

Guide to the Charles Jeffery Smith Papers

MS 1372



compiled by Catherine Lawrence

January 1996

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
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CALL NUMBER: MS 1372

CREATOR: Smith, Charles Jeffery, 1740-1770

TITLE: Charles Jeffery Smith papers

DATES: 1758-1908

BULK DATES: 1758-1765

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.5 linear feet

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Charles Jeffery Smith's papers consist of his writings and diaries, including "Some Minits: or a Brief Narrative of the Motions & Strivings of Gods Spirit with my Soul;" "Jejunations," a devotional journal; and a four-part diary, 1763-1765, containing his religious thoughts and detailing his daily activities and travels. There are also daily transcriptions, made in 1908, which excise parts dealing with Smith's personal problems. The transcriptions also include marginal notes about place names, people mentioned, and the changing quality of Smith's handwriting during his times of depression. The identity of the person who transcribed the diaries is not known.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1372>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1372>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

- b. box
- f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Transferred from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 1980.

Conditions Governing Access

Original writings, folders 1-3, are available on microfilm. Patrons must use FILM HM 259 instead of the originals.

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Charles Jeffery Smith Papers (MS 1372). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Charles Jeffery Smith was born near the village of Setauket, New York, on October 9, 1740. His father, Henry S. Smith, died in 1747, but the sizeable estate supported Charles's education at Yale College (Class of 1757) and enabled him to choose the life of an independently wealthy, itinerant Presbyterian minister. He spent part of 1760 and 1761 traveling in New Jersey, and by 1762 he had decided to become a missionary to the Native Americans. During the winter of 1762-1763, he taught in Reverend Eleazar Wheelock's Indian Charity School in the mountains of Connecticut. Soon after his ordination in Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1763, Smith set off on a mission to the Indians of the Six Nations in upstate New York. With the outbreak of Pontiac's Rebellion near Albany, New York, however, he had to alter his plans. For the rest of the summer he preached in small towns along the Hudson and in western Connecticut. He visited family and friends in Long Island during the fall of 1763. In November he embarked on another mission, this time spending six months in southern New Jersey, especially the Newark Mountains. In the summer of 1764, Smith returned to itinerant preaching in Connecticut, based in New Windsor. Soon he began his longest journey to date: to Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Smith was the first dissenting minister granted permission by the governor to preach in Williamsburg, Virginia; at the request of some townspeople, he later published one of the sermons he delivered there. Wherever he stayed, he appealed to the citizens to unite into a "Society for the Reformation of Manners and Suppression of Vice." Smith prepared guidelines for these societies and had pamphlet versions printed in Williamsburg and Charleston, South Carolina. He returned to Long Island in the summer of 1765, married his first cousin Elizabeth Platt, and had a son, Elihu Platt Smith (Yale Class of 1785). Smith returned to the South to preach again, purchasing land in eastern Virginia. In August 1770 he returned to Long Island from one of his southern journeys, expecting to settle his affairs and move permanently with his family to Virginia. On the 10th of August, however, probably suffering from one of his recurrent bouts of severe headaches and depression, Smith shot and killed himself with a hunting gun during an afternoon walk in the woods.

Scope and Contents

"Some Minits: or a Brief Narrative of the Motions & Strivings of Gods Spirit with my Soul" is a devotional account that Smith "Penned for my own private Benefit and Satisfaction" in August 1758 and "revised & enlarged" in 1760. It contains the history of his spiritual life: his education as a child, the loss of his father, and the "ashmatick disorder" which he often thought might prove fatal to him; the religious lectures he attended as a teenager; his years at Yale College; his eventual spiritual awakening and conviction of sin in the months following his graduation, culminating with his admission into the Church in the spring of 1758. "Jejunationes" is an intimate devotional journal, which Smith kept on his periodic days of "Solemn fasting & deep humiliation" during his travels in New Jersey's Newark Mountains. (September 1760-April 1761).

