

George Clymer Papers, 1745-1848
1745-1848
Mss.B.C625

American Philosophical Society
2002
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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Clymer, George, 1739-1813
Title	George Clymer Papers, 1745-1848
Date [inclusive]	1745-1848
Call number	Mss.B.C625
Extent	0.25 Linear feet 27 items
Location	LH-MV-C-3; LH-SB-Black Case-26 (OS)
Language	English
Container	1
Abstract	<p>George Clymer was a successful merchant, well-known politician, and a generous philanthropist, but is today most famous for being a signer of the Declaration of Independence. As a proponent of independence, he joined various local political committees including six of the seven Philadelphia resistance committees. From there, he entered the national political arena and in 1776 was elected to the Second Continental Congress where he signed the Declaration of Independence.</p> <p>The George Clymer Collection is a small one and not reflective of his varied pursuits. There are twenty-seven documents, most of which are not signed by Clymer; those that are signed by Clymer are dated between May 3, 1800 and January 22, 1813. The items represent not Clymer's political activities but his ordinary legal and real estate transactions.</p>

Preferred Citation

Cite as: George Clymer Papers, American Philosophical Society.

Background note

George Clymer (1739-1813, APS 1786) was a Philadelphia merchant, politician, and philanthropist. Today, he is most famous for being a Signer of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. He went from a successful career as a merchant into local and then national politics. As a member of Pennsylvania's Proprietary Party he opposed making Pennsylvania a royal colony. He was an ardent proponent of independence and belonged to several local political committees that actively resisted British policies. In 1776 he entered the national political arena with his election to the Second Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence. He subsequently also signed the Federal Constitution, and, as a Federalist, was a strong supporter of Alexander Hamilton's financial plan.

Born in 1739 in Philadelphia, Clymer was the son of Christopher Clymer, a sea captain, and Deborah Fitzwater, a Quaker disowned for marrying Clymer, an Episcopalian. Orphaned at age seven, Clymer was raised by his maternal aunt, Hannah (Fitzwater) Coleman, and her husband William Coleman (1705?-1769, APS 1743), a wealthy and respected Quaker merchant, friend of Benjamin Franklin, and one of the founders of the American Philosophical Society.

By the late 1750s, Clymer was a wealthy merchant himself. In 1759 he formed a partnership with Henry and Robert Ritchie for the importation of European and East Indian goods. In 1765 he married Elizabeth Meredith, the daughter of the prominent Quaker merchant Reese Meredith (1771?-1778). The couple eventually had eight children, five of whom lived to adulthood. Clymer's fortune was greatly augmented when first his maternal grandfather and then Coleman left him substantial inheritances, including land and an interest in the Durham Iron Works. In 1772 Clymer, his father-in-law, and his brother-in-law Samuel Meredith entered into a partnership to form the merchant house Meredith and Sons, later re-named Meredith and Clymer. By 1774 Clymer had the second highest residential tax assessment in Philadelphia and ranked third in gross income from property.

Clymer's high social standing is reflected in his many social and cultural activities. He was a member of the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Hand-in-Hand Fire Company, and the Mount Regale Fishing Company. He was also a contributor to the Pennsylvania Hospital, the Silk Society, and the College of Philadelphia. In addition, his wealth allowed him to indulge his interest in politics. In 1767 he joined the Philadelphia Common Council; seven years later he became city alderman. He also served as justice of the peace for the city and county courts in 1772.

Clymer was an early supporter of independence. He signed non-importation agreements in 1765 and 1770. After the outbreak of hostilities with Great Britain he served as captain of a volunteer company. In this capacity he helped arrange the purchase of gunpowder and oversaw the fortification of Philadelphia. Between 1770 and 1776 he was a member of various local political committees, including six of the seven Philadelphia resistance committees, such as the committees of safety, of correspondence, and of inspection and observation. On at least two occasions he traveled to Boston, where he met Josiah Quincy, Jr., and Samuel Adams. He was elected to the state constitutional convention of 1776, where he opposed the plan for a unicameral legislature. He did not sign the new state constitution and became a leader of the Anti-Constitutionalist party. He was elected to the assembly in 1776 and 1778.

In 1776 he was elected to the Second Continental Congress and in consequence signed the Declaration of Independence. He sat on the Board of Treasury and the Board of War, and he was a member of the three-man executive committee that remained in Philadelphia after Congress fled to Baltimore. In 1777 his house in Chester County was looted and burned by British soldiers.

Clymer was reelected to Congress in February 1777, but failed in his bid for reelection in September 1777. Instead he was sent as a commissioner to Fort Pitt to help alleviate tensions between Native Americans and European settlers there. Clymer came away from this mission with a sense of sympathy for Native American apprehensions about the advance of settlement. He also developed strong anti-frontiersmen sentiments.

