

**Historical Sketch of the Continental Bills of
Credit, from 1775 to 1781, with Specimens thereof
1840, 1862**

Mss.332.5.B74h

American Philosophical Society
3/2003
105 South Fifth Street
Philadelphia, PA, 19106
215-440-3400
manuscripts@amphilsoc.org

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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Breck, Samuel, 1771-1862
Title	Historical Sketch of the Continental Bills of Credit, from 1775 to 1781, with Specimens thereof
Date	1840, 1862
Call number	Mss.332.5.B74h
Extent	0.25 Linear feet 1 vol., 153 spms.
Location	LH-MV-E-7
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Born in Boston and educated there and in France, Samuel Breck (1771-1862) was a major figure in the mercantile, philanthropic, and political life of Philadelphia during the first half of the nineteenth century. With an interest in historical and literary affairs, Breck was an active member of the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Athenaeum, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the American Philosophical Society (elected 1838).</p> <p>The Breck Collection is comprised of two manuscripts written by Samuel Breck. The first, "Historical Sketch of the Continental Bills of Credit, from 1775 to 1781, with Specimens Thereof" (1840), includes an essay and 153 specimens of Continental Currency. The second essay, "Recollections of My Acquaintance and Association with Deceased Members of the American Philosophical Society" (1862) includes the</p>

92 year-old Breck's reminiscences of his personal relationships with the nationally and internationally prominent membership of the APS.

Preferred Citation

Cite as: Samuel Breck Collection, American Philosophical Society.

Background note

Born into wealthy family in Boston on the eve of the American Revolution and educated there and at the Royal Military School of Loreze, France, Samuel Breck (1771-1862) made his career as a merchant and politician. Unhappy with the high taxes in post-war Massachusetts, Breck's father relocated his family to Philadelphia in 1792, and Samuel soon planted roots there. On Christmas eve, 1795, he married Jean Ross, daughter of one of Philadelphia's most important merchants.

After serving as a corporal during the Whisky Rebellion in 1794, Breck took an increasingly active role in the civic and cultural life of the city. A major benefactor of the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Athenaeum and a founder of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind, he took a particular interest in historical matters, becoming an officer of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania., and a member of the American Philosophical Society in 1838. He was also a prominent politician, serving in the State house of representatives in 1817-1820, the State senate in 1832-1834, and as Federalist in the U.S. Congress in 1823-1825. His brother Daniel, a jurist and banker, also served as a congressman.

Breck died in Philadelphia on August 31, 1862, and was interred in St. Peter's Churchyard.

Scope & content

The Breck Collection is comprised of two separately-cataloged manuscripts written by the merchant, philanthropist, and politician, Samuel Breck. The first, "Historical Sketch of the Continental Bills of Credit, from 1775 to 1781, with Specimens thereof" (332.5 B74h), was written in 1840, and reflects Breck's strong interest in matters of finance, banking, and paper currency. It is distinguished by the inclusion of 153 Continental bills issued during the Revolution, including many printed by Hall and Sellers, along with several counterfeit examples.

Although Breck states that his essay on Continental bills was read at the APS on July 3, 1840, the manuscript differs significantly from the paper abstracted in the *APS Proceedings* 1 (1840): 248-251. Breck read a second paper on May 26, 1843, which was abstracted in the *Proceedings* 3 (1843): 57-64. A revised version of the two papers, incorporating material in the manuscript, was printed in APS Historical and Literary Committee *Transactions* 3 (1843): 1-40.

The second manuscript, ["Recollections of My Acquaintance and Association with Deceased Members of the American Philosophical Society" \(920 B74\)](#), contains brief sketches some of the more prominent figures in the Society as remembered by the superannuated Breck in 1862, along with a photograph of Breck from that period. In part, the value of these sketches lies in the intimacy of Breck's acquaintance with their subjects, and his often anecdotal recollection. It forms a valuable companion to his *Recollections of Samuel Breck, with Passages from His Notebooks (1771-1862)*.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 3/2003

Provenance

Acquisition Information

Gift of Samuel Breck, 1856.

Processing Information

Recatalogued 2003.

Alternative Form Available

Breck's "Recollections" is available on microfilm (Film 188).

Related Materials

Related Material

The APS houses approximately twenty letters to or from Breck in the APS Archives and Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collections and in the papers of Samuel George Morton and the Madeira-Vaughan Family. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania houses several collections that contain materials by Breck, including a large collection of his notebooks (Collection 1887).

Indexing Terms

Corporate Name(s)

- Hall & Sellers.

Genre(s)

- Business Records and Accounts
- Miscellaneous
- Official Government Documents and Records
- Paper money
- Photographs

Geographic Name(s)

- United States--Biography

Personal Name(s)

- Adams, John Quincy, 1767-1848
- Barlow, Joel, 1754-1812
- Bingham, William, 1752-1804
- Brissot de Warville, J.-P. (Jacques-Pierre), 1754-1793
- Chastellux, François Jean, marquis de, 1734-1788
- Cobbett, William, 1763-1835
- Hamilton, Alexander, 1757-1804
- Holyoke, Edward Augustus, 1728-1829
- Knox, Henry, 1750-1806
- La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, François-Alexandre-Frédéric, duc de, 1747-1827
- Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves, marquis de, 1757-1834
- Letombe, Philippe Joseph, d. 1833
- Louis Philippe, King of the French, 1773-1850
- Morris, Robert, 1734-1806
- Penn, John, 1729-1795
- Raguét, Condé, 1784-1842
- Rush, Benjamin, 1746-1813
- St. John de Crèvecoeur, J. Hector, 1735-1813
- Talleyrand-Perigord, Charles Maurice
- Volney, C.-F. (Contantin-François), 1857-1820
- Washington, George, 1732-1799

Subject(s)

- Business and Skilled Trades

- Diplomats
- Early National Politics
- Paper money--United States--Forgeries
- Paper money--United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783
- Physicians
- Presidents
- Scholars
- Statesmen

Other Descriptive Information

The Samuel Breck Collection consists of two bound volumes. The first is a long manuscript essay on Continental Bills of credit from 1775 – 1781, which reflects Breck's interest in historical matters. The second volume is a handwritten account of Breck at 92 years old reminiscing on prominent APS members he had met.

Of particular significance, the volume on Continental bills includes 153 examples of various Continental bills beginning with the first emission in May 1775 until 1779. The collection also includes examples of colonial currency from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. There is a separate section that includes examples of counterfeit Continental bills. Breck also discusses the history of paper money in the colonies and debate about Continental currency in the early republic. The essay may be of interest to those interested in governance and finance in the early republic.

The second volume in which Breck recounts his memory of APS members is described separately under 920.B74.

Samuel Breck (1771-1862) was a Philadelphia merchant and APS (1838) member.

Other Descriptive Information

The "Historical Sketch" was removed from its original heavily embossed and decorated leather binding. The original boards are stored with the volume.

Bibliography

Breck, Samuel, *Recollections of Samuel Breck, with Passages from His Notebooks (1771-1862)* (London, 1877). **Call no.:** B B75s.

Wainwright, Nicholas B., "The Diary of Samuel Breck, 1814-1835, 1838." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (1978): 469-508; 103 (1979): 85-113, 222-51, 356-82.

Collection Inventory

Breck, Samuel, 1771-1862	1840	1 vol., 153	332.5 B74h
"Historical Sketch of the Continental Bills of Credit, from 1775 to 1781, with Specimens Thereof"		spms	
