



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

Thomas Jefferson papers

1766-1826

MssCol 1557

Digitization was made possible by a lead gift from The Polonsky Foundation.

Compiled by Casey Babcock, 2015

Summary

Creator: Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826

Title: Thomas Jefferson papers

Date: 1766-1826

Size: 1.86 linear feet (1 box, 1 oversized folder)

Source: Various gifts and purchases, 1896-1954

Abstract: Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was a Founding Father, statesman, lawyer, and planter. He is considered the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson held numerous political offices throughout his career including representative from Virginia in the Second Continental Congress, Governor of Virginia, Minister to France, Secretary of State under George Washington, Vice President of the United States under John Adams, and President of the United States from 1801-1809. The Thomas Jefferson papers, dated 1766-1826, cover Jefferson's career as a statesman, lawyer, and plantation owner. The bulk of the collection consists of outgoing correspondence, 1766 and 1783-1826, concerning Jefferson's thoughts on the formation of a new government, naval and shipping issues, the growth and sale of tobacco on his plantation, and personal and business matters. Correspondents include John Page, James Madison, James Monroe, Edmund Pendleton, Robert Purviance, and Noah Webster. Additional documents notably include Jefferson's draft of a proposed amendment to the Constitution on the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, containing notes penciled by James Madison, as well as Jefferson's 1771 list of suggested books for a private library. Also present are legal documents, drafts, notes, and autographs.

Access: Advance notice required.

Alternative Form Available: Transcripts of much of the correspondence contained in this collection is available via Founders Online (<http://founders.archives.gov/>). Some letters are available only as abstracts rather than full text.

Preferred citation: Thomas Jefferson papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Processing note: Compiled by Casey Babcock, 2015

Creator History

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was a Founding Father, statesman, lawyer, and planter. He is considered the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson held numerous political offices throughout his career. He represented Virginia in the Second Continental Congress, served as Governor of Virginia from 1779-1781 and as Minister to France from 1785-1789. He was the first Secretary of State under George Washington, and the second Vice President of the United States under John Adams. He was elected the third President of the United States in 1800, serving two terms, 1801-1809. After leaving the presidency, Jefferson founded and helped design the campus of the University of Virginia. He resided at Monticello, his estate in Albemarle County, Virginia.

Custodial History

This collection includes transfers from the Ford collection and Thomas Addis Emmet collection. The Ford Collection was compiled by Gordon L. Ford, business manager of the New York Tribune from 1873 to 1881 and collector of documents pertaining to early American history. Ford's collection was later purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan and portions of it were donated to The New York Public Library in 1899. The Emmet Collection was collected by Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet, a collector of early American history manuscripts. His collection was later purchased by John S. Kennedy and donated to The New York Public Library in 1896. A letter from Jefferson to the President of Pennsylvania dated August 18, 1790 was purchased from Emily E.F. Skeel on October 29, 1942. A letter from Jefferson to W.C. Nicholas dated March 20, 1808 was purchased from Mrs. Paul McEwen on March 26, 1954.

Scope and Content Note

The Thomas Jefferson papers, dated 1766-1826, cover Jefferson's career as a statesman, lawyer, and plantation owner. It is a synthetic collection of largely autograph material, combining gifts and purchases from multiple sources. The bulk of the collection consists of outgoing correspondence, 1766 and 1783-1826, with a few incoming letters. Letters concern Jefferson's thoughts on the formation of a new government, naval and shipping issues, the growth and sale of tobacco on his plantation, and personal and business matters. Correspondents include John Page, James Madison, James Monroe, Edmund Pendleton, Robert Purviance, and Noah Webster. Additional documents in the collection consist of legal documents, drafts, notes, autographs and other items.

Correspondence dating prior to his appointment as Secretary of State in 1790, including letters to Edmund Pendleton of Virginia, pertain primarily to the development of government in the newly sovereign United States, foreign intelligence, the shipment of goods to and from the West Indies, and his service as Minister to France and his travels to France. Letters dated while he held the office of Secretary of State consist mostly of notices of acts of Congress that were sent to state governors. These notices originally contained enclosures of legislation which are not present here. Some personal correspondence from this era is also present, notably a 1790 letter to Noah Webster offering his opinions on Webster's essays. Correspondence dating from his presidential and vice presidential tenures consists mainly of outgoing invitations and letters of thanks. Letters discussing Jefferson's business affairs, particularly the management of his plantation, the growth and sale of tobacco, and his legal work are interspersed throughout the correspondence, especially during the late presidential and post-presidential period. An 1817 letter to James Monroe is a letter of recommendation, and his 1826 letter to Madison concerns the growth of the University of Virginia. The collection also contains earlier letters documenting Jefferson's friendships with Virginia governor John Page and Robert Purviance of

Maryland.

