

**The New York Public Library
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Manuscripts and Archives Division**

**Burgess Family Papers
1794-1929**

**Margaret Heilbrun
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**Revised by Claudia Funke
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Summary

- Main entry:** Burgess family
- Title:** Burgess Family Papers, 1794-1929
- Size:** 4.25 linear feet (9 boxes, 2 vols.)
- Source:** Gift of Mrs. Thomas F. Burgess, 1938; 1956-1958
- Abstract:** The Burgess family papers document three generations of an English family involved in overseas commerce. Charles Henry Burgess (1806-1854) was the first British subject to export good directly from England to Persia. The papers contain correspondence, diaries, financial records, art work and other materials documenting the personal life and commercial activities of the family members. The papers provide abundant information on a rich variety of British, Anglo-Persian and Anglo-American topics.
- Access:** Collection is open to research. Apply in Special Collections Office.
- Preferred citation:** Burgess Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
- Special formats** Photographs, watercolors, sketches, genealogical chart
- Alternate formats:** Persian letters of Charles and Edward Burgess (Boxes 5 and 6) available on microfilm. Transcriptions of these letters, introduced and edited by Benjamin Schwartz have been published in the *Bulletin of The New York Public Library*, volume 45.

Biographical note

The Burgess family papers document three generations of a British family whose members ventured to Persia, Continental Europe and the United States.

The patriarch of the family was Henry Burgess (1781-1863). Born into a Quaker family, he did not practice the religion himself and indeed married an Anglican, Frances Ridsdale (1784-1847). Burgess was an inventory, an economist, commercial investor and editor. The last of these was his most steady profession. From 1827 until approximately 1850 he edited *The Bankers Circular*, a paper that he had founded. The *Circular* attracted a prestigious readership that included the leading politicians of the day. As an investor, he was a co-partner with Baring Brothers in iron mining and steel ventures during the latter part of this life. Products of his career as an inventor include a patented device designed to improve wheeled carriages (1823) and a machine for curing or salting meats (c.1844). As an economist, he devoted much energy to schemes that included [a Plan for obtaining a more speedy postage communication between London and the distant parts of the Kingdom] (1819), a petition before Parliament in the matter of English currency (c.1830), and a study of the tariffs imposed upon imports such as tea, sugar, malt and hops, during 1840s.

The children of Henry and Frances Burgess were: Charles Henry (1805-1854), Edward (1810-1855), Joseph (1813-1832) and George (1817-1900).

In 1828 Charles Burgess went to Persia, initially to join the military service of the Prince Royal. After several months in that capacity, he became convinced that direct trade between England and Persia, via Turkey could succeed. He returned to Britain in 1830 and, with the financial help of his father, purchased British manufactures such as guns, china and chintz to bring back. He was the first British subject to export goods directly from England to Persia. He enlisted the aid of his brother Edward who went to Persia in 1831, never to return.

In 1836, Charles left Persia on one of his trips back to England, entrusted with the money of several members of the royal family and of the government. He did not return. As a result, Edward was held there more or less as a hostage, pending Charles' repayment of the Persian government's moneys. Such repayment never came. Charles' health appears to have broken down and he spent the remaining years of his life moving around Europe from Bern to Marseilles to Leghorn to other health resorts (with occasional visits to England) in search of a lasting cure. He died in 1854, having borrowed heavily from his father for years.

Edward settled in Tabriz and became an employee of the Prince Bahman Meezu's household. In 1844, the Prince made him magistrate of a village of about one thousand inhabitants near Tabriz. He thus became a tax collector and peace keeper. In addition, he translated newspapers and books for the Prince. In a letter to his brother George, he admitted that it would be possible for him to leave Persia by running away, but that he could never do anything so dishonorable. Edward supported Charles' abandoned common-law wife and children as well as his own wife, Anna, an Armenian woman whom he had married in 1851. His son died in infancy. His daughter Fanny, however, survived. In 1855, when Fanny was one year old, Edward at last secured permission to leave Persia for a visit to England with his wife and child. He died en route between Tehran and Tabriz. His widow and daughter visited England at least once in the years that followed, staying with Edward's father.

By then, Henry Burgess was a widower and a father of only one surviving son. Joseph had been killed at age 19 in the Pyrenean War of 1832. In 1840, Frances Burgess had established herself permanently in Brighton while her husband remained in London. With precarious health, she appears not to have strayed from her house. She devoted much time to letter-writing and reading. She was a Victorian gentlewoman who yearned for further intellectual stimulation. [If a craving desire could bring its own fulfillment,] she wrote in 1843, [I should have, like Bacon, all learning for my province.] She died, after long illness, in 1847.

