Aaron Burr (1756-1836) Collection, 1771-1958 (bulk 1782-1830): Finding Aid

Summary Information

Call number: C0089
Repository: Princeton University. Library. Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections
Manuscripts Division
One Washington Road Princeton, New Jersey 08544 USA
Size: 0.2 linear feet
1 half-size archival box
Language(s) of Material: English
Abstract: Consists primarily of letters by Aaron Burr (Princeton Class of 1772) to members of his family and associates.
Location: This collection is stored onsite at Firestone Library.
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Aaron Burr was born in Newark, New Jersey, on February 6, 1756, to Aaron Burr, a theologian and second president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), and Esther Edwards Burr, daughter of famous revivalist pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards. The younger Burr’s parents died before he was three, and he was raised by his maternal uncle, Timothy Edwards. Burr entered the College of New Jersey at age thirteen, and graduated in 1772 with distinction. After graduation, he studied theology privately before switching his concentration to law.

Burr interrupted his studies when he enlisted in the American army attacking Boston in 1775. He rose quickly through the ranks because of his skills on the battlefield, but he did not get along well with George Washington. Although promoted to Washington’s secretarial staff, Burr transferred to the staff of Washington’s second-in-command, Israel Putnam, to avoid conflicts with the general. Burr was successful under Putnam, valiantly leading troops in combat and securing important camps, such as in Brooklyn Heights and later at the battle of Monmouth Courthouse in New Jersey in 1778.

Burr resigned from the army in 1779 due to poor health, which was aggravated by the high temperatures and humidity at Monmouth. He continued to study law after leaving the army and recovering from illness, and became a member of the bar of New York in 1782. He married Theodosia Prevost in the same year, with whom he had one child, Theodosia Burr. Professionally, Burr entered a rivalry with Alexander Hamilton, another prominent lawyer in New York.

Burr began his political career in 1784 when he was elected to the state assembly. He continued in politics to serve in the United States Senate and ultimately as Vice President of the United States under Jefferson. He was a controversial character in Albany and Washington, D.C., not siding clearly with any single faction and repeatedly being accused of self-interested legislation, political conspiracy, and generally unfair and dishonest practices, some of which can be confirmed. Burr’s political career was thus tumultuous, and he found himself regularly in and out of favor with the ruling powers. He ultimately lost his second candidacy for Vice President when he alienated Republican leadership with sympathies for the Federalists. In the same year, he lost a bid for the governorship of New York.

Burr blamed much of his political downfall on Alexander Hamilton and his compatriots. After failing to force Hamilton to apologize for statements made against Burr in the gubernatorial race, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. When Burr killed the prominent politician, popular opinion cast him as a cold-blooded murderer, and warrants were put out for his arrest in New York and New Jersey. Burr fled to Philadelphia and then the South to escape capture.

On these travels, Burr began dreaming of a new nation formed in the Southwest. Burr believed that conflict between Americans and the Spanish could encourage an occupation of Mexico, allowing a new nation to form. One of his allies in these plans, however, revealed the scheme to President Jefferson, and Burr was indicted for treason. He was acquitted by John Marshall, whose narrow interpretation of the Constitution’s definition of treason was influenced by the justice’s dislike of and disagreements with Jefferson.

In Burr’s later life, he lived abroad, attempting to gain support for his plan for a new nation in the Southwest. Upon returning to the United States in 1812, he began again to practice law in New York. He remarried to a wealthy widow, who divorced him for adultery. He died on September 14, 1836, the same day the divorce was granted.
Description

The collection consists of 54 letters and five documents of Burr (Princeton Class of 1772), one letter (1780) from Robert Troup, and assorted photostats and facsimiles of additional Burr material. Addressees of the letters include Jeremy Bentham, Theodosia Burr (his wife), Theodosia Burr (his daughter), Mrs. Payne (Dolley Madison’s mother), and George Washington. In the latter letter, dated 1779, Burr resigns his rank and command in the Continental Army; many of the other letters deal with legal cases and legal advice.

Access and Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Associate University Librarian for Rare Books and Special Collections.

Acquisition and Appraisal

Custodial History

The collection was formed as a result of a departmental practice of combining into one collection manuscript material of various accessions relating to a particular author.

