

A Guide to the Papers of John Mason (1766-1849), 1794-1834

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Descriptive Summary

Accession Number

A1988.3

Language

English

Physical Characteristics

This collection consists of approximately 350 items relating to the personal, business and legal affairs of John Mason, son of George Mason of Gunston Hall.

Storage Location

Archives

Repository

Gunston Hall Library & Archives

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

This collection was donated by Virginia Dawson Beebe, 1981

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Biographical/Historical Information

JOHN MASON (1766-1849), the eighth surviving child of George and Ann Eilbeck Mason of Gunston Hall, was a Georgetown merchant and civic leader in the District of Columbia. In partnership with James and Joseph Fenwick, Mason began his career in 1788 exporting goods from Bordeaux, France. He lived in France until 1792 when he returned to the United States and managed the firm from its Georgetown offices. In 1798 he became president of the Bank of Columbia (chartered 1793). In 1815 he purchased the Columbia Foundry in Georgetown. In 1796 he became a director of the Potowmack Canal Company and in 1817 he became its president. When the District of Columbia militia was formed in 1802, Mason was appointed its commander by President Thomas Jefferson with a rank of brigadier general, a post which he held until 1811. President Jefferson also appointed him as Superintendent of Indian Trade in the District of Columbia in 1807, an office which he fulfilled until 1815. During the War of 1812 Mason was appointed as Commissioner General of Prisoners.

In 1796 John married Anna Maria Murray of Annapolis and they had ten children. They lived in Georgetown and also had a mansion on Analostan (now Theodore Roosevelt) Island. In retirement (after some financial reversals) John and Anna moved to "Clermont," a farm about four miles west of Alexandria.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of approximately 350 items relating to the personal, business and legal affairs of John Mason, son of George Mason of Gunston Hall.

Arrangement

This collection is divided by series and primarily chronological within each series. The contents list provides more information to the arrangement of this collection.

Contents List

The Recollections of John Mason, date range 1822-1839.

Box 1

Extent

Manuscript, 41 pages, with an additional 8 pages being copies of the "Recollections" in three other hands. One manuscript dated 1822; others late 1820s to 1839.

Scope and Content

This manuscript provides a vivid picture of Gunston Hall and its occupants. It provides details on plantation life, including gardens, landscaping, slaves, agriculture, and accounts of the rooms and furnishings of the mansion itself. There are sections mentioning the education of the children and domestic pursuits, including dining and drinking habits.

Arrangement

Chronological

Letters from George Mason to John Mason, date range 1783-1792.

Box 1

Extent

8 manuscripts.

Physical Location This series has been integrated into the George Mason IV Papers (MS01).

Scope and Content

Various letters from George Mason IV to his son concerning business and political affairs.

Arrangement

Chronological

George Mason IV to John Mason, 8 January 1783, Gunston Hall.

Scope and Content

A long letter concerning business affairs, the evacuation of Charles Town by The British, George Rogers Clark's Indian country raid, and the free navigation of the Mississippi.

George Mason IV to John Mason, 12 June 1788, Richmond.

Scope and Content

A hortatory letter explaining to his son how to succeed in foreign trade. Written just prior to the son's departure for France.

George Mason IV to John Mason, 31 July, 1789, Gunston Hall.

Scope and Content

Regarding business affairs and commenting in detail on his son's business partner, Joseph Fenwick.

George Mason IV to John Mason, 9 December 1791, Gunston Hall.

Scope and Content

Regarding sales of wheat and tobacco.

George Mason IV to James Fenwick, 11 May 1792, Gunston Hall.

Scope and Content

Concerning business affairs and the situation in France ("very doubtful and unsettled").

George Mason IV to John Mason, 18 June 1792, Gunston Hall.

Scope and Content

Discusses the proposed Federal City including the matter of where a Potomac River bridge would be built.

George Mason IV to John Mason, 5 July 1792, Gunston Hall.

Scope and Content

Comments on his sons in business, with advice. He asks that John, who is in Richmond, consult Mr. John Marshall on "the subject of my suit...against John Hooe Banbury and others, ..[I] am afraid it is neglected by Mr. Marshall, who tho' a very worthy man, is an indolent one...."

George Mason IV to John Mason, 9 July 1792, Gunston Hall.

Scope and Content

Expressing irritation at the delay of a shipment of Cypress Scantlin to Norfolk.

Letters Between Family and Friends, date range 1781-1857.

Box 1

Extent

31 manuscripts.

Scope and Content

Letters to and from John Mason from various family members and friends.

Arrangement

Chronological.

Jonathan Williams to George Mason, August 1781, Nantes.