In 1780 Clymer served as co-director of the Pennsylvania Bank, a non-profit, subscription-based organization that had been founded to secure provisions for the troops. In 1780 and 1781 he was again elected to Congress. During this time he was a member of the finance committee and the committee charged with requesting the southern states to comply with the requisitions of Congress. In 1782 he moved his family to Princeton, New Jersey, apparently to have his sons educated there. However, within two years he was back in Philadelphia.

After the war he was a member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1785 to 1788, and a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787. He was elected as a pro-administration candidate to the First Congress in 1789 where he served as chairman of the Committee on Elections. Clymer was a strong supporter of locating the federal capital in Philadelphia, and a leading advocate of Alexander Hamilton's financial program. One of his last - and least successful - political appointments was federal revenue inspector for Pennsylvania in 1791. He was responsible for collecting the federal excise on spirits, a tax that was particularly unpopular in the western counties. Widespread opposition prevented him from collecting the tax, and, unable to diffuse the growing protests that became the Whiskey Insurrection, he resigned in 1794. (His son Meredith was one of the troops dispatched to western Pennsylvania by President Washington to put down the rebellion.) The following year George Washington assigned him to a commission that in 1796 negotiated the Treaty of Coleraine with the Creeks of Georgia. His close friend Benjamin Rush gave him a list with queries about the Indian customs and habits that Clymer completed and returned, with some comments of his own.

Clymer's business ventures during and after war served to increase his wealth. In 1779 and 1780 Clymer and Meredith engaged in a lucrative trade with St. Eustatius. After his retirement as a merchant in 1782, he focused on his real estate investments in Kentucky, New York, Indiana and Pennsylvania. He also served as president of the Philadelphia Bank from 1803 until his death.

Clymer's later years were occupied to a large extent with philanthropic work. He was a trustee of the University of Pennsylvania from 1779 to 1813. In addition, he was an active supporter of the Philadelphia Dispensary for the Medical Relief of the Poor in 1786 and the Society for Promoting the Manufacture of Sugar from the Sugar Maple in 1792. He was also the first president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, founding member and vice president from 1805 to 1813 of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, and vice president of the Pennsylvania Manufacturing Society, and of the Society for Political Inquiries. He was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1786. He rarely attended meetings, but he contributed funds toward the construction of its new hall. Clymer died in 1813 at his home, "Summerseat," in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, where he had resided since 1806.

Scope & content

This small collection contains just twenty-seven documents; these are dated between October 31, 1785 and June 6, 1848. The majority of these items are legal documents not actually signed by George Clymer, such as deeds, powers of attorney, and financial documents. Those penned by and/or signed by Clymer are dated between May 3, 1800 and January 22, 1813, years following Clymer's political career.

During later life he was involved with the University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, and the Philadelphia Bank. His papers, however, do not document his involvement with these institutions either but rather reflect typical legal and financial transactions.

The George Clymer Papers might have appeal for one interested in peripheral information about the founding fathers or signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 2002

Provenance

Acquisition Information

Accessioned 1947.

Processing Information

Recatalogued by Anne Harney, 2002.

Related Materials

Related Material

No large collection of George Clymer's papers exists.

Indexing Terms

Genre(s)

- Account books.
- Educational Material
- General Correspondence
- Legal Records
- Maps

Geographic Name(s)

- Philadelphia (Pa.)--Boundaries

Personal Name(s)

- Cadwalader, Lambert
- Francis, Tench, 1730-1800
- Heysham, John, 1753-1834
- Knox, William, 1732-1810
- Law, Samuel Andrew, 1771-1845
- Wharton, Charles Henry, 1748-1833

Subject(s)

- Business and Skilled Trades
- Education
- Estate--Valuation
- Finance,Personal
- Land and Speculation
- Marriage and Family Life
- Patents--Pennsylvania
- Power of Attorney--Pennsylvania
- Trust indentures-United States

Other Descriptive Information

This small collection contains just twenty-seven documents relating to the life of George Clymer, one of the most prominent politicians in revolutionary Philadelphia. The majority of the collection dates to after Clymer's death and relates to his estate, beginning first with his will dated January 22, 1813. There are a few documents written by Clymer in the collection. The most notable one may be a long letter from Clymer that discusses education, particularly mathematics and mathematicians.

