

James Fowler Simmons Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the
Library of Congress

Prepared by Suzanne J. Harris



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2010

Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/mss.contact>

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Collection Summary

Title: James Fowler Simmons Papers

Span Dates: 1771-1939

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1840-1860)

ID No.: MSS40055

Creator: Simmons, James Fowler, 1795-1864

Extent: 21,000 items; 58 containers; 19 linear feet; 1 microfilm reel

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: Manufacturer, political leader, and United States senator from Rhode Island.

Correspondence, family letters, memoranda, legal documents, account books, photographs, and printed matter relating to Simmons's cotton and yarn manufacturing enterprises and to public matters, including the tariff, Thomas Dorr and the Dorr Rebellion of 1842, the nomination and election of Abraham Lincoln as president, and social, economic, and political conditions in Rhode Island.

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.

People

Abbott, Lawrence F. (Lawrence Fraser), 1859-1933--Correspondence.

Adams, Charles Francis, 1807-1886--Correspondence.

Anthony, Henry B. (Henry Bowen), 1815-1884--Correspondence.

Armington, Hervey 1793-1868--Correspondence.

Bliss, Zenas R. (Zenas Randall), 1835-1900--Correspondence.

Combs, Leslie, 1793-1881--Correspondence.

Cranston, H. G.--Correspondence.

Cranston, Robert Bennie, 1791-1873--Correspondence.

Dickins, Asbury, 1780-1861--Correspondence.

Dorr, Thomas Wilson, 1805-1854.

Eno, Edward J.--Correspondence.

Everett, Edward, 1794-1865--Correspondence.

Ferguson, William--Correspondence.

Gerry, Elbridge, 1791-1883--Correspondence.

Gibbs, William C. (William Channing), 1789-1871--Correspondence.

Harrison, William Henry, 1773-1841.

Hunter, William, 1774-1849--Correspondence.

Jackson, Charles, 1775-1855--Correspondence.

Jackson, George W., 1803 or 4-1860--Correspondence.

Jenckes, Thomas A. (Thomas Allen), 1818-1875--Correspondence.

Knight, Nehemiah Rice, 1780-1854--Correspondence.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Correspondence.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865.

Morse, Samuel Finley Breese, 1791-1872--Correspondence.

Polk, James K. (James Knox), 1795-1849.

Potter, Charles--Correspondence.

Randolph, Richard K. (Richard Kidder), 1781-1849--Correspondence.

Ruggles, Nathan S.--Correspondence.

Sargent, Nathan, 1794-1875--Correspondence.

Seward, William Henry, 1801-1872--Correspondence.

Simmons family--Correspondence.
Simmons, James Fowler, 1795-1864.
Simmons, Walter C.--Correspondence.
Tallmadge, Nathaniel Pitcher, 1795-1864--Correspondence.
Tillinghast, Joseph L. (Joseph Leonard), 1791-1844--Correspondence.
Tyler, John, 1790-1862--Correspondence.
Walker, Amasa, 1799-1875--Correspondence.
Watson, William A.--Correspondence.
Webster, Daniel, 1782-1852--Correspondence.

Organizations

Abbott & Bliss--Correspondence.
Bank of the United States (1816-1836)
Fearing & Hall--Correspondence.
Liverman & Cushing--Correspondence.
Tiffany, Ward & Company--Correspondence.
Whig Party (U.S.)

Subjects

Bounties--United States.
Cotton manufacture--Rhode Island.
Dorr Rebellion, 1842.
Elections--United States--1860.
International trade.
Manufacturing industries--United States.
Presidents--United States--Election--1860.
Slavery--United States.
Tariff--United States.
Textile industry--Rhode Island.
Yarn.

Places

Rhode Island--Economic conditions.
Rhode Island--History--1775-1865.
Rhode Island--Politics and government.
Rhode Island--Social conditions.
Texas--Annexation to the United States.
United States--Economic policy--19th century.
United States--Politics and government--1783-1865.

