Guide to the

Henry Laurens diary

1780-1781
MssCol 1695

Compiled by Susan P. Waide, 2016

Summary

Creator: Laurens, Henry, 1724-1792

Title: Henry Laurens diary

Date: 1780-1781

Size: .21 linear feet (1 volume)

Source: Donated by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1899, as part of the Ford Collection

Abstract: Henry Laurens (1724-1792) was a South Carolina merchant, plantation owner, and Revolutionary-era statesman. The Henry Laurens diary, 1780 August 13-1781 December 6 (1 volume) is a manuscript notebook recording his voyage to Europe as U.S. envoy to Holland, his capture at sea by the British on September 3, 1780, his transfer to England via Newfoundland, and his imprisonment in the Tower of London. Pencilled entries briefly record day-to-day experiences, serving as the foundation of a subsequent narrative compiled by Laurens of his time abroad. The last entry is incomplete.

Alternative Form Available: Diary published in "Journal and Narrative of Capture and Confinement in the Tower of London," in The Papers of Henry Laurens, vol. 15, David R. Chesnutt and C. James Taylor, eds. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 330-404.

Preferred citation: Henry Laurens diary, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Processing note: Compiled by Susan P. Waide, 2016

Creator History

Henry Laurens (1724-1792) was a South Carolina merchant, plantation owner, and Revolutionary-era statesman. Laurens was president of the Continental Congress from November 1, 1777 to December 9, 1778. On November 1, 1779 Congress elected him a commissioner to negotiate a treaty of amity and commerce with Holland. Laurens sailed for Europe on August 13, 1780, only to be captured at sea by the British on September 3, 1780. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London under the charge of treason from October 6, 1780 until his release on bail December 31, 1781. Laurens briefly joined the

American peace commission, signing the preliminary Treaty of Paris on November 30, 1782. He returned to the United States in 1784, and was a member of the South Carolina convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution in 1788.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic
Diaries

Geographic Names
Great Britain -- Politics and government -- 1760-1789
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Prisoners and prisons

Occupations
Merchants
Plantation owners
Statesmen

Names
Laurens, Henry, 1724-1792
Tower of London (London, England)