

**George William Featherstonhaugh papers, 1809-1840**  
**1809-1840**  
**Mss.B.F31**

American Philosophical Society  
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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Featherstonhaugh, George William, 1780-1866
<b>Title</b>	George William Featherstonhaugh papers, 1809-1840
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1809-1840
<b>Call number</b>	Mss.B.F31
<b>Extent</b>	0.25 Linear feet 17 items, 15 items are photocopies
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<b>Location</b>	LH-B-17-1
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Container</b>	1
<b>Abstract</b>	These are copies of letters, chiefly relating to the American Philosophical Society, from Peter S. Du Ponceau, John Vaughan, and James Mease. There are a few original letters, one to Benjamin Franklin Peale.

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## Background note

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George William Featherstonhaugh (1780–1866, APS 1809) was a British gentleman-farmer, geologist and diplomat. He promoted the application of scientific principles to farming, and he was instrumental in the construction of a railroad line in his home state of New York. In addition, Featherstonhaugh completed several geological surveys for the United States, including some in the area that was acquired through the Louisiana Purchase. In the late 1830s he served as boundary commissioner to settle the disputed Maine – New Brunswick border.

Featherstonhaugh was the son of George and Dorothy (Simpson) Featherstonhaugh. He was born in London but grew up in Scarborough, near the North Sea. As a boy, Featherstonhaugh showed a strong interest in natural history and mineralogy. However, his father died the year he was born and his mother's income from her millinery shop did not suffice to pay for a university education. He was employed as an agent for British firms on the continent until 1804, and then worked for a London firm until 1806. In 1807 he moved to the United States. He settled near Schenectady, New York, where his wife Sarah Duane (1775-1828) had inherited a large estate.

Featherstonhaugh promoted agricultural and commercial development by applying scientific principles to farming, stressing proper drainage, and drawing attention to soil composition. He served as secretary for the New York board of agriculture, and promoted the construction of a railway from Schenectady to Albany. In 1826, he received a charter for the Mohawk and Hudson Rail Road Company. That same year, his interest in railroads took him to England.

His stay in England turned out to be less useful for developing Featherstonhaugh's expertise in railroads than his interest in geology. In England and also during a visit to France, he turned his attention to the study of that science. He worked with several eminent geologists, including William Smith (1769-1839) and Roderick Murchison (1792-1871). In 1827 he returned to the United States with 8,000 fossils and minerals with the intention to make the study of geology his main occupation.

In 1829, after the death of his wife and the destruction of his house by fire, Featherstonhaugh abandoned agricultural pursuits and his position of railway director for good. In 1831 he moved first to New York City and then to Philadelphia. He remarried, published several literary works, and founded the *Monthly American Journal of Geology and Natural History*. The journal lasted only until 1832, partly because his tendency to attack and disparage the work of leading American scientists alienated him from the scientific community. However, his work helped establish his reputation as a geologist, and in 1834, he became the United States government's first geologist to survey the structure and mineral resources of Arkansas and adjacent territories. His 1844 book *Excursion Through the Slave States*, which focuses on Arkansas, is remarkable not only for its geological descriptions but also for the observations of the local inhabitants. Much of their dialogue, for example, is rendered in their dialects. Over the next few years, he surveyed and published official and popular reports on that region as well as parts of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina and several neighboring states.

In 1839 Featherstonhaugh served as boundary commissioner to survey the area disputed between the United States and Britain on the Maine – New Brunswick border. His conclusion that Britain had a

rightful claim to the territory earned him much criticism as a traitor to his adopted country. The Webster-Ashburton treaty of 1842 largely ignored his findings, but Britain did not. In 1844 he was appointed the British consul at Le Havre, a position that he held until his death in 1866.

Recognition for his accomplishments as a geologist includes his election to the American Philosophical Society in 1809, and to the Geological Society of London in 1827.

Featherstonhaugh had four children with his first wife Sarah Duane. In 1831, after the death of Sarah, he married Charlotte Williams Carter. They had three children.

## Scope & content

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The collection consists of seventeen letters addressed to Featherstonhaugh, dated between 1809 and 1840. Sixteen of the letters are photocopies. A table of contents is included in the box.

Most of the letters were written by representatives of the American Philosophical Society, including Stephen Du Ponceau, Mahlon Dickerson (acting secretary), John Vaughan, and James Mease. The letter dated April 24, 1809 informs Featherstonhaugh of his election to membership, and the items dated November 4, 1817, consist of a printed prospectus and a note related to the new series of the APS Transactions. The letters by Du Ponceau also include personal information that reflects the close friendship between the two men. In addition, two of Du Ponceau letters refer to Native American linguistics (1822, 1823). The manuscript letter by Featherstonhaugh to Benjamin Franklin Peale deals with minerals, including some that he got in “the Cherokee country” (1837).

## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

## Provenance

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### Acquisition Information

15 items presented by Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburg, N.Y., and accessioned, 1961 (1961 1439ms). Additional material purchased by Paul C. Richards (\$150.00) and accessioned, 1983 (1983 232ms). See in-house shelf list for additional accession numbers and dates.

### Original Location

Originals in Albany Institute of History and Art.

## Indexing Terms

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### Corporate Name(s)

- American Philosophical Society.

### Genre(s)

- General Correspondence
- Scientific Correspondence

### Personal Name(s)

- Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844
- Mease, James, 1771-1846
- Peale, Franklin, 1795-1870.