Occupations

Industrialists.
Politicians.
Senators, U.S. Congress--Rhode Island.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of James Fowler Simmons, manufacturer, political leader, and United States senator from Rhode Island, were purchased in 1940. A small addition was given by Whitman Bailey in 1948.

Processing History

The papers of James Fowler Simmons were arranged and described in 1978. The finding aid was revised in 2010.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of James Fowler Simmons 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 select items from these papers is available on one reel. 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 or reel number, James Fowler Simmons Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1795, Sept. 10	Born near Little Compton, R.I.
1820	Married Eliza Randall (died 1833)
1822	In Simmonsville, N.H., manufacturing yarns
1827	Moved to Johnston, R.I.; engaged in the manufacture of yarns and in agricultural pursuits
1829-1841	Representative, Rhode Island general assembly
1835	Married Sarah Scott Whipple
1841-1847	United States senator from Rhode Island
1842	Appointed chairman, Senate Committee on Manufacturing
1847	Returned to Johnston, R.I., and resumed his former pursuits
1857-1862	Served in United States Senate
1864, July 10	Died, Johnston, R.I.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of James Fowler Simmons (1795-1864) span the years 1771-1939 and consist primarily of correspondence and business papers, supplemented by legal papers, notes, drafts of reports,

speeches, and printed matter. The collection is organized in [Family Correspondence](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Financial Papers](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Printed Matter](#) series.

The bulk of the material falls between the years 1840 and 1862 when Simmons's political career reached the national level. His cotton manufacturing business in Rhode Island was still of major concern to him although it was managed by his eldest son, Walter C. Simmons, when the senator was in Washington. The correspondence and papers concerning both his public and business affairs during this period, together with some pertinent family letters, reflect the major aspects of his career. Specifically, they depict Simmons's activities as a Whig in state and national politics, significant political and economic issues of the time, and the operations of a typical business concern in the mid-nineteenth century.

James Fowler Simmons's time was much in demand. In pursuing two major careers he did not allow himself the luxury of extensive correspondence. One exception to this is a group of about 250 "husband-wife" letters which were removed from the collection by the donor and never returned. Another exception is Simmons's letters to his son Walter Cook. These letters, usually brief, constitute the largest number of letters in this collection written by James Fowler Simmons to any one person. They span the years 1838-1861 and primarily concern business matters, although from time to time political events in Washington are discussed. The papers also contain the letters of Walter C. Simmons to his father. They include family and political subjects, especially political affairs in Rhode Island, as well as detailed accounts of the family business.

The bulk of the [General Correspondence](#) relates to political matters, state and national, and appears to be the most significant group of papers in the collection. When Simmons was a member of the Rhode Island General Assembly, 1828-1841, he received many letters from his constituents concerning contemporary political and economic issues, especially on the state and local level. Other significant correspondence of the late 1820s and 1830s are the letters of Nehemiah Rice Knight to Simmons. Knight was in the United States Senate from 1821 to 1841 and wrote regularly to Simmons about the political situation on the national front. His letters discuss such topics as the nomination of William Henry Harrison to the presidency, tariff matters, Texas annexation, James K. Polk, the Bank of the United States, slavery, and bounty laws.

When Simmons, himself, served in the Senate, 1841-1847 and 1857-1862, his correspondence becomes not only more extensive, but comprehensive as well. He became chairman of the Committee on Manufacturing in the Senate in 1842 and much correspondence deals with the tariff, exporting and importing, and manufacturing throughout the country. Other significant subjects discussed are Abraham Lincoln, the Bank of the United States, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, the Dorr Rebellion in Rhode Island, and the changing party structure preceding the Civil War. Specific items include an invitation to the White House from President John Tyler, 1841; two letters from Charles Francis Adams against the annexation of Texas, 1845; a letter from Edward Everett concerning the merits of a sculptor, 1846; a note from William H. Seward, 1861; photocopies of an invitation, note, and letter from Webster, 1848; and a photocopy of a letter from Abraham Lincoln about Douglas enlisting support of some men from Rhode Island, August 17, 1860. Other notable correspondents include Lawrence F. Abbott, Henry B. Anthony, H. G. Cranston, R. B. Cranston, Edward J. Eno, William Ferguson, Elbridge Gerry (1791-1883), W. Hunter, Samuel F. B. Morse, Nathan Sargent, Nathan P. Tallmadge, and Amasa Walker.