After a few months working in the Derbyshire Banking Co., George Burgess emigrated to America in 1840. His subsequent professional life was spent as an importer, largely of linens and threads. He initially worked for J. Gihon & Co. in New York and Philadelphia, but eventually set up business for himself in New York and Dundee, Scotland. In 1844 he married an American, Valeria Dean. They had several children, including Thomas F., Lucy, Fanny, and Teddy. George's business brought him frequently to England and Scotland. He was in Dundee when his wife died in 1881. He survived for another 19 years.

Scope and content note

The Burgess family papers shed light on the personal and commercial activities of three generations of the Burgess family. These papers, chiefly correspondence, begin in 1794 with the collection's first letter from Henry Burgess, and continue through 1929, with the last letter from Henry's granddaughter, Fanny Burgess Bottin. The bulk of the papers falls between 1835 and 1863, the latter being the year of Henry Burgess' death.

The family correspondence is the centerpiece of this collection. After the four Burgess sons were full grown, no member of the family lived for long in close proximity to the other. Thus interfamily correspondence is extensive.

The papers offer details on a rich variety of British, Anglo-Persian and Anglo-American topics. Henry Burgess' papers, 1794-1863, provide a depth of detail on the monetary, fiscal and commercial policies of the British governments, particularly during the second quarter of the 19th century. The correspondence documents his attempts to gain the attention of the elite ranks of government via his suggestions regarding those policies. That he was at least partially successful is evident from the responses contained in letters from such notables as Lord Stanhope, George Canning, John Gladstone, and Lord Western. The bulk of his papers fall after 1840.

The papers of Frances Ridsdale Burgess depict the life of an invalid, intellectually thirsty Victorian gentlewoman, whose quests are all conducted within the confines of her house in Brighton. Her papers extend from 1827-1847, the bulk being from the last two years.

The papers of Charles Burgess and of Edward Burgess are a mine of firsthand information on Persia from 1828-1855. Anglo-Persian commercial and political relations and the changeable political conditions within Persia during that time are clarified. The letters written by each of the brothers give highly specific detail about their lives in the military service of various princes and as British merchants in Tabriz and Tehran. Letters from Charles after his departure from Persia in 1836 illustrate his wanderings from one continental watering hold to another until his death in 1854. Edward's letters, offering the greatest amount of detail on Persian life, continue until his death in 1844. The contrast between an opportunistic, untrustworthy Englishman (Charles) and the paradigm of the true noble gentleman (Edward) may be observed in a comparison of their papers.

Joseph Burgess' short life has left behind papers chiefly valuable for demonstrating the influence of early 19th century education upon the mind of a young Englishman: the formation of his attitudes upon such matters as England's status in the world, the usefulness of knowing French and Latin, and the ritual of dueling. Schoolboy writings of Edward and George likewise tell much of an English boy's outlook in the second decade of the 1800s.

Aspects of the life of a businessman transplanted from England to the United States are illustrated in George Burgess' papers, c.1830-1888. His correspondence, the most extensive in the collection, and his account books and diary of 1840-1843 leave many impressions of the life of a man in the textile importing trade, as well as hints of his personal life. Little information or opinion is offered, however, on U.S. politics or upheavals. George Burgess' diary and correspondence show a friendship with Mrs. John James (Lucy) Audubon that begins in 1840 and continues until her death in 1874.

The collection is arranged into six major sections, for the papers of each member of the immediate Burgess family. Each section includes the family member's correspondence arranged in chronological order. Letters exchanged between family members are filed with the papers of the writer rather than by recipient. Other series include legal and commercial papers, diaries, and personal notes, also arranged chronologically. The only material not divided by family member is a series of photographs, approximately 70 original watercolors and sketches, mostly unsigned, and genealogical material in photostat. The artwork reveals the Burgess family's strong gift for draftsmanship.

Arrangement note

The Burgess Family Papers are organized in the following series:

- I. Henry Burgess
- II. Frances Ridsdale Burgess
- III. Charles H. Burgess
- IV. Edward Burgess
- V. Joseph Burgess
- VI. George Burgess
- VII. Family Photographs, watercolors, sketches and genealogical material

Series descriptions and container list

Box Folder

I. Henry Burgess

2 boxes

Correspondence, 1794-1858; n.d.

