

Guide to the William Barron Calhoun Papers

MS 880



compiled by Janet Elaine Gertz

February 1983

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 880

CREATOR: Calhoun, William B. (William Barron), 1795-1865

TITLE: William Barron Calhoun papers

DATES: 1810-1844

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.25 linear feet

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Approximately seventy letters of the Calhoun family of Boston, over half written by or to William B. Calhoun while he was a student at Yale College (1810-1814). Topics discussed include family affairs, Calhoun's experiences at Yale College and the War of 1812. Later family letters are written from various parts of New England and one is from a brother describing his travels in Turkey in 1838. Few of the letters reflect Calhoun's political career in the state legislature of Massachusetts (1825-1835) or as a congressman (1835-1843).

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Requesting Instructions

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Mrs. Morgan D. Brainard, 1961.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

William Barron Calhoun Papers (MS 880). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

William Barron Calhoun, the eldest child of Andrew Calhoun, a Scotch merchant of Boston, and of Martha (Chamberlain) Calhoun, was born in Boston on December 29, 1795. A brother was graduated at Williams College in 1829, and became a well-known missionary. The father was one of the founders of the Park Street Church. The son's patronymic was written Colhoun while he was in College. He was prepared for Yale by William Wells (Harvard 1796). In his Senior year he was one of the editors of the *Athenium*, a short-lived students' periodical. After graduation he began to read law in Concord, New Hampshire, where his father was then living, and later continued his studies for three years with the Hon. George Bliss (Yale 1784), in Springfield, Massachusetts, where he opened an office in 1822.

He was not, however, most successful as a practicing lawyer, but the sterling qualities of his character were soon appreciated, and from 1826 to 1836 he was a member of the State Legislature, and Speaker of the House in 1828, 1829, 1830, 1832, and 1833; in 1829 he received the unprecedented tribute of a unanimous election.

In 1834 he was elected to Congress as a Whig, and he remained in office from 1835 to 1843. But his vigor began to be impaired from the inroads of consumption, catarrh, and dyspepsia, and largely for this reason he declined further re-election.

In the meantime he was married, on May 11, 1837, to Margaret Howard, eldest daughter of Dr. Samuel and Jemima (Chapin, Lyman) Kingsbury, of Springfield.

He was a Presidential Elector for Henry Clay in 1844. In 1846, he was elected to the State Senate as an anti-war Whig, and he presided over that body for two years.

He was then Secretary of the Commonwealth from January, 1848 to 1851, and commissioner from 1853 to 1855.

In 1858 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from Amherst College, of which he was a Trustee from 1829 to his death.

In 1859 he was mayor of Springfield, and in 1861, for his last public service, was again a member of the State Legislature.

His later years were an almost constant struggle with disease, and were spent largely in retirement on his farm.

He died in Springfield on November 8, 1865, aged nearly 70 years.

His widow died on May 7, 1877, at the age of 66.

His children, one daughter and two sons, all survived him.

His portrait is given in Chapin's *Old Springfield*.

He was the soul of uprightness in all public and private relations. In his last years he was much gratified by an election to the office of Deacon in the First Congregational Church.

He was much interested in the improvement of public education. He was the chairman of the convention at Boston at which the American Institute of Instruction was organized in 1830, and after serving that body as Vice President for three years, was its President from 1833 to 1849.

(Taken from *Yale Biographies and Annals, 1805-1815*, by F. B. Dexter, pp. 628-630).

Scope and Contents

The William Barron Calhoun Papers consist of approximately seventy letters of the Calhoun (also spelled Colhoun) family of Boston, over half written by or to William B. Calhoun during his study at Yale College from 1810 to 1814. The letters discuss religion, for the family was very devout, family events in Boston, and William B. Calhoun's experiences at Yale. A letter of April 28, 1811, tells of a town-and-gown riot; another of February 26, 1812, tells of student violence against tutors. There are also comments on politics and foreign relations, and reports of incidents in the War of 1812 (April 23 and June 18, 1814). William Calhoun's letters after 1814 come from his father, mother, brothers Charles, James, John, and Henry, and his sisters. They are written from Boston, Rindge (New Hampshire), and from Canojoharie (New York), where his parents moved in 1821. There are also several letters from his mother to friends in Rindge, mostly concerning religion, and a few letters to other family members. The letters deal largely with family matters, but one letter from one of William Calhoun's brothers to an aunt (June 16, 1838) describes travel in Turkey.

Arrangement

The letters are arranged in chronological order.

Collection Contents

b.1, f.1 - 9	Correspondence	1810-1819, 1821-1823, 1825-26, 1831, 1838, 1842, 1844, undated
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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

Families
Lawyers
Students

Geographic Names

Turkey -- Description and travel
United States -- History -- War of 1812

Names

Calhoun, Andrew
Calhoun, Martha Chamberlain, 1770-1830
Calhoun, William B. (William Barron), 1795-1865

Families

Calhoun family

Corporate Bodies

Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1814
Yale University -- Students