

Guide to the Pierpont Edwards Papers

MS 1357



compiled by Bruce P. Stark

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 1357

CREATOR: Edwards, Pierpont, 1750-1826

TITLE: Pierpont Edwards papers

DATES: 1764-1826

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 3.5 linear feet (6 boxes, 1 folio)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: These papers contain legal and financial documents relating to Edwards's business activities and his legal career, most of which was carried on in New Haven. Also included are drafts of his political writings and speeches on the Federalist Party, Connecticut's charter government, and other topics. Most of Edwards's correspondence concerns his land speculation in Vermont, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and especially Connecticut's Western Reserve in Ohio. Major correspondents are William Neilson, John Read, Jr., Aaron Burr, Seth Tracy, Simon Perkins and George Swift. Edwards's correspondence with John Read, Jr. and a number of the legal documents reflect his activities as a special agent appointed to settle Loyalist claims following the Revolutionary War under the terms of the Jay Treaty.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1357>

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.1357>.

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

Gift of Thomas M. and Anne T. Debevoise, 1982.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Pierpont Edwards Papers (MS 1357). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Scope and Contents

The Pierpont Edwards Papers were donated to Yale University by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas M. Debevoise. Mr. Debevoise is the great-great-great-great-grandson of Pierpont Edwards. They are divided into two series, CORRESPONDENCE and OTHER PAPERS.

Series I contains correspondence arranged chronologically to and from Pierpont Edwards, covering the years 1773-1826. The Papers contain only thirty-two letters written by Edwards, mostly drafts; the largest number of them relate to his land holdings in the Western Reserve. A great many letters are routine in nature, concerning payment of debts, business matters, and legal affairs.

The first major correspondent is William Neilson, a New York City merchant. Pierpont Edwards served as Neilson's Connecticut lawyer and was charged with the responsibility of collecting debts due Neilson. The correspondence, covering the period 1773-1788, is almost exclusively devoted to Neilson's business affairs. There is little discussion or mention of the events leading to the American Revolution or the results thereof, but the letters give insight into the difficulties many merchants had in collecting the money owed them. Neilson's problems were compounded by his exile from New York City during the Revolutionary War and the lack of effort Edwards made on his behalf after it. In a September 25, 1784 letter, Neilson states, "It is now 18 months since peace & nearly the same since I requested you would inform me what you have done in the agency of my affairs & altho I have wrote you three times ... you have not deigned to drop me a few lines in answer."

Edwards's second major correspondent is John Read, Jr. (1769-1854), who in 1797 was appointed "Agent Gen[era]l for the United States relative to British debts," i.e. to the loyalist claims, payable under terms of the Jay Treaty. Edwards, then U. S. Attorney for the District of Connecticut, was special agent for the state in charge of searching out and determining the validity of these claims. Eight letters from Read and one from Edwards discuss the cases of loyalists Jonathan Simpson, Joseph Totten, Abraham Bates, Henry White, James McEvers, and James Janney.

The greatest volume of correspondence, however, concerns the extensive land speculations of Pierpont Edwards, a subject not mentioned in his *DAB* sketch. Edwards owned or was interested in property in Vermont, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and most importantly, Connecticut's Western Reserve in Ohio. In addition, he served as counsel to the "Connecticut Susquehannah Company Claim" in 1795, was the following year attorney for the "South Carolina Yazoo Company," and was one of the largest shareholders in the Connecticut Land Company (Box 6, folders 86-87), the organization established by the Connecticut General Assembly to dispose of the Western Reserve. According to Connecticut Land Company documents, at one time Pierpont Edwards owned the rights to five per cent of the Western Reserve. See also, folders 5 and 7 in Box 1, and folders 55-58 in Box 4 for material on this subject. In addition, the correspondence in folders 10-16 and 18, covering the years 1813-1826, almost entirely concerns Edwards's lands in Mesopotamia township, Warren County, Ohio. After the death of son John S. Edwards in 1813, Pierpont Edwards appointed Seth Tracy his agent to oversee the sale of some eight thousand acres in Mesopotamia, to collect the money due him from those who had already purchased land, and to take legal action against trespassers. Tracy was dismissed in 1819 and was replaced by Simon Perkins (1771-1844) and then George Swift. The correspondence gives a great deal of information on the difficulties encountered by land agents, the problems faced by pioneer settlers in paying their bills, and is particularly useful for the insights it gives into a virtually unknown aspect of the career of Pierpont Edwards.

