

William Plumer Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the
Library of Congress

Prepared by Audrey Walker



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2009

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

Finding aid encoded by Library of
Congress Manuscript Division, 2010

Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010237>

Collection Summary

Title: William Plumer Papers

Span Dates: 1774-1845

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1802-1825)

ID No.: MSS36434

Creator: Plumer, William, 1759-1850

Extent: 1,800 items; 20 containers; 3.8 linear feet; 6 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: Governor of New Hampshire and legislator, United States senator from New Hampshire, essayist, and historian. Correspondence, diaries, letterbooks, autobiography, writings, notes, transcripts of poetry, essays, extracts, and other papers relating to Plumer's personal life and career in New Hampshire and national politics and as an essayist.

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

Adams, John Quincy, 1767-1848.

Adams, John, 1735-1826.

Burr, Aaron, 1756-1836.

Chase, Samuel, 1741-1811--Impeachment.

Clay, Henry, 1777-1852.

Cutts, Charles, 1769-1846.

Farmer, John, 1789-1838.

Gilman, John Taylor, 1753-1828.

Hale, Salma, 1787-1866.

Harper, John Adams, 1779-1816.

Hill, Isaac, 1789-1851.

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826.

Langdon, John, 1741-1819.

Livermore, Arthur, 1766-1853.

Livermore, Edward St. Loe, 1762-1832.

Mason, Jeremiah, 1768-1848.

Moore, Jacob Bailey, 1797-1853.

Parker, Nahum, 1760-1839.

Pickering, John, 1737-1805--Impeachment.

Plumer, Daniel, 1770-1852--Correspondence.

Plumer, Sarah--Correspondence.

Plumer, William, 1759-1850.

Plumer, William, 1789-1854--Correspondence.

Sheafe, James, 1755-1829.

Smith, Jeremiah, 1759-1842.

Woodbury, Levi, 1789-1851.

Organizations

Dartmouth College.

Federal Party (U.S.)

New Hampshire. Militia.

Spain. Treaties, etc. United States, 1819 Feb. 22.

United States. Congress.

Subjects

Agriculture.
Courts--New Hampshire.
Debts, Public--United States.
Education.
International trade.
Louisiana Purchase.
Paper money--United States.
Political science.
Politics, Practical.
Religion.
Trials (Impeachment)--United States.

Places

Africa, North--Foreign relations--United States.
Florida--History--Spanish colony, 1784-1821.
France--Foreign relations--United States.
Great Britain--Foreign relations--United States.
New England--Politics and government.
New Hampshire--History.
New Hampshire--Politics and government--1775-1865.
Spain--Foreign relations--United States.
United States--Foreign relations--Africa, North.
United States--Foreign relations--France.
United States--Foreign relations--Great Britain.
United States--Foreign relations--Spain.
United States--Politics and government--1783-1865.

Occupations

Essayists.
Governors--New Hampshire.
Historians.
Legislators--New Hampshire.
Senators, U.S. Congress--New Hampshire.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of William Plumer, United States senator, governor of New Hampshire, essayist, and historian, were purchased by the Library of Congress, 1906-1923.

Processing History

The papers of William Plumer were arranged and described in 1978. The finding aid was revised in 2009.

Other Repositories

Most of Plumer's papers are in the New Hampshire State Library, and others are in the New Hampshire Historical Society Library. The "Notes on the Sources" section of Lynn W. Turner's *William Plumer of New Hampshire, 1759-1850* (Chapter Hill, Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by University of North Carolina Press, 1962. 366 p.) gives a bibliographical description of these manuscripts.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of William Plumer 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 these papers is available on six reels. Consult a reference librarian 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, William Plumer Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1759, June 25	Born, Newburyport, Mass.
1768	Moved to Epping, N.H.
1779	Converted to the "New Lights"; became a Baptist preacher
1780	Abandoned organized religion
1783	Elected selectman, Epping, N.H.
1784	Read law with Joshua Atherton
1785-1800	Served intermittently as a representative in New Hampshire legislature 1785-1786, 1788, 1790-1791, 1797-1800; speaker of the New Hampshire house, 1791 and 1797
1786	Read law with John Prentice
1787	Admitted to New Hampshire bar
1788	Married Sarah ("Sally") Fowler
1789	Admitted to practice before the superior court
1791-1792	Member, New Hampshire Constitutional Convention
1802-1807	United States senator as a Federalist
circa 1808	Became a Republican

