

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

William Barclay Parsons Collection of Robert Fulton Manuscripts
1796-1919
MssCol 18137

Donald R. Mennerich
April 2009
Revised October 2010

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Summary

Main entry:	Parsons, William Barclay, 1859-1932
Title:	William Barclay Parsons collection of Robert Fulton manuscripts, 1796-1919 (bulk 1804-1815)
Size:	1 linear foot (3 boxes, 2 volumes, 1 oversize portfolio)
Source:	Purchased from the estate of William Barclay Parsons, 1934
Abstract:	Writings, drawings and publications on or by Robert Fulton collected by civil engineer William Barclay Parsons for his book <i>Robert Fulton and the Submarine</i> , published in 1922.
Access:	Advance notice required. Apply at http://www.nypl.org/mssref
Preferred citation:	William Barclay Parsons Collection of Robert Fulton Manuscripts, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
Special formats	Drawings, Sketches.

Provenance note

Parsons purchased the two treatises and watercolor plates in Europe. Other photocopied materials were received from Fulton enthusiasts and scholars, Randall J. LeBoeff, F. Loree, Edward Camann and Alice Crary Sutcliffe

Related materials note

Gilbert H. Montague Collection of Robert Fulton Manuscripts. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Montague Collection of Historical Autographs. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Robert Fulton Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Biographical note

William Barclay Parsons was born to prominent family in New York City in 1859. After studying abroad during his teenage years Parsons attended Columbia University where he received degrees in 1879 and 1882. In 1885 Parsons founded his civil engineering firm that is now Parsons Brinckerhoff.

In 1895, after several years of civil engineering work, Parsons was appointed chief engineer for New York's Rapid Transit Commission, which was charged with designing and building a subway rail system. After spending the year 1899 in China surveying the country's railway system (which is documented in Parson's book *An American Engineer in China*). Parson's returned to New York to begin the construction of the city's first subway line. The Interborough Rapid Transit line was completed in 1904.

Parsons was elected to the New York Public Library's Board of Trustees in 1912, replacing Alexander Orr (Chairman of the IRT). After working on the Cape Cod and Panama Canal projects Parsons joined the 11th regiment of US Army Engineers in 1917 to report on engineering problems facing the U.S. military in WWI. After the war Parsons attained the rank of Brigadier General and published his account of the war in his 1920 book *The American Engineers in France*. Shortly thereafter Parsons published *Robert Fulton and the Submarine* in 1922.

Parson's died suddenly in 1932. The *Bulletin of The New York Public Library* notes that until his death Parsons maintained a deep interest in all that pertained to the welfare of the Library. In 1934 his engineering library (consisting of 1,191 volumes, 27 pamphlets, 53 boxes of maps) was purchased by The New York Public Library.

In addition to his work for The New York Public Library, Parsons was a trustee of the Carnegie Institution, chairman of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center administrative board, and chairmen of the board of trustees of Columbia University.

Scope and content note

Between the years 1797 and 1804 Robert Fulton worked in France and England developing a system submarine warfare. Fulton foresaw the complete freedom of the seas from naval blockade for the free trade of nations and set about a way to obtain this through the use of submarine vessels. Fulton lived with American ambassador to France from 1797 to 1804; initially to expand on his work of as designer of canals, which he had spent the past four years designing in England. Using Barlow's connection to Napoleon, Fulton soon found himself designing his "Nautilus", a boat that was able to plunge beneath the water and fasten a torpedo to an enemy ship's hull. Although he successfully demonstrated the destructive power of his Nautilus twice and had the support of Napoleon's scientific consultants; Napoleon ultimately decided Fulton was a charlatan and extortionist due to his lack of formal scientific education and unwillingness to disclose drawings of his boats mechanisms.

Not content with his treatment in France, Fulton returned to England in 1804 to petition the government to adopt his system of submarine warfare. In 1805 Fulton was unsuccessful at an attempt at destroying a French ship for the British with one of his torpedoes. Unable to secure a contract with the English, having spent the past seven years with little to show, Fulton returned to America in 1806.

