
The majority of materials in this collection were purchased with support from The Barksdale-Dabney-Henry Fund for Research and Teaching on Patrick Henry and Early Americana

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Biography/History

Patrick Henry, born in Hanover County, Virginia, was an American lawyer, patriot, orator, and participant in almost every aspect of the founding of America, as well as a plantation owner and enslaver. He studied law on his own, and in 1760, he appeared in Williamsburg to take his attorney's examination before Robert Carter Nicholas and others. Henry served in the Virginia House of Burgesses, was a member of the Virginia Committee of Correspondence, a delegate to the Virginia Convention, and a delegate to the Virginia Constitution Ratification Convention. He played a prominent role in the May 6, 1776, convention and became the first governor of the commonwealth under its new constitution. He served three terms as governor of Virginia. Henry is perhaps best known for the speech he made in the House of Burgesses on March 23, 1775, urging the legislature to take military action against the encroaching British military force, which ended with the phrase "Give me liberty or give me death!" Henry also acquired extensive land holdings in the 1780s and 1790s, including a 10,000-acre plantation in Henry County, Virginia, known as Leatherwood, where he lived from 1779 to 1784, cultivated tobacco, and owned 75 enslaved persons. In 1794, he retired to Red Hill Plantation in Charlotte County, Virginia, a tobacco plantation comprising 520 acres.

Description

The collection consists of selected manuscript material by and about Patrick Henry (1736-1799), including signed autograph letters to family and associates; documents and notes regarding legal, property, and financial matters; and engraved portraits of Henry.

Arrangement

Items are arranged by accession.

Access and Use

Access

The collection is open for research use.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. No further photoduplication of copies of material in the collection can be made when Princeton University Library does not own the original. Inquiries regarding publishing material from the collection should be directed to RBSC Public Services staff through the Ask Us! form. The library has no information on the status of literary rights in the collection and researchers are responsible for determining any questions of copyright.
Custodial History

The collection was formed as a result of a Departmental practice of combining into one collection material of various accessions relating to a particular person, family, or subject.

Provenance and Acquisition

Promissory Note in the Hand of Patrick Henry, Signed by Jacob Puckett was a gift of Pierre F. Cook (1892) in 1931. (AM 9875).

Letter to Thomas Madison and receipt dated June 8, 1765, were a gift of Cyrus H. McCormick in April 1947. (AM 13366)

Letter to Robert Carter and receipts for October 1764 and May 1765 were a gift of David S. Elkind (1973), in October 2006. (AM 2007-37)


Appraisal

No material was separated during 2013-2020 processing.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Princeton University Library Collection of Patrick Henry Materials, Box and Folder Number; Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Encoding

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit 2013-06-12T14:45-0400

Descriptive Rules Used

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

Subject Headings

- Henry, Patrick, 1736-1799 -- Sources.
- Revolutionaries -- United States -- 18th century .
- Slaveholders -- Virginia -- 18th century .
- Slavery -- Virginia -- 18th century -- Sources.
- Virginia -- History -- 1775-1865 -- Sources.
- Correspondence -- 18th century.
- Documents -- 18th century.
· American history/Revolution
Promissory Note, 1793 February 22  
accessionnumber: AM 9875  
Description: In the hand of Patrick Henry, signed by Jacob Puckett  
Box: 1 Folder: 1

Letter to His Brother-in-Law, Thomas Madison (1746–1798), 1789 September 28  
accessionnumber: AM 13366  
Description: Regards a bond of Henry's brother.  
Box: 1 Folder: 2

Receipt and Letter to Robert Carter, 1765, 1789  
accessionnumber: AM 2007-37  
Description: Letter, dated July 24, 1789, regards a legal matter.  
Box: 1 Folder: 3

Letter to His Daughter, Elizabeth (Betsey) Aylett, and Steel Engraving of Henry, 1794 May 3  
accessionnumber: AM 2007-66  
Box: 1 Folder: 4

Letter Concerning Will of Israel Christian, 1788 June 19  
accessionnumber: AM 2008-43  
Box: 1 Folder: 5

