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Guide to the J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur Papers

GEN MSS 722



by Diane J. Ducharme

January 2011

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
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CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 722

CREATOR: St. John de Crèvecoeur, J. Hector, 1735-1813

TITLE: J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur papers

DATES: 1784-circa 1880

BULK DATES: 1784-1810

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 3.55 linear feet (6 boxes)

LANGUAGE: French

SUMMARY: The J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur Papers consist of manuscripts and printed material documenting aspects of the later life and work of the French author, best known for his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*.

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

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.creve>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Almost all of the papers were purchased from the 19th Century Shop on the Edwin J. Beinecke Book Fund and the Frederick W. and Carrie S. Beinecke Fund for Western Americana, 2006.

The 1784-1786 letterbook of Crèvecoeur family correspondence was purchased from the William Reese Company on the Henry C. Taylor Fund, 2006.

The corrected proofs of *Voyage dans la Haute Pennsylvanie et dans l'État de New-York* were purchased from the William Reese Company on the Edwin J. Beinecke Book Fund, 2006.

Custodial History

Christie's New York sale, 2001 October 29.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813)

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur was born and educated in Caen, Normandy. In 1755 he became a surveyor in the French Colonial Militia and fought at the battle of Fort George in 1757. Crèvecoeur was wounded at the battle of Quebec, after which he left the army for unknown reasons and sailed to New York in December, 1759. On arrival, he changed his name to J. Hector St. John. For the next decade, Crèvecoeur earned his livelihood as a trader, explorer and surveyor, traveling through all of the British North American colonies. He became a naturalized citizen of New York Colony in 1765.

In 1769 he married Mehitable Tippet, the daughter of a prominent Dutchess County family, and purchased 120 acres of farmland in Orange County. The next several years brought Crèvecoeur three children and increasing prosperity; his farm flourished, and he led a county project to drain arable meadows and reclaim farmland. Crèvecoeur kept a daily journal of observations on his experiences and on his adopted country, which he considered "the most perfect society in the world."

The advent of the American Revolution disrupted this happiness. Crèvecoeur's attempts to remain neutral won him suspicion and hostility from both sides of the conflict. In 1779, he decided to return to France to establish his children's right to inherit the family's lands in Normandy. Arrested by the British in New York City as a suspected enemy collaborator, he was imprisoned for months, but finally sailed for Europe in September of 1780. His ship was wrecked off the coast of Ireland, and he did not reach Normandy until August of 1781.

Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* was published in London early in 1782. It received international praise, appeared in several English and Irish editions, and was translated into German and Dutch. On the verge of America's independence, Crèvecoeur was the first author to provide an answer to the European question of the day: "What then is this American, this new man?"

Crèvecoeur was considered one of the foremost European authorities on the new country, and France appointed him consul to New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. He sailed for New York on the ship that carried the first copy of the Treaty of Paris to the United States. When he arrived, he discovered that his wife had died and his children had been taken in by their neighbors; his farm and its buildings had been destroyed by Native American allies of the British.

As Consul, Crèvecoeur worked to increase French-American trade and supported cultural and artistic exchanges. He was also a patron of botanical gardens, experiments with steamships, and the first Roman Catholic church in New York City. His greatly enlarged and reorganized French version of *Letters* was published in Paris in 1784. His many American friends included Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. St. Johnsbury, Vermont, was named after Crèvecoeur, in 1789 he was made a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Crèvecoeur returned to France in 1790, but the dangers of the French Revolution led him to retire unpensioned in 1792 and to withdraw into his family life. In 1801 he published his *Voyage dans la haute Pennsylvanie et dans l'État de New York*; the work was not popular, and was not translated into English until 1961. Crèvecoeur spent his final years at his farm in Lesches, France, and visiting his extended family. He died at Sarcelles, near Paris, in 1813.

Scope and Contents

The J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur Papers document aspects of the later life and writings of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, particularly the expanded French version of his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1784) and his final work, *Voyage dans la haute Pennsylvanie et dans l'État de New York* (1801). The collection includes family correspondence, manuscripts, and research materials, mostly focused on social and political conditions in the United States during the first decades of its existence as a nation.

Arrangement

Organized into three series: I. Correspondence and Family Papers, 1784-1880. II. Writings, 1786-1801. III. Research Materials, 1784-1812.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence and Family Papers, 1784-1880, undated

(1 box)

Series I includes correspondence and family papers. Correspondence includes a letterbook containing letters from Crèvecoeur and from members of the French nobility to his sons. Family Papers include biographical notes compiled by Crèvecoeur's grandson and accounts from Crèvecoeur's attempt to run a packet-ship service.