Related Materials

Related Archival Material

Related collections include C0090 (Aaron Burr, 1716-1757, Collection) and C0081 (Fuller Collection of Aaron Burr, 1756-1836).

Processing and Other Information

Preferred Citation

Citations should be as follows: Aaron Burr Collection (1756-1836), Box #, Folder #, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Works Cited
The Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1977) was consulted during preparation of the biographical note.

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Anna Bialek in July 2005. Finding aid written by Anna Bialek in July 2005.

Encoding


Descriptive Rules Used

Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

<table>
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<th>Subject Headings</th>
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<td>· United States. Continental Army—Officers</td>
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<td>· Lawyers—United States—18th century</td>
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<td>· Legal correspondence--18th century</td>
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<td>· American history/Revolution</td>
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<td>· American history/Early national</td>
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Series 1: Correspondence, 1771-1904

Size: 28 folders

Description: Letters primarily written by Burr to others; several to him have been interfiled.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

Alston, Theodosia Burr (1783-1813), 1793 December 16

Description:
· ALS, 3 pp., by Burr, describing the frequency of and manner in which Theodosia should write to her father as part of her lessons, including a sample letter on the third page. Includes small TD of unknown origin describing a man's pleasure upon receiving a portrait of Darwin.

Box: 1 Item: 1

Beers, Mr, 1796 February 7

Description:
· ALS, 3 pp., by Burr, regarding legal matters including the cases of Bennet and others. Also mentions the arrival of "Spanish Treaty" and "Jay’s Treaty." Includes note describing the acquisition of the letter, written by Edward H. Sholl, M.D., Class of 1853, dated May 20, 1872.

Box: 1 Item: 2

Benson, Egbert (1746-1833), undated

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Box: 1 Item: 3

Bentham, Jeremy (1748-1832), 1819 November 29

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr, regarding a German astronomer and requesting Bentham’s works on [Religion]

Box: 1 Item: 4

Burr, Sally, 1771 November 28

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr, to his sister, Sally, written from Nassau Hall while he is a student at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton)

Box: 1 Item: 4A

Burr, Theodosia, 1795 June 11

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr, mentioning her "Odyssey" and requesting a letter from the recipient, despite the volume of letters Burr has sent for her to answer

Box: 1 Item: 5

Colt, Peter (1736-1824), 1782 July 17

Box: 1 Item: 6
Series 1: Correspondence ... (Continued)

Description:
· ALS, 3 pp., by Burr

Craft, William D. (1787-1826), 1823-1828

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., March 17, 1823, by Burr
· ALS, 1 p., April 29, 1823, by Burr
· ALS, 1 p., March 29, 1826, by Burr
· ALS, 2 pp.: January 12, 1827, by Burr
· ALS, 1 p., February 16, 1827, by Burr, regarding taxes and the Circuit Court of the U.S.
· ALS (initialed), 1 p., February 20, 1827, by Burr
· ALS, 1 p., March 3, 1827, by Burr
· ALS, 2 pp., March 4, 1827, by Burr, regarding Medina and [Gaibina]
· ALS, 1 p., March 18, 1827, by Burr
· ALS, 1 p., March 22, 1827, by Burr, including a "slip" to be delivered to "Mr. P."

Duane, William (1760-1835), 1801 April 25

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Edwards, Timothy (1738-1813), 1790 July 9

Description:
· ALS, 2 p., by Burr. Includes complete photocopy of the original.

Edwards, Pierpont (1750-1826), 1792 January 8

Description:
· ALS, 2 pp., by Burr

Gait, Thomas, Dr, 1824 August 8

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr. Includes complete photocopy of the original and TLS and photocopy of TLS from John F. Schenk, dated Christmas 1939, commenting on Burr's place in history.