Receipt for Shoes and Saddle Cloth for Henry's Nephew, John H. Christian, 1795, 1889  
accessionnumber: AM 2008-86  
Description: Signed by cobbler Ephraim Potts  
Includes an accompanying explanatory letter (1889)  
Box: 1 Folder: 6

Letter to Spencer Roane (Son-in-Law) , 1786 November 14  
accessionnumber: AM 2009-34  
Box: 1 Folder: 7

One-Page "Opinion" Regarding a Land Survey, circa 1831  
accessionnumber: AM 2009-40  
Box: 1 Folder: 8

Letter to "Sir" (Henry Lee?), 1795 February 14  
accessionnumber: AM 2009-115  
Description: Declining to take a law case involving an influential Fairfax family.  
Box: 1 Folder: 9

Letter to Philip Payne Concerning Supplies for Persons Enslaved by Henry, 1794 July 30  
accessionnumber: AM 2010-26  
Box: 1 Folder: 10

Letter to Colonel Joseph Martin Regarding Policy toward American Indians, 1784 December 13  
Box: 1 Folder: 11
Letter to Unidentified Correspondent Regarding the Sale of His Plantation, Red Hill, 1796 March 14

Description: Addressed to the Virginia delegate, the letter is about two persons jailed for suspected "wicked intentions."

Outgoing Letter Concerning the Selling of Enslaved Persons to Purchase Yazoo Land, and Engraving of Henry, 1790 January 12

Description: Sent from Prince Edward County, Virginia, Henry writes about selling enslaved persons to raise money to purchase Yazoo land (portions of present day Alabama and Mississippi). The engraving, made from an Alonzo Chappel painting of Henry seated with a pen and notebook, is undated.

Documents Regarding Henry's Purchase of Lands on Leatherwood Creek, Henry County, 1743-1783, bulk 1778

Description: Consists of three documents related to the purchase of lands for Patrick Henry's Leatherwood Plantation. In one document, dated November 27, 1778, Martin Key agrees to allow Patrick Henry to settle on land on Leatherwood Creek in Henry County, Virginia, which Henry purchased from Thomas Lomax, but was involved in a legal dispute. Another is a May 29, 1778, document signed by Thomas Lomax transferring 9,990 acres of land on Leatherwood Creek to Patrick Henry. The third is a complaint for the Court of Chancery case of Lomax v. Randolph concerning a tract of land, circa 1743 (filed April 3, 1783).

Letter to Henry Lee (1756-1818), 1795 April 7

Description: Consists of a one-page signed autograph letter from Patrick Henry in Red Hill, Virginia, to Major-General Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee III. Henry opens the letter reporting that he has again been asked by "the Executive" (President George Washington) to administer the Fairfax estate, likely referring to George William Fairfax, whose estate neighbored Mount Vernon. Fairfax had left Virginia in 1773, giving Washington power of attorney, but had died in England in 1787. Henry continues seeking Lee's assistance in selling "about 10 tracts of land in No. Carolina from 15 to 20 miles from Fayetteville. They contain about 9000 acres, are choice rice lands..." Henry also describes land at Cape Henry and elsewhere.
Engraved Portrait of Patrick Henry, undated

accessionnumber: AM 2018-44

Description: Consists of an engraved portrait of Patrick Henry, engraved by E. Wellmore from a painting by J.B. Longacre after an original miniature in possession of John S. Fleming of Virginia. The engraving is signed by Patrick Henry.

Patrick Henry Letter to the County Lieutenant of Berkeley, 1777 November 12

accessionnumber: AM 2019-129

Description: One letter, written in Williamsburg, from Patrick Henry as Governor of Virginia, in which he arranges for salt provisions for the Virginia militia "that have joined Genl Washington."

Patrick Henry Document Certifying Land Allotment to Thomas Chandler, 1785 February 28

accessionnumber: AM 2020-72

Description: Consists of a printed document completed by hand and signed by Patrick Henry, certifying that the representative of Thomas Chandler is entitled to the proportion of land allowed a Lieutenant of the State Navy for three years service.

Patrick Henry Letter Fragment to Moses Smith, 1794 February 14

accessionnumber: AM 2020-72