

Thomas Lloyd commonplace book, 1789-1796
1789-1796
Mss.B.L774

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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Lloyd, Thomas,1756-1827.
Title	Thomas Lloyd commonplace book, 1789-1796
Date [inclusive]	1789-1796
Call number	Mss.B.L774
Extent	1.0 Volume(s) 1 volume, 61 p.
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Location	LH-MV-E-3
Language	English
Container	1
Abstract	<p>This volume contains letters (a few in shorthand) relating to his pursuit of the position as principal recorder, and then, upon accomplishing this, his problems in publishing. There are sales accounts and a diary (April, 1793 to June, 1794), written while he was imprisoned in Newgate Prison, London (1793 to Jan., 1796). Included for this period is an interesting description, brought to him at Newgate by an Englishman, John Ford, who was seeking support and American contacts for his plan to take an English textile process to America: "A Manufacture of Wollen & Cotton Cloth & Without spinning or weaving," August, 1794.</p>

Background note

Thomas Lloyd (1756–1827) was a teacher and stenographer. Also known as the “Father of American Shorthand,” Lloyd is best known for publishing the *Congressional Register*, the official record of the First Federal Congress based on his notes taken in shorthand.

Thomas Lloyd, of Welsh ancestry, was born in London. Like many young Catholics of the period, he received his education at the Jesuit-run College of St. Omer in Flanders. At that time, shorthand was widely used in England to record religious sermons and stage plays as well as speeches in official settings such as Parliament and the Courts and less formal environments such as taverns. The skill was generally self-taught or acquired in schools, especially Jesuit schools like the one Lloyd attended. Lloyd learned and practiced what is known as alphabetic shorthand.

In 1771 Lloyd emigrated to the United States, settling in Maryland. During the Revolutionary War, he volunteered for the Fifth Independent Company of the Maryland Militia and subsequently enlisted in the Fourth Company of the Fourth Regiment of Maryland. He was wounded and taken prisoner at the Battle of Brandywine; through a prisoner exchange he was released and taken to a hospital in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In 1779 he was discharged from the army. He was married the following year.

In the late 1770s Lloyd was selected to supervise the printing of the *Journals* of the Continental Congress. He also served as the clerk to the Treasurer of the United States Michael Hillegas, and he was sent to France with letters to Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, John Adams and Henry Laurens.

In the early 1780s, Lloyd settled in Philadelphia where he soon established himself as a respected teacher and stenographer. In 1787 he began to record the debates in the Pennsylvania Assembly. The Irish-born publisher Mathew Carey was also taking notes, albeit in longhand. In 1787 Lloyd recorded and published the debates of the Pennsylvania Convention to ratify the United States Constitution. However, volume two of a planned two-volume set never appeared, and volume one only contained the speeches of proponents of ratification. Anti-Federalists accused their political opponents of suppressing the appearance of their arguments by threatening or bribing editors and shorthand writers, including Lloyd. In 1788 Lloyd, whose pro-ratification sentiments were well known, recorded but never published the anti-ratification speeches given at the Maryland Convention. Lloyd was widely criticized for these seemingly partisan actions.

When the First Federal Congress met in 1789, Lloyd set out to complete an accurate record of the debates. This was a considerable task. In his notes, Lloyd did not use vowels or punctuation, and few articles and connectives. In addition to a number of idiosyncratic abbreviations, his shorthand utilized look-alike symbols for many consonants. In order to complete a readable text, he not only had to add vowels and punctuation to his shorthand notes but also had to insert missing words from memory. Lloyd was often exhausted during the debates from the many hours required to transcribe and edit his “taking” which he completed at night. He acknowledged that he sometimes dozed during the debate, or that he was drunk. Nevertheless, the fact that he was a freelance reporter unrestrained by deadlines and space limitations allowed him to prepare the text more carefully than other reporters. As a result, his record has been

deemed the most complete and accurate of the ones taken. However, only the notes covering the period from April 1789 to March 1790 appeared in print.

In 1791 Lloyd left the United States to visit his family and help with his father's business. The following year he published *The Commentaries on the Constitution of America, &c.*. However, due to financial problems stemming from his agent's failure to carry out their agreement, Lloyd landed in debtor's prison. While in prison he published a declaration of republican principles that included a condemnation of the prison that held him. This earned him a conviction for publishing a libel, and he was transferred to Newgate Prison. His repeated appeals for assistance to the American State Department and President were in vain; he languished in jail until 1796. During this time, in 1793, John Carey published with Lloyd's permission a description of Lloyd's system of shorthand titled *The System of Short-hand Practiced by Mr. Thomas Lloyd . . .*. Lloyd kept a diary and published two accounts of his trial during his incarceration at Newgate.

While in prison, Lloyd joined with John Ford of Lambeth, Surrey, and William Raynaud of London to organize a company to manufacture a variety of cloth products. The necessary capital for this enterprise was to be raised by selling shares to Robert Morris and interested Europeans. Ford visited Lloyd in prison in hopes of gaining support and contacts in the United States.

Upon his release from jail, Lloyd returned to the United States. Over the next thirty years, his career declined steadily. He moved from one reporting job to another, and he also worked as a teacher. In 1819 he published his own account of his shorthand, titled *Lloyd's Stenography*. However, by 1820, Lloyd, who by then was nearly blind, depended on his wife Mary and their daughters for support. He died seven years later.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

Indexing Terms

Genre(s)

- Accounts.
- Commonplace Book
- Diaries.
- Miscellaneous
- Travel Narratives and Journals

Geographic Name(s)

- United States -- Politics and government.

Personal Name(s)

- Ford, John

Subject(s)

- American Revolution
- Americans Abroad
- Publishers and publishing.
- Textile industry -- England.

Other Descriptive Information

The volume contains additional copies of letters by Lloyd upon his return to America, relating to his publishing and printing undertakings.

Other Descriptive Information

The Thomas Lloyd Collection is a slender volume that is part account book, part notebook, part commonplace book, and part diary. Although its cover describes it as a “letter book,” there are only a few copies of letters inside. Lloyd was the first recorder of Congress, who later found himself imprisoned in Newgate Prison in London for debt. This volume covers Lloyd’s period in London, as he failed in his publishing ventures and spent time in prison. Among the items recorded was a proposal to develop textile manufacturing in the United States. There are also examples of shorthand.