Additional documents notably include Jefferson's draft of a proposed amendment to the Constitution adding the Louisiana Territory to the United States. The draft contains notes penciled by James Madison and offers insight into constitutional aspects of the Louisiana Purchase. Also of note is Jefferson's 1771 list of books for a private library, suggested for his friend Robert Skipworth.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Certificates

Patents

Occupations

Diplomats

Lawyers

Statesmen

Geographic Names

France -- Foreign relations -- United States

United States -- Foreign relations -- France

United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783

United States -- Politics and government -- 1783-1865

Virginia -- History -- 1775-1865

Virginia -- Politics and government -- 1775-1865

Subjects

Louisiana Purchase

Presidents -- United States

Names

Brown, James, 1766-1835 -- recipient

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826

Madison, James, 1751-1836 -- recipient

Minor, Lancelot, 1763-1848 or 1849 -- recipient

Monroe, James, 1758-1831 -- recipient

Page, John, 1744-1808 -- recipient

Pendleton, Edmund, 1721-1803 -- recipient

Purviance, Robert -- recipient

Webster, Noah, 1758-1843 -- recipient

Container List

Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1 Letter to John Page 1766 May 25
- Letters to Edmund Pendleton
- b. 1 f. 2 1783 March 4
- b. 1 f. 3 1783 December 16
- b. 1 f. 4 1784 February 29
- b. 1 f. 5 1784 April 2
- b. 1 f. 6 1784 May 25
- b. 1 f. 7 Letter to unknown correspondent 1787 January 5
- b. 1 f. 8 Letter to Victor Dupont 1787 October 6
- b. 1 f. 9 Letter to the President of Pennsylvania 1790 April 6
- b. 1 f. 10 Letter to unknown correspondent 1790 July 27
- b. 1 f. 11 Letter to the President of Pennsylvania 1790 August 18
- b. 1 f. 12 Letter to the Governor of North Carolina 1790 August 30
- b. 1 f. 13 Letter to unknown correspondent 1790 September 17
- b. 1 f. 14 Letter to Noah Webster 1790 December 4
- b. 1 f. 15 Letter to the Governor of Rhode Island 1791 January 11
- b. 1 f. 16 Letter to James Brown 1791 September 27
- b. 1 f. 17 Letter to the Governor of Pennsylvania 1792 March 1
- b. 1 f. 18 Letter to the Governor of Connecticut 1792 March 29
- b. 1 f. 19 Letter to James Brown 1792 November 15
- b. 1 f. 20 Letter to the Governor of New York 1793 March 16
- b. 1 f. 21 Letter to James Iredell 1793 July 12
- b. 1 f. 22 Letter to John Kean 1793 November 16
- b. 1 f. 23 Letter to Matthew Carey 1798 April 2
- b. 1 f. 24 Letter to John Steel 1799 February 28
- b. 1 f. 25 Letter from Edward Livingston 1800 April 11
- b. 1 f. 26 Letter from George Helmbold, Jr 1801 July 30
- b. 1 f. 27 Letter to Mr. and Mrs. James Madison 1802 January 26
- b. 1 f. 28 Letter to Robert Purviance 1803 June 14
- b. 1 f. 29 Letter to Christopher Ellery 1803 July 5
- b. 1 f. 30 Letter to John Page 1803 July 26
- b. 1 f. 31 Letter to Robert Purviance 1805 October 27
- b. 1 f. 32 Letter to Noah Webster 1806 February 25
- b. 1 f. 33 Letter to William Read 1806 February 23
- b. 1 f. 34 Letter to William Branch Giles 1807 February 23
- b. 1 f. 35 Letter to Joseph Sansom 1807 March 13
- b. 1 f. 36 Letter from Philip Reed 1807 September 5
- b. 1 f. 37 Letter to Edmund Bacon 1807 November 9

Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 38 Letter to unknown correspondent 1807 November 24
- b. 1 f. 39 Letter to D.B. Warden 1808 May 1
- b. 1 f. 40 Letter to John Armstrong 1809 March 6
- b. 1 f. 41 Letter to Wilson Cary 1808 March 20
- Letters to Lancelot Minor
- b. 1 f. 42 1812 February 19
- b. 1 f. 43 1812 May 5
- b. 1 f. 44 1812 May 30
- b. 1 f. 45 1813 May 26
- b. 1 f. 46 Letter to Fitzwhyson and Potter 1817 May 1
- b. 1 f. 47 Letter to James Monroe 1817 October 30
- b. 1 f. 48 Letter to Leroy and Bayard 1823 July 8
- b. 1 f. 49 Letter to Frederick Winslow Hatch 1824 November 11
- b. 1 f. 50 Letter to James Madison 1826 April 21
- b. 1 f. 51 Letter to William B. Giles undated
 - o. 1 "List of Books for a Private Library" 1771 August 3
 - Enclosure to a letter to Robert Skipwith
 - Original cover letter to Skipwith is at the University of Virginia
- b. 1 f. 52 Legal notes and memoranda 1774, undated
 - Includes a summary of the will of John Early written by Jefferson
- b. 1 f. 53 Certificate of election of John Penington for membership in the American Philosophical Society 1791 July 28
 - o. 1 Naval permit signed by President Jefferson granting permission to Selvanus Snow, master and commander of the schooner "Industry," to sail cargo to Martinique 1801 June 26
- b. 1 f. 54 Draft of a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution on the purchase of Louisiana circa 1803
 - Includes notes penciled by James Madison
- o. 1 Patent issued to Israel Wood for "a new and useful improvement in setting stills and other large kettles" 1804 February 21
- b. 1 f. 55 Autographs and fragments 1793-1815, undated