Smith's four-part diary for 1763-1765 records his daily business and activities, although some entries are devotional in character. "A Diary---No. 1" begins in February 1763 in Lebanon, Connecticut, with Smith's teaching and lecturing duties at Reverend Wheelock's Charity School for Indians, and concludes with his April 1763 journey to Long Island to solicit donations for the school and prepare for his summer mission to the Indians of the Six Nations. The second diary encompasses his travels along the Hudson in July, his itinerancy in Connecticut in August and September, his visit to Long Island in October and November, and the first four months of his preaching "in ye Vacant parts of christs Vineyard," to the "lost sheep...Scattered among the highways & hedges" of New Jersey. During a week-long stay in New York City in December 1763, Smith attended Rev. George Whitfield's sermons and conversed with him on several occasions. "A Diary---No. 3" opens in Egg Harbour, New Jersey, on March 2, 1764. According to Smith's calculations, by the end of March he had traveled 2,300 miles in a year's time. Making his way home to Long Island in the spring, Smith stopped briefly in both Philadelphia and Princeton. The third diary includes his summer visit to Brookhaven, his months in New Windsor, Connecticut, and his return to Brookhaven in September 1764. "A Diary---No. 4," starts on October 7 and details Smith's remaining weeks in Long Island; his hurried trip through New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; his travels along Maryland's Eastern Shore; and his itinerancy in Virginia and North Carolina. By the end of March 1765 he had logged another 2,000 to 3,000 miles. His bouts of sickness and depression had also become progressively more severe. On May 6, 1765, Smith began his journey homeward; his last diary entry dates from June 1, 1765, near Cumberland, Virginia.

An unidentified transcriber copied Smith's four-part diary in 1908 under the direction of an unknown editor, who had used a pencil to mark sections of the original manuscript for omission. The transcriber wrote the copy in brown ink, but noted in pencil where there were omissions. The editor later scratched out these notations with black ink or erased them, but they remain readable. As a result of the editing, many instances of Smith's self-doubt, self-humiliation, and self-defeat are not included in the transcripts, though this emotional history sheds much light on Smith's eventual suicide. The transcriber occasionally made marginal notes about place names, people mentioned, and the changing quality of Smith's handwriting during his times of depression.

For a contemporary account of Smith's suicide, see an August 17, 1770, letter from Charles Chauncey to his father, Elihu Chauncey, in the Chauncey Family Papers in Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Collection Contents

Writings

b. 1, f. 1reel 1U	"Some Minits: or a Brief Narrative of the Motions and Strivings of Gods Spirit with my Soul..." English This material has been microfilmed. Patrons must use HM 259 instead of the originals.	1758, 1760
b. 1, f. 2reel 1U	"Jejunationes" English This material has been microfilmed. Patrons must use HM 259 instead of the originals.	1760-1761
b. 1, f. 3reel 1U	"A Diary..." [in four separately bound parts] English This material has been microfilmed. Patrons must use HM 259 instead of the originals.	1763-1765
b. 2, f. 1-3	Transcript of the diaries A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	[ca. 1908]
b. 2, f. 4	Miscellaneous [letter concerning provenance of original diaries, 1907 Jun 17; biographical sketch of Smith; and printed copies of letters by and about Smith]	

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Children -- Religious life
Clergy -- United States
College students -- Religious life
Families -- Connecticut
Indians of North America -- Connecticut
Indians of North America -- Missions -- Connecticut
Indians of North America -- Missions -- New York (State)
Indians of North America -- New York (State)
Missionaries -- Connecticut
Missionaries -- New York (State)
Presbyterians -- Connecticut

Geographic Names

Connecticut -- Description and travel
Connecticut -- Religious life and customs
Maryland -- Religious life and customs
Middle Atlantic States -- Description and travel
New Jersey -- Description and travel
New Jersey -- Religious life and customs
New York (State) -- Description and travel
New York (State) -- Religious life and customs
North Carolina -- Religious life and customs
Southern States -- Description and travel
Southern States -- Religious life and customs
Virginia -- Religious life and customs

Genres / Formats

Diaries

Names

Smith, Charles Jeffery, 1740-1770

Corporate Bodies

Six Nations
Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1757
Yale University -- Students