The Parsons collection of Fultoniana contains drawings, the manuscript treatise "Motives for Inventing Submarine Navigation" and the accompanying "Description of the Drawings of the Submarine Vessel" (1806), and facsimiles of Fulton's correspondence and writings. Also present are publications by and about Fulton.

Of particular note are Fulton's watercolor and ink drawings from his treatise "On Submarine Navigation and Attack". Parsons asserts in his book that Fulton had left the treatises and paintings in England in case he died while returning to America in 1906. Several of the documents and the paintings are described in detail in Parsons' volume on Fulton's submarine.

Arrangement note

The William Barclay Parsons Collection of Robert Fulton Manuscripts are organized in the following series:

- I. Drawings, 1806
- II. Manuscripts, 1806
- III. Facsimiles and photostats, 1798-1806
- IV. Publications, 1796-1919

Container list

I. Drawings, 1806

In cloth portfolio. Each drawing 19" x 23"

Seven original watercolor drawings relating to Fulton's invention of the submarine.

<u>Portf.</u>	<u>Unit ID</u>	
1	1	<p>Plate the Second</p> <p>Transverse cross-section of Fulton's submarine. Scale: one inch to a foot</p> <p>http://images.nypl.org/?id=ps_mss_cd20_297&t=w</p>
2		<p>Plate the Third</p> <p>Five mechanisms: 1. Forcing section of double facing pumps, 2. Side view of pumps, 3. Side view of windlass 4. End view of windlass, 5. Communications of the pump tubes.</p> <p>Scale: one inch to a foot.</p> <p>http://images.nypl.org/?id=ps_mss_cd20_296&t=w</p>
3		<p>Plate the Fourth</p> <p>Two figures. 1. Cross-section view of Fulton's submarine. Scale: one quarter of an inch to one foot 2. Mode of constructing air pipes with cork . Scale: real size.</p> <p>http://images.nypl.org/?id=ps_mss_cd20_295&t=w</p>
4		<p>Plate the Fifth</p> <p>Three Figures: 1. Mode of placing conic glass windows with cork stops in case of accident. 2. Lid and cap of a dome for observation. 3. Bathometer, gauge for measuring depth. Scale: real size</p> <p>http://images.nypl.org/?id=ps_mss_cd20_298&t=w</p>
5		<p>Plate the Seventh</p> <p>Two views of Fulton's submarine, under sail and submerged. Scale one quarter of an inch to a foot</p> <p>http://images.nypl.org/?id=ps_mss_cd20_294&t=w</p>
6		<p>Plate the Ninth</p> <p>Three men of war, one exploding after hitting a mine. Three anchored mines are shown in the drawing</p>
7		<p>Plate the Twelfth</p> <p>Submarine bombs arranged with an instantaneous lock and anchored from ten to twenty under water.</p> <p>http://images.nypl.org/?id=ps_mss_cd19_292&t=w</p>

II. Manuscripts, 1806

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
		Letters by Fulton, 1806
1	1	Letter to Mr. King, secretary to Lord Grenville , 1806 Jun 6 (Draft or copy, 1 page, quarto) Letter to Lord Grenville, 1806 Jun 20 (Draft or copy, 2 1/2 pages, quarto) Includes a second letter addressed to Lord Grenville, dated June 19, 1806 Letter to Mr. King, 1806 Jun 19 (Draft or copy, 1 page, quarto) Letter to Lord Howick, 1806 Jun 19 (Draft or copy, 1 page, quarto) Letter to Lord Howick, 1806 Jun 20 (Draft or copy, 2 pages, quarto) Letter to Mr. King, 1806 Jun 20 (Draft or copy)
	2	Motives for inventing submarine Navigation..., 1806 Aug 10 (Manuscript, 10 leaves, folio)
	3	Description of the drawings of the Submarine Vessel..., 1806 Aug 10 (Manuscript, 14 leaves, folio) Final page headed "Additional notes" is on the supply of air in the submarine, with a sketch

