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Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

William P. Van Ness correspondence

1795-1826

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Compiled by Susan P. Waide, 2014

Summary

Creator: Van Ness, William Peter, 1778-1826

Title: William P. Van Ness correspondence

Date: 1795-1826

Size: .2 linear feet (2 folders)

Source: Material acquired in 1897.

Abstract: William Peter Van Ness (1778-1826) of Kinderhook, Columbia County, New York and New York City was a lawyer, U.S. District Court judge, author, and Columbia College graduate. He was active in Democratic-Republican politics and served as Aaron Burr's second in his duel with Alexander Hamilton. The collection consists of approximately 100 letters, most written to Van Ness at Kinderhook, New York City and elsewhere, from friends, political figures and lawyers, and from his brothers John P. Van Ness and Cornelius P. Van Ness. The bulk date from 1801 to 1819 and concern state and national political affairs, especially party politics in the Hudson River Valley region and New York City, and the electoral strategies of DeWitt Clinton and his supporters. Political appointments or offices for Van Ness and others are also discussed. Correspondents include Peter Irving, Isaac Mitchell, John Swarthout, Matthias B. Tallmadge, Daniel C. Verplanck, and other New Yorkers. Letters from his brother John in Washington, D.C., and a lesser number from Cornelius in New York and Vermont pertain to personal, family and political matters. Van Ness' relationship with Aaron Burr is seen primarily through John's letters, questioning his brother's public support of Burr. A small number of letters written by Van Ness include four to his father Peter Van Ness while a student in New York City, 1795-1796, as well as a letter to Richard Riker, July 17, 1810, accusing Charles Holt of spreading lies, with Holt's response to Richard Riker. Also present are some undated legal notes and voting tallies.

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Key Terms

Occupations

Authors
Judges
Landowners
Lawyers
Politicians
Students

Geographic Names

Columbia County (N.Y.)
Hudson River Valley (N.Y. and N.J.)
Kinderhook (N.Y.)
New York (N.Y.) -- Politics and government -- 19th century
New York (State) -- Politics and government -- 1775-1865
United States -- Politics and government -- 1783-1865
Washington (D.C.) -- Social life and customs -- 19th century

Names

Burr, Aaron, 1756-1836
Clinton, DeWitt, 1769-1828
Holt, Charles, 1772-1852
Irving, Peter, 1772-1838
Mitchell, I. (Isaac), approximately 1759-1812
Riker, Richard, 1773-1842 -- recipient
Swarthout, John
Tallmadge, Matthias B. (Matthias Burnet), 1774-1819
Van Ness, Cornelius P. (Cornelius Peter), 1782-1852
Van Ness, John Peter, 1770-1846
Van Ness, Peter, 1734-1804 -- recipient
Van Ness, William Peter, 1778-1826
Verplanck, Daniel C.
Columbia College (New York, N.Y.) -- Students