Letters through 1812 are to his friend Joseph Hall. In these, the most personally revealing of his letters, he ponders his own character, his future and his attitudes toward women. The next stage of correspondence is largely to him from notable political figures of the day including Lord Bentinck, George Canning and Lord Stanhope and the secretaries of Robert Peel, Benjamin Disraeli and the Duke of Wellington. These letters reveal Burgess' success in becoming a noticed inventor, economist and financial editor in London. After c.1840, more of the correspondence is outgoing, much of it to his son George in the United States, with whom he seemed to have several disagreements. Revealing letters are also to his wife in Brighton and to his other sons.

1	1	1794-1812
	2	1818-1832
	3	1833-1839
	4	1840-1843
	5	1844-1845
	6	1846-1847
	7	1848-1858
	8	n.d.

Legal and Commercial Papers, 1823-1863; n.d.

Includes patents, passports, licenses, leases, Weardale Iron Co. partnership, inventory of household furnishings, small volume of Banker's Circular subscriptions. Many items engrossed on parchment.

2	1	1823-c.1844
	2	c.1844-c.1845
	3	1846-1848
	4	1851-1863; n.d.

Personal Notes, 1797; 1819; n.d.

Includes notes on Mary Wollstonecraft, data on a coach journey from Leeds to London, and notes upon his salting machine.

Seated portrait of Henry Burgess, n.d.

Photograph copy of ambrotype portrait .

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Printed Material, 1821-1851; n.d.

A wide range of printed matter, including an article on Burgess' proposal for an extra post, a published letter from him to the Duke of Richmond on [Emigration and the Poor,] a proclamation from Trinidad on runaway slaves, and a photostat copy of an issue of The Bankers' Circular from 1843.

Box Folder

II. Frances Ridsdale Burgess**Correspondence, 1827-1847; n.d.**

Mainly outgoing correspondence, the bulk being 1846-1847. Included are many letters to George in America, keeping him up-to-date on family news. There are also many letters to George's wife, Valeria, as well as letters to Henry. Many letters are undated/fragmentary.

3	1	1827-1844
	2	1845-1847
	3	n.d.

3	4	Personal Notes, n.d.
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Includes a large quantity of reading notes as well as notes for charades, lists of correspondence, prescriptions, a hat pattern and personal thoughts. The latter include a [Scheme for Flying] in which she considers a way [to inflate] men so that they may propel themselves about in the air.

Box

III. Charles H. Burgess**Correspondence, 1828-1850; n.d.**

One outgoing letter, written c.1833, is in printed format. It is to T.H. Villiers, entitled [A brief Notice respecting the Trade of the Northern Provinces of Persia.] This provides much detail on Persia and Charles' history there up to the time of writing. Manuscript letters begin with Charles' first trip to Persia and are largely from Tabriz. Letters to his father indicate his debts. His letters after his last departure from Persia in 1836 show his migration from one part of Europe to another. Undated letters include a group in Persian from Prime Minister Amir Nezam and others asking Charles to settle his accounts to prevent his brother Edward from going to jail. These letters have accompanying typescript translations.

4	1	1828-1834
	2	1835-1850
	3	n.d.

4	4	Personal Notes, post-1827
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Includes travel observations and data on travel costs en route between England and Persia.

see also: Oversize folder for Charles' drawings of pistols

4	5	Legal and Commercial Papers, Passports, 1831 and 1849. Payments and receipts in Persian with English on verso, 1836 and undated.
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4	6	Materials in Persian, n.d. Unsorted documents, including correspondence between Persian officials transacting government business.
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Box Folder

IV. Edward Burgess

Correspondence, 1820-1855

Mostly outgoing, the bulk of the correspondence dates from 1820-1845. Five letters predate his trip eastward. The rest are all from Persia, mainly from Tabriz. The evolution of Edward's status in Persia is clearly shown. His attitude toward his brother Charles is conveyed in quarterly letters to George, along with much detail on his daily life. His unfailing good cheer and his conciliatory nature are also evident. There are many letters to his parents. The series has a high research value for its Persian details.

4 7 1820-1841
 8 1842-1845
 9 1846-1855

4 10 **Diary, 1823-1824**

Pamphlet bound in marble wrappers, with entries detailing his vacations from school, 1823 June-July and 1823 Dec. - 1824 Jan. Includes notes on chemical experiments, travel between London and Hampstead, pony-riding, cricket, and guns.

4 11 **Legal Papers, 1831; 1847; 1858**

Copy of Edward's will, 1831; translation from the Persian of Order of the Lion and Star, 1847; notice of probate of Edward's will, partially printed, 1858.

see also: Oversize folder

4 12 **Persian Poetry and English Translations, c.1845**

Family Papers

4 13 Anna Burgess transcript of interview, 1880
 Interview held in Leicester in March 1880. Her timeframe is not completely accurate.