John Mason to his brother, 21 August 1789, Bordeaux.

John Mason to unknown, 11 May 1790, Bordeaux.

John Mason to George Mason IV (his father), 10 October 1790, Bordeaux.

John Mason [Jr] to Dr. James Murray (his grandfather), 7 June 1811, Analostan Island.

C.T. Chapman to John Mason, 18 June 1811, Alexandria.

John Mason [Jr] to Mrs. [Joel] Barlow, 30 August 1813, Paris.

John Mason [Jr.] to Mrs. [Joel] Barlow, 13 April 1815, Paris.

Mrs. S. E. Murray to Maria S. Mason, 5 December 1817, Annapolis.

Mrs. S.E. Murray to Maria S. Mason, 13 May 1818, Annapolis.

Mrs. S.E. Murray to Dr. [James] Murray.

M.A. Natalie Surnter to Maria Mason, 12 August 1821, Statesburg, S.C.

W.B. Magruder to John Mason, 5 August 1823, Baltimore.

Extract from funeral sermon preached by the Rev. Mr. Blanchard. 14 August 1825, St. Anne's Church, Annapolis.

Scope and Content

Death of Isabella E. Steele, 6 August 1825.

[Mrs. Steele?] to Maria Mason, undated.

Scope and Content

enclosing extract from funeral sermon preached by Rev. Mr. Blanchard on 14 August 1825.

John Mason to his son, 1 September 1827, Bedford Springs.

C[atherine] E. Rush to Mrs. A[nn]a M[aria] Mason, 30 January 1834, Sydenham.

[Mrs. A.M. Mason?] to Mrs. Eleanor Anne C. Mason, 28 January 1844, Clermont.

J[ohn] T[homson] Mason to Mrs. Eleanor Anne C. Mason, 6 Marcy 1844, Clermont.

J[ohn] Mason Jr. to Col. [Richard C.] Mason, California, 16 September 1847, Washington.

John Thomson Mason to James Murray Mason, 29 July 1848, Clermont.

Philip J. Thomas to Mrs. Maria S. Cooper, 2-5 Decemer 1857, Lothian.

Scope and Content

Enc.: Poem on death of Anna Maria Mason.

Thomson McCarty to Gen. John Mason, 19 Oct. [George]town.

John Mason to George Mason, Jr., no date.

Scope and Content

fragment.

J[osep]h Lopes Dias to Gen. John [Mason], no date.

Scope and Content

fragment.

Memorandum on the Boston Massacre, no date.

Poem on Perry's victory on Lake Erie, no date.

Plats on squares 5,6,17,42,44, and 55 in Washington, D.C., no date.

Memorandum on birth and death dates of children of John and Elizabeth Smith, no date.

Notes on ceremonies in Athens, no date.

Verses entitled To the Maiden Choristers of St. Johns and The Bible, no date.

Fenwick and Mason Papers, date range 1789-1803.

Box 1

Extent

7 manuscripts.

Arrangement

Chronological

John Mason to Capt. James Fenwick, 1 April 1789, London.

John Mason to Joseph Fenwick, 8 August 1789, Bordeaux.

Scope and Content

partially in French.

John Mason to Mr. Fenwick, 8 September 1789, Bordeaux.

John Mason to Capt. James Fenwick, 1789.

Joseph Fenwick to John Mason, 25 September 1794, Bordeaux.

D'Allarde Swan & Co. to Messrs. Mason and Fenwick, 20 September 1794, Paris.

Scope and Content

Copy of letter from Joseph Fenwick, enclosed in above.

Memorandum by Joseph Fenwick, 25 August 1803, Paris.

Financial and Banking, date range 1781-1823.

Box 1

Extent

9 manuscripts.

Arrangement

Chronological.

Philip Mazzei to George Mason, Jr., 31 October 1781, Pisa [Italy].

Bills of Exchange, 5 November 1800, Washington [Ky?].

Bills of Exchange, 4 September 1801, Washington [Ky?].

Clement Biddle to John Mason, 13 March 1803, Philadelphia.

I[saac] Cox Barnet to John Mason, 9 Mary 1804, Paris.

Francis Corbin to John Mason, 20 April 1812, White Chimneys, VA.

Wil[ia]m Murdoch to John Mason, 1 July 1823, London.

Wil[ia]m Murdoch to John Mason, 1 July 1823, London.

Chandler Price to John Mason, 1 September 1823, Philadelphia.

Offical and Other Papers, date range 1725-1823.

Box 1

Extent

34 manuscripts.

Arrangement

Chronological

Jos[eph] Aderton, and Peter Howe to Messrs. Edward Smith and William Eilbeck, 23 September 1725, Whitehaven [England].

