books. Included are monthly payroll accounts and payroll vouchers for laborers which record the name of the laborer, days worked, daily wage rate and amount due in pounds/dollars; monthly returns of the commissary (James Thompson) for purchases and sales of flour, beef, pork, salt, hides, tallow, and bread; statements of expenditures and tolls which include (for 1802-1803) the names of boatmen, their point of origin, and the volumes in barrels/bushels of flour, wheat rye and corn carried; reports of purchases of tolls and equipment including shingles, boards, nails, steel, iron, powder, wheelbarrows and spades; distillery accounts, shareholders' accounts and statements of receipts/disbursements. The account books (19 vols.) include bank books of Bank of North America, Bank of Pennsylvania at Lancaster, and Bank of the United States; cash journal and ledger (1801-1804) of the Conewago mill; ledger (1804-1806) kept by Abraham Singer containing accounts of the 'Conewago works'; shareholders' accounts (1795-1798); check stubs (1793-1794); and receipt book (1792-1793) for laborers' wages.

CONEWAGO CANAL COMPANY

Container list

| Container No. | |
|---------------|--|
| | Correspondence |
| 1 | 1791-93 |
| 2 | 1794-95 |
| 3 | 1796 |
| 4 | 1797 |
| 5 | 1798-1801 |
| 6 | 1802 |
| 7 | 1803, Jan-June |
| 8 | 1803, July-Dec |
| | 1804, Jan-Apr |
| 9 | 1804, May-Dec |
| 10 | 1805-06 |
| 11 | 1807-08 |
| 12 | 1809 |
| 13 | 1810-11 |
| 14 | 1812-15; 1819-20 & undated |
| | Letterbooks of Thomas Willing Francis, 1795-1813 |
| 15 | Minutes (1792-98) |
| | Business papers |
| | 1788-95 |
| 16 | 1796-1802 |
| 17 | 1803-12 & undated |
| | Miscellaneous accounts |
| 18 | 1792-93 |
| 19 | 1794 |
| 20 | 1795-96 |
| 21 | 1797-1802 |
| 22 | 1803-11 & undated |
| | Bills & receipts |
| 23 | 1792-95 |
| 24 | 1796-97 |
| 25 | 1798-1815 & undated |
| 26 | Account books |
| Charter case | Plan of Conewago Canal (1795); plan of town of York Haven (1814) |