14 Anna Burgess letters sent, 1859; 1877
 (Three letters to George Burgess on family matters.)

15 Fanny Burgess Bottin correspondence, 1876-1929; n.d.
 Mainly outgoing letters, the bulk post-1900. Earlier letters are to George Burgess, later ones to Thomas F. Burgess, from her home in Tehran, on family matters.

Box

V. Joseph Burgess

Box

Fol

4 **Correspondence, 1827-1831**

Letters to his parents from school and letters relating to a proposed duel with Henry Hughes.

4 17 **Personal notes, n.d.**

Includes an [essay on card playing,] notes on GULLIVER's TRAVELS, and thoughts on the usefulness of knowing French and Latin.

Box Fol

VI. George Burgess**Correspondence, 1832-1888; n.d.**

Mainly incoming letters, usually on business matters. Starting in the 1840s and continuing through 1863, a substantial number of the letters are from Joseph Turpin, Henry Burgess' assistant. Letters from George in the late 1870s in Dundee, Scotland indicate some financial difficulties. Also included are letters from Lucy Audubon, the widow of John James Audubon, in Kentucky.

5	1	1832-1838
	2	1839-1840
	3	1841-1842
	4	1843-1844
	5	1845-1846
	6	1847-1855

6	1	1856
	2	1857
	3	1858-1861
	4	1862-1877
	5	1878-1888; n.d. Letterpress copybook, 1871-1877 Letterpress copybook, 1878-1881

Diary and Personal Notes, c.1839-1846; n.d.

Includes two pamphlet-bound school notebooks in marbled wrappers, c. 1830, one of them with lessons on the functions of various mechanisms such as a clock and a battering ram and with excellent pen drawings of each. A leather-bound diary, 1840-1843, gives George's impressions of New York City and Philadelphia and documents the beginning of his friendship with John James and Lucy Audubon.

7	1	School notebook, c.1830 School notebook, c.1830 Diary, 840-1843 (Leather-bound volume)
	2	1844-1846; n.d.

Legal and commercial papers, 1843-1883

Loose material includes accounts, checks, bills of lading, invoices, receipts covering the entire date range. Volumes listed below.

7	3	1843-1859
	4	1860-1881; n.d. Disbursements 1839; 1841 (1 volume) Invoices, 1865-1875 (1 oversize volume) Cash book, 1865-1883 (1 volume) Journal, 1865-1883 (1 oversize volume) Bank account, 1871-1872 (1 volume)

Box Folder

Family papers, 1836-1906

Valeria Dean Burgess

Correspondence includes many letters from her cousin, Catherine Foljambe, many to her mother-in-law, Frances (Ridsdale) Burgess, 1845-1847, and from Lucy Audubon, 1871-1874. Personal notes include poetry transcriptions and a list of books made by her in Scotland.

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|---|---|---------------------------------|
| 8 | 1 | Correspondence, 1841-1846 |
| | 2 | Correspondence, 1848-1875; n.d. |
| | 3 | Personal notes, n.d. |

Thomas F. Burgess

Incoming correspondence includes letters from the children of John James and Lucy Audubon, regarding Audubon artwork and property. The Fort Washington property documents concern a property handed down to Thomas from his parents, consisting of 1/2 acre of land between 176th and 177th Streets in Manhattan, originally left to Valeria Burgess by Richard F. Carman in 1853. Subsequent papers document the eventual sale of the property to John Haven in 1894.

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| 8 | 4 | Incoming correspondence, 1901-1906 |
| | 5 | Papers relating to Fort Washington property, NYC, 1836-1894 |
| | | Accounts: Invoice book No. 1, 1881 (1 volume) |
| | | Accounts: Cash book - Journal - Ledger No. 1, 1881 (1 volume) |

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|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| 8 | 6 | Fanny, Lucy and Teddy Burgess |
| | | Letters from Lucy Audubon {1871-1874} |

Box
9 Fol

VII. Family Photographs, watercolors, sketches and genealogical material

One cabinet card, seven cartes-de-visites, and approximately a dozen photographic prints. Cartes-de-visites are of Henry Burgess and a granddaughter, Anna Burgess, Fanny Burgess, Queen Victoria, and others. Travel photographs feature Seraglio Point. Some snapshots of unidentified individuals. There are approximately 70 items of original art work, largely unsigned and showing strong talent. Genealogical material is on photostats: a coat of arms and a diagram of a family tree.