Harison, Richard, 1791 June 2

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Hauterive, Alexandre Maurice Blanc de Lanautte, comte d' (1754-1830), 1790 July 27

Description:
Series 1: Correspondence ... (Continued)

- ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Henry, John V, 1799 April 17
Description:
- ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Hopkins, Miles, 1793
Description:
- ALS, 2 pp., July 15, 1793, by Burr, regarding the acquisition of books for the recipient's library; ALS, 3 pp., November 2, 1793, by Burr, regarding books acquired and to be acquired for the recipient's library, including a list of books

Ireson, William, 1798 August
Description:
- ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Lathrop, Gurdon William (1790-1832), 1814
Description:
- ALS, 3 pp., March 28/29, [n.y.], by Burr, regarding various lawsuits
- ALS (initialed), 1 p., January 27, 1814, by Burr

Martin, Luther (1748-1826), 1813 December 27
Description:
- ALS, 2 pp., by Burr

Monroe, James (1758-1831), 1794 November 10
Description:
- ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Montanye, Vincent, 1785 March 23
Description:
- ADS (incomplete), 1 p., by Burr regarding the estate of the recipient

Morris, Robert (1734-1806), 1787 February 14
Description:
- ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Nicholson, John (1757-1800), 1794 March 31
Description:
- ALS, 1 p., by Burr, requesting a few more "Certificates of Population Shares" signed by the recipient

Payne, Mrs, 1795 May 8
Box: 1 Item: 23
Series 1: Correspondence ... (Continued)

Description:
· ALS, 2 pp., by Burr, regarding failure to see her before traveling and advice about money

Pelletreau, John, 1827
Box: 1 Item: 24

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., January 11, 1827, by Burr, regarding a trip by stagecoach and legal cases
· ALS, 1 p., January 14, 1827, by Burr
· ALS, 1 p., January 17, 1827, by Burr, regarding legal cases

Peters, Henry and Roosevelt, James G, undated
Box: 1 Item: 25

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr to regarding an application to the Court of Chancery to compel the recipients to exhibit accounts and estate records

Pichon, L. A. (Louis André), baron (1771-1850), 1803 February 13
Box: 1 Item: 26

Description:
· ALS (in French), 3 pp., to Burr.

Prévost, Augustine, Maj, 1784-1790
Box: 1 Item: 27

Description:
· ALS, 2 pp., January 9, 1784, by Burr
· ALS, 3 pp., April 25, 1789, by Burr
· ALS, 3 pp., August 24, 1789, by Burr
· ALS, 3 pp., May 7, 1790, by Burr

Remsen, Henry (1762-1843), 1799 October 2
Box: 1 Item: 28

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr, authorizing payment of $420 to the Honorable E. Boudinot, Esq

Riggs, E. W, 1904 March 9
Box: 1 Item: 29

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., to Mr. Collins, requesting relabelling and transfer of "Aaron Burr's letter" to University Library

Rhoades, Julius, 1821 August 15
Box: 1 Item: 30

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr, letter accompanying papers giving a notice of legal motion "to enlarge publication"

Sergeant, John (1747-1824), 1772
Box: 1 Item: 31

Description:
· ALS, 1 p., June 12, 1772, by Burr, requesting the sum of $4.10, carried by George Merchant and with an endorsement verifying that the sum was received
· ALS, 1 p., August 15, 1772, by Burr, requesting the recipient to send "a considerable sum" as he sees fit by "the bearer Georgem," includes endorsement that $4 was received
Folder includes 3 TDs describing and labeling the letters in a small envelope by an unknown author.

"Stirling, Lord", 1778 April 10
Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr, regarding "Capt. Tom" returned absent without leave, questioning his proper punishment

Troup, Robert (1757-1832), 1780 February 14
Description:
· ALS, 3 pp., to Burr, regarding Troup's resignation from his office, the move to Princeton from Philadelphia, and his fears about the changes

Van der Lyn, John, undated
Description:
· ALS, 1 p., undated, by Burr
· ALS, 1 p., undated, by Burr
Folder includes small typed note by unknown author, describing Burr's handwriting or signature.

Van Schaarck, Peter (1747-1832), 1790 October 20
Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr

Washington, George (1732-1799), 1779 February 25
Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr, describing the reasons for his leave from his rank and command in the Army and his actions to ensure a replacement will be ready before he leaves
Folder includes a typed transcript of the letter.

Williamson, Isaac H. (Isaac Halsted, 1767-1844), 1830 February 27
Description:
· ALS, 1 p., by Burr accompanying papers enclosed with the letter

Wilson, John Lyde, circa 1807 July 22-1809
Description:
· ALS to Mrs. Joseph Alston, regarding papers of his friend, Aaron Burr
### Series 2: Documents, 1777-1803

**Size:** 3 folders  
**Description:** Documents regarding financial and legal matters.  
**Arrangement:** Arranged alphabetically by the name of the associated person, either author or recipient.