George Clymer Papers

Collection Inventory

George Clymer Papers	1745-1848	Box 1
Edward Price Deed to Tench Francis Philadelphia, Printed D. filled in ms.S.: 1p. and end. Witnessed: Thos. Willing and Wm. Knox. Attested: Geo. Bryan and W. Knox, on 1p. Printed by Joseph Crukshank.	1785 October 31	2p.
Tench Francis Deed to Robert Heysham Philadelphia, Printed D. Filled in ms.S. 1p. and end. Witnessed: Henry S. Drinker.	1796 October 10	1p.
State of Pennsylvania Patent to Henry Drinker Printed D.filled in in ms.S.: Tho[mas] Mifflin, pres. Attest: James Thimble. Inrolled: Math[e]w Irwin. 1p.and add., end. Printed by F.& R. Bailey. Parchment. Seal. (see George Clymer papers.)	1794 May 23	1p.
Clymer, George, 1739-1813 Power of attorney to Samuel A. Law Philadelphia, D.S.: Geo. Clymer, Elizabeth Clymer, Sam. Meredith and Margaret Meredith. Witnessed: William Doughty, Samuel Brook, Wm. Duncan, Henry Bryant, Chs. Chauncey. Certified: Robert Wharton, James M.Hughes, Pennsylvania; and Isaac Smith and John McClelland, New Jersey. 4p., end.	1800 May 3	4p.
Clymer, George, 1739-1813 Deed to Samuel A. Law Philadelphia, D.S.: Sam[ue]l Meredith Geo[rge] Clymer and S[amuel] A. Law. Witnessed: Geo. Davis and George Clymer, Jr. 4p., end.	1806 May 31	4p.
Clymer, George, 1739-1813	1810 May 3	6p.

George Clymer Papers

Articles of Agreement

Philadelphia, D.S.: Sam. A. Law. Sam. Meredith and Geo. Clymer. Witnessed: Sam. Brook, James Paxton and Henry Clymer. Supplement: May 31, 1806. D.S.: Sam Meredith, S. A. Law and Geo. Clymer. Witnessed: Geo.Davis and Gel.Clymer, Jr. Supplement: Aug. 3, 1809. D.S: Geo. Clymer, John Read and James Gibson. Witnessed: W. J. Jones. Supplement; March 30, 1812. D. S.: Samuel A. Law, Sam. Meredith and Geo. Clymer. Witnessed: George Clymer, Jr. and Srah Jordan 6p.and end. Articles of agreement between Samuel Meredith and George Clymer with Samuel A. Law; for sale of lands in New York.

Clymer, George, 1739-1813

1811 Dec. 17

1p.

Indenture to J. Gay

Printed D. filled in ms.S.: Samuel Meredith, Margaret Meredith, George Clymer, Elizabeth Clymer, by their attorney, Samuel A[ndrew] Law. Witnessed: Jas. Hotchkiss and Lerner Cotrell. 1p. and end. Printed by H.& E. Phinney, Jun. Printers.

Clymer, George, 1739-1813

1812 March 30

1p.

Statement to settlers concerning Samuel A.
Law as their attorney

Philadelphia, D. S.: Geo. Clymer, Sam. Meredith, Henry S. Drinker, James C. Fisher, Willm. Drinker, Charles Wharton and Francis R. Wharton. 1p. and end.

Samuel Meredith

1812 March 30

2p.

ALS to Samuel A. Law

Philadelphia, L. S.: Geo. Clymer, Sam[ue]l Meredith. Contains note by Thos. Meredith; July 22, 1822. 2p. and end. Concerning the donation of land for education.

Clymer, George, 1739-1813

1812 March 30

2p.

ALS to Samuel A. Law

Philadelphia, L. S.: Sam. Meredith and Geo. Clymer. 2p. and end. Instructions concerning the sale and care of their property in New York.

Clymer, George, 1739-1813

1812 May 12

3p.

ALS to George McCall

George Clymer Papers

Clymer, George, 1739-1813 1813 Jan. 22 4p. This is
Will Copy. 4p.
13x8.

Jan. 5; and codicils, Jan. 18 and Jan. 22, 1813. Copy of D. 3p. and end.

Restrictions on Access

Aug. 1955 - restricted, cf. terms of use, Legal folder. (see B C625.w).

Acquisition Information

Deposited by the Register of Wills Office, Phila.

Other Descriptive Information

B C865.w. Film 895.1

S. A. Law 1813 Nov. 19 3p.
ALS to Samuel Meredith

Meredith, N.Y., A.L.S. 3p. and end. Draft. Concerning the sale and care of property of Clymer and Meredith.