1810-1811	Served in New Hampshire senate
1812-1813	Governor of New Hampshire
1816-1819	Governor of New Hampshire
1820	Presidential elector
1850, Dec. 22	Died, Epping, N.H.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of William Plumer (1759-1850) span the years 1774-1845, but most of them are concentrated in the period 1802-1825. The papers consist of diaries, correspondence, and nine volumes of writings that include his autobiography, notes on the proceedings of Congress, and transcriptions of essays, poetry, and extracts from various sources. The collection is organized in three series: [Diaries](#), [Correspondence](#), and [Writings](#).

The [diaries](#), called registers, record significant events of Plumer's life and times as well as opinions on events of local and national interest. For some periods entries are made daily; others are made at varying intervals of days, weeks, or longer. The first two volumes, which cover Plumer's last two years in Congress, were written as a "means of preserving facts & opinions which with the changes & revolution of time & of parties" were rapidly becoming lost. They have been closely associated with Plumer's notes on the proceedings of Congress and have been published as part of *William Plumer's Memorandum of Proceedings in the United States Senate, 1803-1807*, edited by Everett Somerville Brown (New York, Macmillan, 1923. 673 p.). The diaries contain references to weather conditions, politics in New Hampshire and other New England States, the courts in New Hampshire, the organization of Congress, issues before Congress (such as the debates over the purchase of Florida, trade, and United States relations with France, Spain, Great Britain, and the Barbary powers), accounts of Plumer's trips, deaths of prominent citizens, and critiques of such contemporaries as Aaron Burr, Henry Clay, Thomas Jefferson, and Jeremiah Smith. Much of the third diary, which was kept less systematically, is devoted to historical projects, historical and statistical facts about New Hampshire, books Plumer had read, and comments on news events and financial matters. The diaries, which are indexed, record very little of Plumer's private life.

Most of the [correspondence](#) in the papers is bound in eleven letterbooks covering the years 1781 to 1833. All are indexed by subject and names of individuals, except volumes 6, 10, and 11. Some are composed entirely of transcribed copies of letters while others contain original letters, copies, and drafts of letters sent. In some instances drafts are written on last pages of incoming letters. Both general and family correspondence are interfiled in the letterbooks; however, more family letters are found in volumes 6, 7, and 8 than in other volumes. Most of the family correspondence consists of Plumer's letters to his wife, Sarah, his brother, Daniel, and to his children. His exchange of letters with his son, William, is rather voluminous, particularly after the younger Plumer's election to Congress in 1819. Although the family correspondence is concerned with personal matters, it also contains considerable comments and observations on political and national issues.

All phases of Plumer's life are represented in the general correspondence. Early letters are introspective, and trace the evolution of his religious beliefs, the formulation of his philosophy of life, and his eventual choice of law as a profession. Later letters contain comments on topics of current interest and New Hampshire politics— the personalities involved, local appointments, bills before the legislature, paper money and the public debt, and the state judicial system and judges' salaries. Following Plumer's election to the United States Senate letters focus on issues before the Congress, although his interest in local politics is still evident. Topics in these letters include the

impeachment cases of Judges Samuel Chase and John Pickering, international trade, the Louisiana Purchase, the decline of the Federalist party, the purchase of Florida, activities of Aaron Burr, and what Plumer and other Federalists perceived as a threat to the New England states by the Southern states. After Plumer returned to private life in 1807 many of the letters reflect his efforts to remain aware of issues facing the government and to collect congressional documents and biographical information for his proposed history of North America, a project he eventually abandoned. The state militia and its protection of frontier towns and the Dartmouth College controversy are the two major subjects featured in the correspondence during his two terms as governor. Letters written in retirement continue to reflect Plumer's interest in history and current politics. Correspondents in the collection include John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Charles Cutts, John Farmer, John Taylor Gilman, Salma Hale, John A. Harper, Isaac Hill, John Langdon, Arthur Livermore, Edward St. Loe Livermore, Jeremiah Mason, Jacob B. Moore, Nahum Parker, Daniel Plumer, William Plumer (1789-1850), James Sheafe, Jeremiah Smith, and Levi Woodbury.

