

James McHenry Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the
Library of Congress

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Revised by Karen Linn Femia



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2009

Contact information: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mss/address.html>

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Congress Manuscript Division, 2009

Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms008012>

Collection Summary

Title: James McHenry Papers

Span Dates: 1775-1862

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1775-1816)

ID No.: MSS32177

Creator: McHenry, James, 1753-1816

Extent: 3,600 items; 15 containers plus 1 oversize; 4.6 linear feet; 6 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: U.S. secretary of war, member of the Continental Congress from Maryland, Continental Army officer, and physician. Correspondence, financial records, diary, and other papers relating to McHenry's service as U.S. secretary of war in the administrations of George Washington and John Adams; and as a Continental Army officer, particularly as secretary to George Washington and on the staff of the Marquis de Lafayette.

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.

Personal Names

Adams, John, 1735-1826--Correspondence.

Adams, John, 1735-1826.

Carroll, Charles, 1737-1832--Correspondence.

Chase, Samuel, 1741-1811--Correspondence.

Dickinson, Philemon, 1739-1809--Correspondence.

Greene, Nathanael, 1742-1786--Correspondence.

Hamilton, Alexander, 1757-1804--Correspondence.

Henley, David, 1749-1823--Correspondence.

Hindman, William, 1743-1822--Correspondence.

Knox, Henry, 1750-1806--Correspondence.

Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834--Correspondence.

Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834.

Lee, Thomas Sim, 1745-1819--Correspondence.

Macon, Nathaniel, 1758-1837--Correspondence.

McHenry, James, 1753-1816.

Murray, William Vans, 1760-1803--Correspondence.

Pickering, Timothy, 1745-1829--Correspondence.

Pinckney, Charles Cotesworth, 1746-1825--Correspondence.

Rush, Benjamin, 1746-1813--Correspondence.

Stoddert, Benjamin, 1751-1813--Correspondence.

Tallmadge, Benjamin, 1754-1835--Correspondence.

Tracy, Uriah, 1755-1807--Correspondence.

Washington, George, 1732-1799--Correspondence.

Washington, George, 1732-1799.

Wilkinson, James, 1757-1825--Correspondence.

Williamson, Hugh, 1735-1819--Correspondence.

Wolcott, Oliver, 1760-1833--Correspondence.

Organizations

United States. Army.

United States. Constitutional Convention (1787)

United States. Continental Army.
United States. War Dept.

Subjects

Coast defenses.
Indians of North America--Government relations.
Shipbuilding.

Locations

France--Foreign relations--United States.
Great Britain--Foreign relations--United States.
Spain--Foreign relations--United States.
United States--Foreign relations--France.
United States--Foreign relations--Great Britain.
United States--Foreign relations--Spain.
United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783.
United States--Politics and government--1783-1809.
West (U.S.)

Occupations

Army officers.
Cabinet officers.
Delegates, U.S. Continental Congress--Maryland.
Physicians.

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of James McHenry, U.S. secretary of war, member of the Continental Congress from Maryland, Continental Army officer, and physician, were obtained by the Library of Congress through gift, deposit, reproduction, exchange, and purchase from various sources from 1901 to 1986. An addition made to the collection in 1999 includes a letter of 1797 formerly in the division's Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection.

Processing History:

The papers of James McHenry were arranged and described in 1971 and 1985. The collection was expanded and revised in 1999. The finding aid was revised in 2009.

Additional Guides:

The James McHenry Papers are described in *Report of the Librarian of Congress for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1930*, p. 69, and in *Report of the Librarian of Congress for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1931*, pp. 60-61.

A card index for series A, B, and C of the Correspondence series is available in the Manuscript Reading Room. Indexes for series A and B are chronologically organized, and the index for series C is alphabetically organized.

Copyright Status:

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of James McHenry is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of James McHenry are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm:

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on six reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, James McHenry Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1753, Nov. 16	Born, Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland
1771	Emigrated to Philadelphia, Pa.
1772	Attended Newark Academy, Newark, Del.
1773	Studied medicine under Benjamin Rush, Philadelphia, Pa.
1775	Volunteered for military service
1776	Assigned to medical staff of military hospital, Cambridge, Mass. Captured at fall of Fort Washington, New York, N.Y.
1777	Paroled
1778	Appointed secretary to George Washington
1780	Transferred to staff of the Marquis de Lafayette
1781	Commissioned major
1781-1786	Member, Maryland senate
1783-1786	Member, Continental Congress
1784	Married Margaret Allison Caldwell
1787	Member, Constitutional Convention
1790	Inherited family importing firm, John McHenry & Co.
1791-1796	Member, Maryland senate
1796-1800	Secretary of war

- 1803 Published *A Letter to the Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States*. Baltimore: Printed by John W. Butler
- 1816 Died at his estate "Fayetteville" near Baltimore, Md.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of James McHenry span the years 1775 to 1862, with the bulk of the items concentrated in the period 1775 to 1816. The collection consists of correspondence and related documents, memoranda of McHenry as secretary of war in the administrations of George Washington and John Adams, miscellaneous personal, financial, and professional material, and a diary kept during the Constitutional Convention of 1787. The collection is organized into the following series: [Correspondence](#), [Miscellany](#), [Addition](#), and [Oversize](#).