[Financial Papers](#) make up the largest series in the papers. This series consists of business correspondence and business papers sent to and received from both Simmons and his son Walker Cook. It is quite technical in content, dealing specifically with types of material, receipts for merchandise, bills, invoices, and similar material.

The [Miscellany](#) series includes calling cards, legal papers, a memo book belonging to Simmons's father, Davis Simmons, photographs, notes and drafts of reports, and Simmons's speeches in the Senate.

The last series in this collection contains printed matter. There are scattered issues of newspapers such as the *Providence Journal* and other New England papers, and a few issues of New York newspapers covering primarily the years 1840-1863 as well as a collection of circulars, handbills, reports, and other material.

Other correspondents include Hervey Armington, Zenas R. Bliss, Leslie Combs, Asbury Dinkins, William C. Gibbs, Charles Jackson, George W. Jackson, Thomas A. Jenckes, Charles Potter, Richard K. Randolph, Nathan S. Ruggles, Joseph L. Tillinghast, and William A. Watson; and the firms Abbott & Bliss; Fearing & Hall; Liverman & Cushing; and Tiffany, Ward, & Company.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in five series:

- Family Correspondence, 1792-1939
- General Correspondence, 1788-1864
- Financial Papers, 1794-1869
- Miscellany, 1771-1909
- Printed Matter, 1808-1931

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-10	<u>Family Correspondence, 1792-1939</u> Correspondence between James Fowler Simmons and his son, Walter C. Simmons, and between other family members. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 11-26	<u>General Correspondence, 1788-1864</u> Primarily letters received, with some drafts of letters sent. Arranged chronologically to the month.
BOX 27-47	<u>Financial Papers, 1794-1869</u> Business correspondence, 1815-1869, consisting primarily of letters sent to and received from James Fowler Simmons and his son, Walter C. Simmons, concerning the cotton manufacturing business; and business papers, 1794-1869, including bills, bills of lading, receipts, invoices, bank notes, and an account book stemming from the cotton manufacturing business. Arranged chronologically by year within the two groups.
BOX 48-53	<u>Miscellany, 1771-1909</u> Calling cards, a journal, legal papers, memo book, notes, drafts of reports, photographs, and speeches. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and therein chronologically by year.
BOX 54-58	<u>Printed Matter, 1808-1931</u> Circulars, handbills, and reports, 1817-1875, and newspapers, 1808-1931. Arranged by type of material and therein chronologically by year.

Container List

Select items available on microfilm edition. Shelf no. 6,358-1N-1P

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BOX 3	1844-1846
BOX 4	1847-1858
BOX 5	1859-1861
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BOX 7	1834-1842
BOX 8	1843-1849
BOX 9	1850-1860
BOX 10	Between other family members, 1861-1939, undated
BOX 11-26	General Correspondence, 1788-1864 Primarily letters received, with some drafts of letters sent. Arranged chronologically to the month.
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General Correspondence, 1788-1864

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BOX 27-47	Financial Papers, 1794-1869 Business correspondence, 1815-1869, consisting primarily of letters sent to and received from James Fowler Simmons and his son, Walter C. Simmons, concerning the cotton manufacturing business; and business papers, 1794-1869, including bills, bills of lading, receipts, invoices, bank notes, and an account book stemming from the cotton manufacturing business. Arranged chronologically by year within the two groups.
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BOX 48-53	Miscellany, 1771-1909 Calling cards, a journal, legal papers, memo book, notes, drafts of reports, photographs, and speeches. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and therein chronologically by year.
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Miscellany, 1771-1909

Container

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BOX 54-58	Printed Matter, 1808-1931
	Circulars, handbills, and reports, 1817-1875, and newspapers, 1808-1931.
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