Plumer's autobiography and his memorandum on the proceedings of the United States Senate, 1803-1805, are perhaps the most significant items in the [Writings](#) series. The autobiography, written between 1826 and 1845, includes a Charles St. Memin profile engraving of him done in Washington, D.C., January 1804, and significantly augments and clarifies many of the events found in Plumer's diaries and correspondence. The pages are annotated to show the date of writing. His "Memorandum" brings additional insight into the special session of the Senate called Oct. 17, 1803, to ratify the treaty and convention with France for the purchase of Louisiana, records the long debate over the Breckinridge bill for the organization of the Louisiana territorial government, and sets forth the arguments of the Federalists who were in opposition. While Plumer also objected to the treaty, he based his opposition on constitutional grounds.

The remaining items in the series are two volumes of Plumer's essays, two volumes of his Repository, chapters 1-8 of his history of North America, and a volume of extracts from the secret journals of Congress. Most of his essays were published as newspaper articles in the *New Hampshire Patriot* and the *Portsmouth Journal*. The articles were generally written under pseudonyms and cover such diverse subjects as religion, politics, education, agriculture, and government. Numbers 1-93 of the 186-article "Cincinnatus" series are included in the volumes of essays. Plumer's "Repository" was chiefly a collection of correspondence, notes, poetry, and extracts from various sources transcribed into volumes for easy reference.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in three series:

- [Diaries, 1805-1836](#)
- [Correspondence, 1781-1833](#)
- [Writings, 1774-1845](#)

Description of Series

Container

BOX 1-3
REEL 1

Series

Diaries, 1805-1836

Three indexed registers
Arranged chronologically

BOX 4-11
REEL 2-4

Correspondence, 1781-1833

Letters sent and received, drafts of letters sent, transcripts of letters sent and received
Bound in letterbooks in chronological order with some overlapping of dates.

BOX 12-20
REEL 4-6

Writings, 1774-1845

Autobiography, essays, book notes, and extracts.
Bound volumes arranged by type.

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 17,572

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-3 REEL 1	Diaries, 1805-1836
	Three indexed registers Arranged chronologically
BOX 1 REEL 1	1805, May 2-1806, May 15
BOX 2 REEL 1	1806, May 15-1807, Apr. 21
BOX 3 REEL 1	1807, May 1-1836, Apr. 8
BOX 4-11 REEL 2-4	Correspondence, 1781-1833
	Letters sent and received, drafts of letters sent, transcripts of letters sent and received Bound in letterbooks in chronological order with some overlapping of dates.
BOX 4 REEL 2	1781, Jan. 18-1804, Jan. 14
BOX 5 REEL 2	1791, Dec. 24-1817, July 18
BOX 6 REEL 3	1802, Dec. 7-1807, Feb. 11
BOX 7 REEL 3	1804, Jan. 25-1807, Feb. 6
BOX 8 REEL 3	1809, Nov. 11-1815, Aug. 1
BOX 9 REEL 4	1817, July 22-1833, Aug. 5
BOX 10 REEL 4	1817, Oct. 25-1820, Dec. 4
BOX 11 REEL 4	1821, June 25-1825, Feb. 14
BOX 12-20 REEL 4-6	Writings, 1774-1845
	Autobiography, essays, book notes, and extracts. Bound volumes arranged by type.
BOX 12 REEL 4	Autobiography
BOX 13 REEL 5	Essays

Writings, 1774-1845

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 13 REEL 5	1782-1838
BOX 14 REEL 5	1813-1823
BOX 15 REEL 5	Memorandum on the proceedings of the United States Senate
BOX 15 REEL 5	1803-1804
BOX 16 REEL 5	1804-1805
BOX 17 REEL 6	History of North America
BOX 18 REEL 6	Repository
BOX 18 REEL 6	1774-1814
BOX 19 REEL 6	1805-1809
BOX 20 REEL 6	Secret journals of Congress, 1774-1780