Although Edwards is usually considered to be the founder of the Jeffersonian Party in Connecticut, little correspondence directly concerns politics. In a 1788 letter, Timothy Larrabee of Windham talks briefly about the new Constitution; newly elected President Thomas Jefferson, in a copy of a March 29, 1801, letter, discusses the midnight appointments of former President Adams and the desire of Edwards for a federal judgeship; and a resolution of Connecticut Republicans on November 1, 1804 commends Edwards "for the able defense which he made in favor of the republican Justices who were cited to answer to the Gen^l Assembly for having declared that in their opinion this State has no Constitution." The collection contains just two other letters from prominent Connecticut Republicans, an undated letter from William Judd regarding army contracts and an 1819 letter from Robert Fairchild, one of two clerks at the 1818 constitutional convention, concerning the settling of accounts with former land agent Seth Tracy.

Series II, OTHER PAPERS, fill Boxes 2-6 and contains a large number of business and legal papers. The greatest volume of material in Series II consists of documents, like account books, bills and receipts, deeds, promissory notes, sheriffs' orders, summonses, and tax receipts. They would be most useful to those attempting to reconstruct the legal career and business activities of Pierpont Edwards. The earliest document in the Pierpont Edwards Papers is a 1764 receipt for work done to complete the new brick meeting house in New Haven. Receipts dated September and October 1778, show that Edwards and partner Mark Leavenworth were purchasing flour. Several other documents, including a January 31, 1778 letter, indicate that Edwards was engaged in the mercantile business. He lived most of his adult years in New Haven, but it is known that his later years were spent in Bridgeport. Deeds from 1806 and 1807 help place the time of his removal from New Haven to Bridgeport. Edwards's wealth is indicated by several 1817-1820 bills for repair of a chaise and harness and by carriage taxes paid between 1814 and 1817.

It is well known that Edwards and Aaron Burr were relatives and political allies. Some documentation of their relationship is found in Box 3, folder 36. The folder contains a 1782 promissory note signed by Burr, a 1785 receipt signed by Burr, and a 1797 power of attorney from Burr to Edwards. In 1794 Burr and Edwards had signed a contract with Henry Drinker of Philadelphia to purchase eighty thousand acres of land in Philadelphia. Difficulties concerning the purchase, however, culminated in the May 1797 power of attorney, with the aim "to cancel the said Contract."

The collection also contains a printed copy of the Connecticut Constitution of 1818, which was for the most part, drafted by Edwards. Included in folders 35 and 51 are papers relating to the loyalist estates of Amos Botsford and Joshua Chandler of New Haven and Azariah Pritchard of Derby. The indentures, folder 47, show that Edwards, Charles Chauncey, and James Hillhouse were owners of a grist mill in Hamden. Legal papers, others, folder 48, contains an agreement between Edwards and Nathaniel Hazard concerning ownership of the sloop, "Three Friends."

Folders 78-85 contain drafts of political writings and speeches. In one Edwards attacks the Federalist Party and in others he criticizes Connecticut's charter government, which lasted from 1662 to 1818, castigates the established Congregational Church, and defends Republican justices who were condemned for their

opinion that Connecticut had no constitution. The Writings and speeches contain almost all the material in the collection on the political views of Edwards.