Series I is arranged by type of material and then alphabetically.

b. 1, f. 1	<p>Letterbook</p> <p>23 letters from Crèvecoeur to his sons, Guillaume-Alexandre and Phillippe-Louis, almost all in English, containing discussion of the boys' educations and social development; Crèvecoeur's business affairs, including his attempt to establish a packet-ship service between France and the United States; and his progress on the third volume of <i>Lettres d'un cultivateur Américain</i>.</p> <p>With 3 letters from Crèvecoeur's daughter, America-Frances ("Fanny") to her father and 30 letters from various members of the French nobility addressed to Crèvecoeur's sons. Correspondents include the comtesse d'Houdetôt, Crèvecoeur's patron; the duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, and the Baron de Breteuil.</p>	1784-1786
b. 1, f. 2	<p>Accounts</p> <p>Accounts related to the packet-ship service started by Crèvecoeur.</p>	1794-1795
b. 1, f. 3-5	<p>Biographical notes and correspondence calendar</p> <p>Notes compiled by Robert de Crèvecoeur during his research for his biography of his grandfather (<i>St. John de Crèvecoeur: sa vie et ses oeuvres</i>, 1883). Includes chronologies, a calendar of correspondence, notes on various persons, and brief essay drafts.</p>	1880, undated

Series II: Writings, 1786-1801, undated*0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)*

Series II contains manuscript and annotated printed material related to two of Crèvecoeur's works, *Lettres d'un cultivateur Américain* and *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'État de New-York*.

Arranged alphabetically by title.

	<i>Lettres d'un cultivateur Américain</i>	undated
b. 1, f. 6	Les Treize Chapitres du Troisième Volume du Cultivateur Américain Autograph manuscript, heavily corrected and revised, of twelve of the seventeen chapters of the third volume of the French version of <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> . Bound in: printed pamphlet, <i>Extrait des gazettes américains</i> (Paris, 1786).	1786
	<i>Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'État de New-York</i>	
	Manuscript	
b. 2, f. 7-9	Autograph draft fragment Includes <i>Précis du Chapitres au Second Volume</i> (18 p.); <i>À George Washington</i> (20 p.); notes on William Penn; and notes numbered 22-60, presumably for a chapter in the work.	circa 1794-1800
	Map: <i>Jonction des Rivières Delaware et Susquehannah</i> Stored in: Box 6, folder 37	undated
	Map: <i>The Southern Parts of the Patent of Elisian Fields</i> Stored in: Box 6, folder 38	undated
b. 2, f. 10	Wrapper	undated
	Printed	
b. 2, f. 11	Volume I Also stored in: Box 6, folder 39 Heavily corrected and annotated in Crèvecoeur's hand, with new manuscript pages tipped in.	1801
b. 3, f. 12	Volume II Heavily corrected and annotated in Crèvecoeur's hand, with new manuscript pages tipped in.	1801
b. 3, f. 13	Volume III Heavily corrected and annotated in Crèvecoeur's hand, with new manuscript pages tipped in.	1801

Series III: Research Materials, 1784-1812, undated*0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)*

Series III contains manuscripts by Crèvecoeur, other manuscript materials, newspaper clippings and newspapers, and printed material, almost all documenting Crèvecoeur's research on aspects of the United States. Manuscripts in his hand include extracts from other works on the United States; a discussion of Franco-American relations; and a notebook containing statistics on various American states. Other manuscript material includes a copy of a John Fothergill letter and a description of George Washington's entrance into New York.

Newspaper clippings, sorted by topic, were collected by Crèvecoeur and reflect his interest in such subjects as religion in America, American educational institutions and learned societies, and slavery.

Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Manuscripts in Crèvecoeur's hand

b. 4, f. 14	Notebook Contents include extracts from Michaux's Travels to the Westward of the Allegany Mountains; notes on the new state of Ohio; descriptions of Native Americans ("Sauvages"); descriptions of Annapolis, Mount Vernon and Monticello; and brief entries on a variety of other topics. Also includes an eight page summary of <i>The Three Sultanas</i> , accompanied by a printed title page, and several pages of pasted-in newspaper clippings on American subjects.	circa 1805
b. 4, f. 15	Notebook: <i>Sundry and Gleanings</i> Also stored in: Box 6, folder 40 Notebook compiled during a trip to Munich. Contents include statistics concerning the United States, including populations of the states and territories, distances between major cities, and amounts of agricultural produce. Also contains notes on European history and law. Title from front cover. Also contains: <i>Postschrift von Deutschland...1793.</i>	1810-1811
b. 4, f. 16	Notes on French-American Relations Manuscript, incomplete, discussing the situations and conditions of Francophone residents of the United States and Canada; the promotion of emigration from France to America; and Franco-American trade relations.	undated
b. 4	Notes on a mechanical device Stored in: Box 6, folder 41 Notes, mathematical calculations and a drawing of a mechanical device. Written on the reverse of <i>Map of the Middle States of North America with Part of Canada, shewing the situation of the principal towns, viz. Columbia, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Newport (Rhode Island) Boston & Montreal, also their several communications with respect to Lake Ontario.</i> undated.	circa 1800?
b. 4, f. 17	Unidentified notes	undated
Other Manuscripts		
b. 4, f. 18	<i>Arrivée du General Washington</i>	undated