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<th>Description</th>
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<td>Brewer, Elizabeth (1758-1821)</td>
<td>1777 April 24</td>
<td>• ADS, 1 p., affidavit declaring the author, Brewer, saw William Butler Lynch in Brunswick on the &quot;15th&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gelston, David</td>
<td>1796 June 22</td>
<td>• ADS, 1 p., promissory note written by Burr to pay recipient $2,000 dollars sixty days after date</td>
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</table>
| Green, Timothy, Dr            | 1794-1803       | • AD, 1 p., December 15, 1794 - January 1, 1797, account sheet for Burr’s account with the author  
                                 |                  | • ADS, 1 p., January 15, 1796, receipt  
                                 |                  | • ADS, 1 p., December 2, 1799 - March 20, 1800, account sheet for Burr’s account with the author |

### Series 3: Photostats/Facsimiles, 1771-1829

**Size:** 6 folders  
**Description:** Consists of photostats and facsimiles of letters and documents.  
**Arrangement:** Arranged alphabetically by recipient (or author, when not Burr).
Alston, Theodosia Burr (1783-1813), 1794 January 7
Box: 1 Item: 44
Description:
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., by Burr, providing comments and corrections on her most recent letter

Reeve, Sally Burr (1754-1787), 1771 November 28
Box: 1 Item: 45
Description:
· ALS (facsimile), 1 p., by Burr to his sister Sally

Unidentified ("I understand from your letter?"), 1793 July 27
Box: 1 Item: 46
Description:
· ALS (photostat), 1 p., by Burr

Unidentified ("His stature is about?"), undated
Box: 1 Item: 47
Description:
· AMs (photostat), 4 pp., unknown writer"s impression of Burr. Includes note that original is in New York Public Library.

Various letters, 1792-1829
Box: 1 Item: 48
Description:
· ALS (photostat, 2 copies), 1 p., November 12, 1771, by Burr to his sister Sally
· ALS (photostat), 1 p., June 20, 1789, by Burr to unknown recipient
· ALS (facsimile), 3 pp., September 12, 1792, by Burr to Timothy Edwards
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., [1792], by Burr to Jacob De Lamater
· ALS (facsimile), 1 p., April 17, 1795, by Burr to [Mr. Henry Dinker]
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., July 15, 1800, by [Harman Blinerth] to D. Woodbridge
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., January 5, 1802, by Burr to [Sam Brook]
· ALS (facsimile), 1 p., March 25, 1802, by [W Hampton] to Burr
· ALS (facsimile), 4 pp., March 24, 1806, by Burr to unknown recipient
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., December 23, 1806, by [Kherr] to General Wilkinson
· ALS (facsimile), 3 pp., April 14, 1807, by unknown person to James Wilkinson
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., August 2, 1813, by Timothy Pickering to Daniel Clark
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., January 15, 1816, by [Jackson] to John Armstrong
· ALS (facsimile), 2 pp., February [28], 1828, by Burr to Captain A. Partridge
· ALS (photostat), 1 p., July 17, 1829, by Burr to Rev. Dr. John Maclean
· ADS (facsimile), 8 pp., undated, "Our Treatment of Aaron Burr", signed "A. [Rittoe]"
· TLS, 1 p., October 2, 1903, by W. K. Bixby to Hon. Judge Jacob Klein requesting printing/distribution of Burr's private European journals

Series 4: Printed Matter, 1802, 1875, 1958

Size: 2 folders

Description: Series consists of an engraving, a newspaper article describing Burr's funeral, and part of a pamphlet.

Arrangement: Not arranged according to any arrangement scheme.

Miscellaneous, 1771-1958

Description:
· Engraving (two copies), 1802, of Aaron Burr; part of a January-February 1958 pamphlet, The Month at Goodspeed's, containing a reference to a document written by Burr as aide to Gen. Israel Putnam, 8 pp.

Macdonald, J. M., Rev, 1875 May 26

Description:
· Macdonald's newspaper article, "Confession of Aaron Burr," discussing details of Burr's funeral