- Vaughan, John, 1756-1841

### **Subject(s)**

- Science -- Societies, etc.
- Science and Technology

### **Other Descriptive Information**

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This collection of George William Featherstonhaugh Correspondence. Featherstonhaugh was a prominent British scientist who traveled to America numerous times and helped promote internal improvements. The single original letter is to Benjamin Franklin Peale and discusses mineralogy. The other documents, all photocopies of originals in private hands, discuss science and APS business and are from APS members Peter Du Ponceau, John Vaughan, and James Mease.



Correspondence

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## Collection Inventory

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### Correspondence

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**American Philosophical Society** April 24, 1809

Letter to Geo[rge] W[illia]m  
Featherstonhaugh, New York;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S.: Mahlon Dickerson. 1p. and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Notifies him of his election to membership.

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**Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844** February, 1809

Letter to [George William]  
Featherstonhaugh;

Photo.of A.L.S. 1p.and add.,end. In Italian. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.)

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**Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844** April 22, 1809

Letter to G[eorge] W. Featherstonhaugh,  
Duanesburgh, N.Y.;

Photo.of A.L.S. 2p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs.Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Notifies him of his election to the APS Friendly letter.

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**Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844** May 21, 1809

Letter to G[eorge] W. Featherstonhaugh,  
Schenectady;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S. 3p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Friendly letter, concerning his new estate in New York. News of friends in Philadelphia.

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**Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844** June 13, 1809

Correspondence

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Letter to G[eorge] W[illiam]  
F[eatherston]haugh;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S. 1p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Forwards diploma of membership for the APS. Refers to Vaughan.

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**Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844** July 9, 1809

Letter to G[eorge] W. Featherstonhaugh,  
Schenectady, N.Y.;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S. 3p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) General news and hopes he will visit Philadelphia. Refers to J.Vaughan. Friendly letter.

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**Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844** Oct. 19, 1809

Letter to George W[illiam]  
Featherstonhaugh, Schenectady;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S. 3p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Marriage of Cora to Garisché. Concerning words in Russian and Chinese. Friendly letter.

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**Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844** Nov. 29, 1809

Letter to G[eorge] W. Featherstonhaugh,  
Duanesburgh,N.Y.;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S. 3p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Sorrows over their loss. Friendly letter.

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**Vaughan, John, 1756-1841** May 24, 1811

Letter to G[eorge] W[illiam] Feather-  
stonhaugh, Duanesburg,N.Y. ;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S. 1p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs.Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Robert Patterson will answer the question [about teaching position for Mr. Allen].

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Correspondence

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**Vaughan, John, 1756-1841**

May 23, 1811

Letter to G[eorge] W. Featherstonhaugh,  
Duanesburgh, N.Y.;

Philadelphia, Photo. of A.L.S. 2p. and add., end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Suggests Mr. Allen write, applying for teaching position.

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**American Philosophical Society**

Nov. 4, 1817

Letter to G[eorge] W[illiam]  
Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.;

Philadelphia, Printed L. filled in in ms.S.: J[ohn] Vaughan 2p. and add., end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Advertises publication of New Series of Transactions.

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**Du Ponceau, Peter Stephen, 1760-1844**

Dec. 7, 1822

Letter to G[eorge] W. Featherstonhaugh,  
Duanesburgh, N.Y.;

Philadelphia, Photo. of A.L.S. 3p. and add., end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Thanks for Publication on agriculture. Family news. Source of word "Schenectady" (Indian derivation). See Freeman Guide 1828.

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**Du Ponceau, Peter Stephen, 1760-1844**

Jan. 20, 1823

Letter to G[eorge] W[illiam]  
Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.;

Philadelphia, Photo. of A.L.S. 3p. and add., end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Describes poem more suitable to the US than translation of Dante. Indian languages. See Freeman Guide 1986.

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**Mease, James, 1771-1846**

May 14, 1823

Letter to G[eorge] W[illiam]  
Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.;

[ ] Photo. of A.L.S. 4p., add., end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duanesburgh, N.Y.) Disposal of publications on agriculture. Refers to DuPonceau and William Short.

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Correspondence

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**Vaughan, John, 1756-1841**

March 18, 1826

Letter to George W[illiam]

Featherstonhaugh, Duaneburgh, N.Y.;

Philadelphia, Photo.of A.L.S. 1p.and add.,end. (from original in possession of Mrs. Duane Featherstonhaugh, Duaneburgh, N.Y.) Concerning publications for and by the APS. Expiration of N.Y. Board of Agriculture.

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**Peale, Benjamin Franklin, 1795-1870**

Dec 28, 1837

Letter to George William Featherstonehaugh

Washington, ALS 2p. Dr. Singleton wishes application for "eight or ten thousand and an Enclosure" strengthened. Mentions Mr. Woodbury & Mr. Patterson. Encloses specimens of rocks and minerals (gold, pyrites, etc.) and paper on Russian method of collecting gold. Discusses minerals, includes some that he got in "the Cherokee country."

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**Featherstonhaugh, George William,  
1780-1866**

Feb. 3, 1840

9-1/4x7-1/2

Letter to ----;

London, Photo.of A.L.S. 3p. In Italian. (from original in Diederich Collection, 138 Bs,University of Amsterdam Library.) Is working for his sovereign. Concerning his work in the United States.

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