Other Manuscripts (continued)

b. 4, f. 19	<i>Convention Generale à Philadelphie</i> List of the contents of three notebooks (not present) documenting the Constitutional Convention.	undated
b. 4, f. 20	<i>Letter from John Fothergill to a Gentleman of Massachusetts-Bay</i> Copy of a letter originally dated October 20, 1780 in which Fothergill discusses the War of Independence and the possible future relationship of Great Britain and the former colonies.	undated
b. 4, f. 21	Letterbook Copies, in English and French, of brief letters concerning trade between the United States and France.	1796-1797
b. 4, f. 22	<i>Order de la grande procession que eu lieu let 4 juillet 1788 à Philadelphie</i>	undated
b. 4, f. 23	Plans and elevations of buildings and gardens Also stored in: Box 6, folder 42	undated
b. 4, f. 24	<i>Politique. Encyclopedie</i>	undated
b. 4, f. 25	Unidentified	undated
Newspaper clippings		
b. 4, f. 26	Fiscal and monetary concerns	undated
b. 4, f. 27	Literature and philosophy	undated
b. 4, f. 28	Native Americans	undated
b. 5, f. 29	Natural history and other scientific topics	undated
b. 5, f. 30	Navigation and travel	undated
b. 5, f. 31	Official statements, decrees, and parliamentary reports	undated
b. 5, f. 32	Religion in America (<i>Religions en Amerique</i>)	undated
b. 5, f. 33	Slavery	undated
b. 5, f. 34	Universities, schools and learned societies (<i>Universites et etablissements publiques en amerique</i>)	undated
b. 5, f. 35	Miscellaneous topics (<i>Melanges</i>)	undated
Newspapers		
b. 5	<i>The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser</i> Stored in: Box 6, folder 43 Contents include an announcement by Crèvecoeur ("St. John") of the publication of the <i>Journal de medicine</i> .	1784 January 1
b. 5	<i>Le Moniteur Universelle</i> Stored in: Box 6, folder 44 Contents include a lengthy <i>Extrait d'une lettre du president de l'Universitie de New-York</i> .	1812 May 7

Printed Material

b. 5	<i>A Plan of Captain Carver's Travels in the Interior Parts of North America in 1766 and 1767</i> Stored in: Box 6, folder 45	1778?
b. 5, f. 36	Memoire aux consuls de la Republique Française Annotations in Crèvecoeur's hand on blank final page. Date given in original as: 10 floréal an. 8.	1802 April 28

Oversize

1.67 linear feet (1 box)

b. 6 (Oversize), f. Map: Jonction des Rivières Delaware et Susquehannah 37	undated
b. 6 (Oversize), f. Map: <i>The Southern Parts of the Patent of Elisian Fields</i> 38	undated
b. 6 (Oversize), f. <i>Carte generale des États-Unis, de l'Amérique septentrionale</i> 39	undated
b. 6 (Oversize), f. <i>Postschrift von Deutschland...1793</i> 40	1793
b. 6 (Oversize), f. Notes on a mechanical device 41	undated
b. 6 (Oversize), f. Plan of a garden 42	undated
b. 6 (Oversize), f. <i>The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser</i> 43	1784 January 1
b. 6 (Oversize), f. <i>Le Moniteur Universelle</i> 44	1812 May 7
b. 6 (Oversize), f. <i>A Plan of Captain Carver's Travels in the Interior Parts of North America in 1766 and 1778?</i> 45 1767	

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

Travelers' writings, French

Geographic Names

New York -- Description and travel
Pennsylvania -- Description and travel
United States -- Description and travel
United States -- Description and travel -- Early works to 1800
United States -- Social conditions -- To 1865
United States -- Social life and customs -- 1775-1783
United States -- Social life and customs -- 1783-1865

Names

St. John de Crèvecoeur, J. Hector, 1735-1813
St. John de Crèvecoeur, J. Hector, 1735-1813
(Letters from an American farmer, French)
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(Letters from an American farmer)
St. John de Crèvecoeur, J. Hector, 1735-1813
(Voyage dans la haute Pensylvanie et dans l'état de New-York)