III. Facsimiles and photostats, 1798-1806

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
2	1	Letter to the Earl of Stanhope, Charles Stanhope, 1798 Apr 14 (1 page, typewritten copy) With a typed letter to Col. Parsons from Alice Crary Sutcliffe, 1922 Jan 29
	2	Letter to General Bonaparte, 12 Floreal, an 6 (Facsimile, four pages, quarto)
	3	Secret circular, 1803 Jun 19 (2 pages, typewritten copy) Typewritten copy of a secret circular outlining Fulton's work on marine warfare technology in France. Signed by Evan Nepean and addressed to Admiral Lord Keith and others
	4	Articles of agreement between Rt. Hon. Pitt and Lord Melville and Robert Fulton, 1804 (Photostat, 6 pages, folio) Regarding the use of submarine bombs to attack fleets
	5	Letter to Lord Grenville, 1806 May 5 (Photostat, four pages, quarto)
	6	Motives for inventing submarine Navigation..., 1806 Aug 10 (Photostat of manuscript in box 1)
	7-9	On Submarine Navigation and Attack, 1806 (Photostat, 71 pages) Original formerly owned by Edward C. Camann, now in the Library of Congress
<u>Vol</u>	<u>2</u>	Motives for Inventing Submarine Navigation / On Submarine Navigation and Attack , 1806 (Slipcase containing bound negative photostats of Fulton's treatises "On Submarine Navigation and Attack" (original in Library of Congress) and "Motives for Inventing Submarine Navigation" (original in Box 1)
<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
2	10	Description of the drawings of the Submarine Vessel..., 1806 Aug 10 (Photostat of manuscript in Box 1)
	11	Letters, 1804-1806 (Photostat, 61 pages, quarto) Majority of the letters are signed "Robert Francis" instead of "Robert Fulton," in Fulton's handwriting.
	12	Portrait of Robert Fulton, undated (Photostat) From a self-portrait in the possession of L. F. Loree

IV. Publications, 1796-1919

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
3	1	Report on the Proposed Canal between the Rivers Heyl and Helford / Robert Fulton, 1796 (15 p. includes a map)(No imprint information)
<u>Vol</u>		
3		A Treatise on the Improvement of Canal Navigation, 1796 (144 p., [17] p. of plates : ill.) Imprint: London : I. and J. Taylor at the Architectural Library.
<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
3	2	Letters principally to the Right Honourable Lord Grenville, on Sub-Marine Navigation and Attack, 1806 (37 p.)(Imprint: London : S. Gosnell)
	3	Torpedo War, and Submarine Explosions / Robert Fulton, 1810 (57 p.)(Imprint: New York : William Elliot)
	4	De la Machine Infernale Maritime / Robert Fulton, 1812 (100 p., ill.) Imprint : Paris : Chez Magimel (French translation of Fulton's "Torpedo War and Submarine explosions")
	5	The American Medical and Philosophical Register, Vol. III, No. II, pp. 196-203, October 1812 (On spine: The First Ferry Boat - Fulton - 1812; On cover: signature of Clement C. Moore, Esq.) "Account of Powles Hook Steam Ferry-Boat, in a letter to Dr. David Hosack, from Robert Fulton, Esq. Fellow of the American Philosophical Society, &c."
	6	Life of Robert Fulton by His Friend / Cadwallader D. Colden, 1817 (371 p.)(Imprint: New York : Kirk and Mercein)
	7	An Examination of Cadwallader D. Colden's Book, entitled A Life of Robert Fulton, by a friend of John Fitch, deceased, 1818 (38 p.)(No imprint information)
	8	Steamboat Controversy / Aaron Ogden, 1818 (16 p.)(No imprint information) Life of Robert Fulton, 1906 (16 p., ill.) Imprint: New York : Fulton Trust Company of New York
	9	Official Robert Fulton Exhibition of the Hudson-Fulton Commission, 1909 (66 p.) Imprint: New York : The New-York Historical Society
2	13	Hudson and Fulton / Edward Hagaman Hall, 1919 (74 p., ill.) Imprint: New York :The Hudson-Fulton Celebration Commission
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