The Pierpont Edwards Papers are most significant for the information they contain on the extensive land speculations of Edwards. They also help document his legal career and his work on loyalist claims under terms of the Jay Treaty. A handful of letters and several writings and speeches contain useful information about his Republican politics. Several additional manuscript collections at Yale University, including the Baldwin Family Papers, MS 162; Bristol Family Papers, MS 101; Burr Family Papers, MS 303; Chauncey Family Papers, MS 135; and the David Daggett Papers, MS 055 are also useful in helping reconstruct the life and career of Connecticut's foremost Jeffersonian.

Arrangement

Arranged in two series: I. Correspondence; II. Other Papers.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1773-1826

CORRESPONDENCE is arranged chronologically in folders 1-16. Undated correspondence is found in folder 17 and a Seth Tracy letterbook is in folder 18.

b. 1, f. 1-9	Correspondence	1773-1807
b. 1, f. 10-17	Correspondence	1813-1826, undated
b. 1, f. 18	Letterbook: Seth Tracy 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.	1813-1819

Series II: Other Papers, 1764-1826

Series II, OTHER PAPERS, is contained Boxes 2-6, folders 19-89. Papers in Boxes 2-5 are arranged alphabetically by subject or person. Within each folder, the papers are chronologically arranged. Box 6 contains four folders of oversize material.

b. 2, f. 19-20	Account book	1800-1812, 1815-1819
b. 2, f. 21-29	Bills, receipts, etc. 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.	1764-1820
b. 3, f. 30-34	Bills, receipts, etc.	1821-1826, undated
b. 3, f. 35	Botsford, Amos	1784-1787
b. 3, f. 36	Burr, Aaron	1782-1797, 1811
b. 3, f. 37	Connecticut Constitution	1818
	Connecticut Land Company See: box 6, folders 86-87	
b. 3, f. 38-40	Deeds 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. See also: box 6, folder 88	1775-1807
b. 3, f. 41	Deeds, other	1781-1806, undated
b. 3, f. 42	Deeds: quit claims 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.	1785-1821
b. 3, f. 43-46	Executions	1773-1800
b. 3, f. 47	Indentures See also: box 6, folder 89	1787-1796
b. 3, f. 48-50	Legal papers, other	1773-1821, undated
b. 4, f. 51	Loyalist estates	1782-1800
b. 4, f. 52	Miscellaneous	Undated
b. 4, f. 53	Newspaper clippings	1810-1814, undated
b. 4, f. 54	North Haven Society	1789-1796

b. 4, f. 55-57	Ohio lands	1809-1818
b. 4, f. 58	Other lands	1780-1792
b. 4, f. 59-66	Promissory notes	1765-1821, undated
b. 4, f. 67-75	Sheriff's orders 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.	1773-1808
b. 5, f. 76	Summonses	1783-1801
b. 5, f. 77	Taxes	1815-1822
Writings and speeches		
b. 5, f. 78	"All legitimate power to Govern founded on compact" English	Undated
b. 5, f. 79	An attack on the Federalists	Undated
b. 5, f. 80-81	"The Grand inquiry of mankind" English	Undated
b. 5, f. 82	Re: Connecticut Charter	Undated
b. 5, f. 83-85	Re: defense of Republican justices	[1804]
Oversize		
b. 6, f. 86	Connecticut Land Company	1795, 1798
b. 6, f. 87	Connecticut Land Company: certificates	1795
b. 6, f. 88	Deeds	1785, 1805
b. 6, f. 89	Indenture	1809

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

American loyalists -- Connecticut
Congregational churches -- Connecticut
Lawyers

Geographic Names

Connecticut -- Politics and government --
1775-1865
New Haven (Conn.)
United States -- Politics and government

Genres / Formats

Account books
Deeds

Occupations

Politicians

Names

Botsford, Amos, 1744-1812
Burr, Aaron, 1716-1757
Edwards, Pierpont, 1750-1826
Neilson, William, 1774-1821
Perkins, Simon, 1771-1844
Read, John, 1769-1854
Swift, George, 1796-1845
Tracy, Seth