[Series A](#) and [B](#) of the [Correspondence](#) series, which together constitute more than half the collection, are composed almost entirely of negative photocopies received by the Library of Congress from McHenry's heirs between 1927 and 1930. The photocopies were organized into bound volumes and include, in addition to the negatives, a few positive prints obtained in subsequent years from various other donors. [Series C](#) and [D](#) contain original documents. Although each series of correspondence is organized chronologically, their dates overlap.

McHenry's papers for the war period relate both to personal aspects of his life in the American army and to his role as amanuensis. They include a copy of his will, a 1776 letter to Benjamin Rush, McHenry's oath of allegiance to the United States, and letters to Thomas Sim Lee, governor of Maryland, written after Washington had reassigned McHenry as aide to the Marquis de Lafayette. Correspondence for the Revolutionary era is occasionally enriched by McHenry's detailed observations on the war's progress. A copy of a 12 September 1778 McHenry letter from White Plains, New York, to Hugh Williamson describes the Continental Army's current deployment and the prospects of future English military actions. The early years are further enhanced by letters from Nathanael Greene to McHenry. [Series B](#) of the [Correspondence](#) includes a photostatic copy of a draft of the Declaration of Independence which Thomas Jefferson circulated through Richard Henry Lee.

Toward the end of the Revolution, McHenry returned to Maryland, where his family owned an importing business, and in 1783 was appointed by the state to the national Congress. A staunch Federalist, McHenry retained and cultivated the friendship of his wartime associates. Letters involving Washington and Lafayette appear in the postwar correspondence, as do those of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Samuel Chase, William Hindman, William Vans Murray, Timothy Pickering, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Benjamin Tallmadge, and Uriah Tracy.

For the years 1796 to 1800, which are the best documented in the collection, the papers cover a wide variety of subjects relating to McHenry's position as secretary of war. Included are reports on frigate construction, fortification of ports and harbors, defense of the frontier, and conferences with various Indian nations, as well as memoranda on the fluctuating state of affairs among the United States, England, France, and Spain. In July 1796 McHenry submitted to Washington a report on the power of the chief executive to remove a diplomatic officer. In April 1797 he wrote a memorandum on the "quantum and kind of defensive force necessary at this juncture."

In the spring of 1798 McHenry and the War Department became involved in implementing a series of bills passed by Congress which put the country on a war footing. The papers contain substantial correspondence on the issues involved, including letters between and among McHenry, Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and James Wilkinson. The subsequent breach in Adams's cabinet between the Hamiltonian faction, of which McHenry was a part on the one hand, and the president and his supporters on the other, is also well treated,

including McHenry's detailed recollection of a conversation which took place between him and President John Adams the evening preceding McHenry's resignation as secretary of war, a copy of which he sent to the president.

McHenry's correspondence continued after he left office, though the bulk is much less. A draft of a long letter McHenry wrote on 20 December 1802 to the speaker of the House of Representatives, Nathaniel Macon, was eventually printed and consists of a refutation of Republican charges that McHenry while in the War Department had abused the public trust. This letter is in Correspondence [Series C](#). Other correspondents in the McHenry papers include Philemon Dickinson, Henry Knox, Benjamin Stoddert, and Oliver Wolcott (1760-1833).

Some of the copies of letters to McHenry dated between 1779 and 1812 in [Series D](#) transcribed in 1915 when the originals were in the possession of the McHenry family contain errors in dating.

In the [Miscellany](#) series are drafts of writings and legislative bills and McHenry's 1787 diary of the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia. The diary, which when first published in 1906 shed new light on the convention, remains an invaluable source for the study of the federal constitution. McHenry was in attendance for only a few days during the latter part of May 1787 when a brother's illness forced him to leave, but he returned on 4 August and continued his private account of the proceedings until 8 September. The diary is supplemented by letters McHenry wrote from Philadelphia to his wife and by a speech in the [Oversize](#) series he delivered in favor of the new plan of government to the Maryland Assembly.

The [Addition](#), appended in 1999, contains two letters. These are the only items in the papers not microfilmed. The first letter, dated 1797 while McHenry was serving as secretary of war, is a response to Colonel David Henley. The second item is McHenry's draft version of George Washington's 1798 letter to President John Adams accepting the office of commander in chief of the army. McHenry wrote the letter while at Mount Vernon, 11-13 July 1798. Both the draft and the revision were later given to Adams. As the secretary of war, McHenry received and retained the draft.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in four series:

- [Correspondence, 1775-1862](#)
- [Miscellany, 1783-1829](#)
- [Addition, 1797-1798](#)
- [Oversize, 1787](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-14 REEL 1-6	<u>Correspondence, 1775-1862</u>
BOX 1-2 REEL 1	<u>Series A, 1778-1814</u> Bound volumes of mostly negative photocopies of letters received and drafts and copies of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 3-10 REEL 1-3	<u>Series B, 1775-1862</u> Bound volumes of mostly negative photocopies of letters received and drafts and copies of letters sent. Includes negative photocopies of draft of Declaration of Independence. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 11 REEL 3-5	<u>Series C, 1776-1816</u> Mostly letters received and drafts and copies of letters. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	<u>Series D, 1775-1822</u> Personal, official, and financial correspondence in loose, extract, letterbook, letterpress, and transcribed form. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.
BOX 14-15 REEL 5-6	<u>Miscellany, 1783-1829</u> A diary of the Constitutional Convention, drafts of bills and memoranda, drafts of writings, an account and commonplace book, and miscellaneous printed and biographical material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 15 not filmed	<u>Addition, 1797-1798</u> Letter of 1797 to David Henley and McHenry's draft version of George Washington's 1798 letter to John Adams. Arranged chronologically.
BOX OV 1 REEL 6	<u>Oversize, 1787</u> Speech. Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which the item was removed. Listed as Container no. 16 on microfilm.

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 19,006

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-14 REEL 1-6	Correspondence, 1775-1862
BOX 1-2 REEL 1	Series A, 1778-1814 Bound volumes of mostly negative photocopies of letters received and drafts and copies of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1 REEL 1	1778, Oct. 11-1799, Apr. 2
BOX 2 REEL 1	1799, June 1-1814, Dec. 20
BOX 3-10 REEL 1-3	Series B, 1775-1862 Bound volumes of mostly negative photocopies of letters received and drafts and copies of letters sent. Includes negative photocopies of draft of Declaration of Independence. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 3 REEL 1	1775, June 29-1781, Sept. 15
BOX 4 REEL 1	1781, Oct. 6-1794, Sept. 16
BOX 5 REEL 2	1794, Sept. 24-1797 Apr. 1
BOX 6 REEL 2	1797, Apr. 3-1798, Sept. 13
BOX 7 REEL 2	1798, Sept. 14-1799, Nov. 19
BOX 8 REEL 2	1799, Dec. 9-1804, July 16
BOX 9 REEL 3	1804, July 28-1813, May 30
BOX 10 REEL 3	1813, May 31-1862, Nov. 4, undated
BOX 11 REEL 3-5	Series C, 1776-1816 Mostly letters received and drafts and copies of letters. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 11	1776, Aug.-1799, Feb.

Correspondence, 1775-1862

Container

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REEL 3-4	(8 folders)
BOX 12 REEL 4	1799, Mar.-Oct.
BOX 13 REEL 4	(6 folders) 1799, Nov.-1816, Feb.
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	(12 folders) Series D, 1775-1822 Personal, official, and financial correspondence in loose, extract, letterbook, letterpress, and transcribed form. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Extracts of letters from James Wilkinson, 1797
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Letterbook copies regarding Fort McHenry, 1799
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Letterbook of John McHenry & Co., 1790-1810
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Letterpress book: correspondence, speeches, statements and miscellany, 1796-1797
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Personal, 1775-1822, undated
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Transcripts, typewritten, of letters to McHenry, 1779-1812
BOX 14-15 REEL 5-6	Miscellany, 1783-1829 A diary of the Constitutional Convention, drafts of bills and memoranda, drafts of writings, an account and commonplace book, and miscellaneous printed and biographical material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Account book of James McHenry in the hand of John McHenry, 1815-1829
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Biographical data, 1822, undated
BOX 14 REEL 5-6	Commonplace book of John McHenry, 1815-1824
BOX 15 REEL 6	Diary of the Constitutional Convention, 1787
BOX 15 REEL 6	Draft of a bill establishing a military academy, undated
BOX 15 REEL 6	Draft of a bill organizing the army, undated
BOX 15 REEL 6	Drafts of articles for <i>The Mirror</i> , undated
BOX 15	Drafts of letters and articles for newspapers and periodicals, 1794, undated

Miscellany, 1783-1829

Container

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REEL 6	
BOX 15	Memorandum concerning a fit person to serve as minister to France, 1798
REEL 16	
BOX 15	Memorandum outlining the reorganization and regulation of the army, circa 1798
REEL 6	
BOX 15	Memorandum on disbanding the army, 1800
REEL 6	
BOX 15	Military affairs, 1799, undated
REEL 6	
BOX 15	Remarks on a plan for new money, 1783
REEL 6	
BOX 15	Speech to the Maryland Assembly concerning proposed constitution, 1787
REEL 6	<u><i>See Oversize</i></u>
BOX 15	Thoughts on the policy of France regarding obtaining the Floridas, circa 1798
REEL 6	
BOX 15	Unidentified and miscellaneous writings, undated
REEL 6	
BOX 15	Addition, 1797-1798
not filmed	
	Letter of 1797 to David Henley and McHenry's draft version of George Washington's 1798 letter to John Adams. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 15	Letter to David Henley, 1797
not filmed	
BOX 15	Letter draft, George Washington to John Adams accepting the office of commander in chief of the army, 1798
not filmed	
BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1787
REEL 6	
	Speech. Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which the item was removed. Listed as Container no. 16 on microfilm.
BOX OV 1	Miscellany
REEL 6	
BOX OV 1	Speech to Maryland Assembly concerning proposed constitution, 1787
REEL 6	(Container 15)