George Clymer Estate 1816 Jan. 31 3p.
Supplement extending the Meredith-Clymer
agreement

D. S.: Sam[ue]l A. Law, James Gibson, George Clymer, C. Wistar, John M. Read, John Keating, jr., John Read, John Hallowell, Thomas McEuen, Henry Clymer and Redm[on]d Conyngham. 3p. and end. Concerning N. Y. lands, with S. A. Law.

Samuel Meredith 1818 Jan. 31 4p.
Power of Attorney

Philadelphia, D. S.: Sam[ue]l Meredith, James Gibson, Caspar Wistar, George Clymer, Geo. C. McCall, John Keating, jr., John M. Read, John Read, John Hallowell, Sam. Richards, Henry Clymer, Mary Clymer, Thomas Lillibridge, Thos. Mederith, Josiah Lewis, Seth Chapman, John Lindsley, H. R. Phelps, and W[illia]m Tilghman. 4p., end. Power of attorney from George Clymer estate and S. Meredith to S. A. Law to sell and collect for land in New York.

James Gibson 1822 June 30 3p.
ALS to Thomas Meredith

George Clymer Papers

Philadelphia, L. S.: James Gibson and John Read. 1p. with 2p. enc., end. by Thos. Meredith. Encloses accounts of John A. Law pertaining to the Meredith and Clymer estates real estate in New York.

John Read 1829 Jan. 5 1p.
ALS to Samuel A. Law

Philadelphia, L. S.: John Read and James Gibson. 1p. and add., end. Concerning payments made of George Clymer estate.

John Read 1829 Jan. 6 1p.
ALS to Samuel A. Law

Philadelphia, L. S.: John Read and James Gibson. 1p. and add., end. Have received payments due estate of Samuel Meredith.

John Read 1829 Jan. 12 1p.
ALS to Samuel A. Law

Philadelphia, L. S.: John Read and James Gibson. 1p. Copy. Notifies him that Thomas Meredith is now in charge of debts due Samuel Meredith estate. On same sheet as letter from T. Meredith to S. A. Law; Feb. 21, 1829.

John Read 1829 Jan. 12 1p.
ALCyS to Samuel A. Law

Philadelphia, L. S.: John Read and James Gibson. 1p. and add.,end. Asks that he pay the debt due the estate of Samuel Meredith.

Thomas Meredith 1829 Feb. 21 1p.
ALS to Samuel A. Law

L.S. 1p. and add., end. Enc. of 1p. Concerning debts due the Meredith estate. On same sheet is letter from J. Read to same; Jan. 12, 1829.

Clymer, William Bingham (1801-1873) 1830 Feb. 23 1p.
ALS to Samuel A. Law

A. L. S. 1p. and add., end. Concerning the George Clymer estate.

S. A. Law 1835 July 16-1856 Dec. 17 21p.

George Clymer Papers

Account of monies

D. by S. A. Law and J. A. Law(?). 32p. of which 22 contain writing. Account of monies received for the Meredith and Clymer estates. Account book covers period from July 16, 1835 to Dec. 17, 1856.

Law, Samuel Andrew, 1771-1845	1838 May 28	1 map, 35.6 x
Map of James Cowles Fisher's rear land		30.5 cm

Annotated: "J. C. Fisher's Front Patent Lot all disposed of: And, of his Rear Division, on hand, only the Two Remnants, in Yellow Shade, of. . . 86.75 acres. 1 May 1838: 28 May 1838." Colored. Realms of Gold, 9 (1).

Authorized donations from Meredith and Clymer Land	1839 May 1	1 map, 28.6 x 25.7 cm
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Annotated: "The line of the North End of No. 22 - can make nothing of - from the orig[ina]l Survey and conclude cannot but be a blunder! [The part of No. 5 and 22] called, say, a hundred acres, is the Reserved Piece or Parcel, appropriated for a Donation ...to the Town, for the purpose of encouraging Schooling, or litterary, Instruction: and which, as yet, has never been so granted and conveyed." Realms of Gold, 9 (2).

Anne Dickinson	1843 March 7	2p.
Power of attorney		

D. S.: Anne Dickinson, John Read, Margaret M. Read, John M. Read. Witnessed: Phil. Dickinson, James Wilson, Geo. Griscom, John Topham, 2p. and end. Power of attorney from heirs of Samuel Meredith to Samuel A. Law.

Samuel F. Fisher	1848 May 25	2p.
ALS to J. Albion Law		

Philadelphia, A. L. S. 1p. and end. Wants payment in full from estate of Samuel Andrew Law to estate of James C. Fisher.

Samuel F. Fisher	1848 June 6	2p.
ALS to J. Albion Law		

Philadelphia, A. L. S. 1p. and end. Concerning payments due to the estate of James C. Fisher.