Scope and Content

Lettercopy.

Appointment of John Mason of Virginia as attorney for Robert Pigott, citizen of France, 20 June 1793, Bordeaux.

Scope and Content

Certified, signed and sealed by Joseph Fenwick.

Letter of administration to John Mason in regard to property of the late Robert Pigott in Anne Arundel County. 5 December 1799, Annapolis.

Scope and Content

Printed form, filled in and signed by John Gassaway, Register of Wills.

John Thomas to John Mason, 23 March 1803, [West River].

Havre, Hottinguer & Co. to John Mason 15 May 1803, Havre.

James P. Watson to John Mason, 30 September 1803, New York.

John Mason to Fleury [Francois Louis Teisseydre, Marquis de], 26 December 1803, Georgetown.

Scope and Content

In French. Receipt for money for registering three letters of exchange received.

Bill of Exchange, 21 June 1805, Paris.

Scope and Content

Drawing on Treasurer of the U. S. for payment to Fenwick Mason & Co. Printed form filled in, signed by John Armstrong, U.S. Minister Plen. to France. Endorsed for payment to John Mason.

John Armstrong to Treasurer of the U.S., 21 June 1805, Paris.

Scope and Content

re. above note. Printed form filled in and signed by Armstrong.

John Armstrong to Treasurer of the U.S., 27 June 1805, Paris.

Scope and Content

Lettercopy, certified by Joseph Fenwick.

Bills of Exchange (nos. 413 and 416), 27 June 1805.

Scope and Content

Printed forms filled in/ signed by Armstrong, Enc. in above.

Thomas J. Beatty to John Mason, 20 July 1805, Wilmington.

Scope and Content

Lettercopies (2) certified.

Thomas Moore to Thomas Jefferson, 23 August 1806, Georgetown.

John P. VanNess to [John] Mason, 12 June 1809, Washington.

Nathaniel A. Haven to John Mason, 26 February 1811, Congress Hall [Washington D.C.]

George Covington to John Mason, 1 April 1812, Baton-Rouge.

Paul Hamilton to J[ohn] Mason, 21 October 1812, [Washington].

Commission and instructions from British Commissioners for conducting His Majesty's Transport Service to Thomas Barclay, as British Agent for Exchange of Prisoners of War in U.S., 1 December 1812, London.

B[] Geale to Piers Geale, 10 December 1813, Frankfort, KY.

Scope and Content

Lettercopy and endorsement. Endorsed [by Gen. Mason]: "copy of a letter from a British officer to his brother in England on retaliation."

Seth Poster to St. George Tucker, 26 May 1814, Norfolk.

Scope and Content

Enclosed in: 29 May 1814, Richmond. St. G[eorge] Tucker to Gen. [John] Mason.

St. G[eorge] Tucker to Gen. [John] Mason, 29 May 1814, Richmond.

Edw[ard] Herbert, Affidavit, 3 April 1824.

Scope and Content

Certified by W[illia]m Wirt.

[John Mason] to [B.W. Crowninshield], 3 June 1814.

Scope and Content

Endorsed: "Copy to the Secretary of the Navy."

[John Mason] to [Tobias] Lear, 27 June 1814.

Scope and Content

Endorsed: "d[ra]ft of Instructions for Col. Lear."

Indenture between William Paten and Mary, his wife, of Alexandria, D. C., and Noblet Herbert of the same place, for land in the said District, 3 October 1817.

M. Hale to [John Mason?], [1818].

Scope and Content

Endorsed: "Application of Dr. Hale for appt. of Post Surgeon 1818."

John D. Dutton to John Mason, 23 March 1823.

J. and C. Bolton to John Mason, 8 August 1823, New York.

Scope and Content

Enclosure: J. and C. Bolton to Thomas Spaulding. Lettercopy.

Samuel L. Southard to John Mason, 13 November 1823.

J[ohn] M[ason] to Samuel L. Southard, 13 November 1823.

S[?] Mason to Samuel L. Southard, 13 November 1823, Georgetown.

Benja[min] Morgan to John Mason 12 December 1823, New Orleans.

Villere to Jos[eph] Bennett Eves, 10 November 1823.

Vincent Gray to John Mason, 13 December 1823, Havana.

Letters to John Mason, date range 1789-1823.

Box 1

Extent

9 manuscripts.

Arrangement

Unspecified.

Joel Barlow to John Mason, 25 September 1805, New Haven.

Scope and Content

Asks that Mason arrange suitable habitation for him and Washington.

John Francis Mercer to John Mason, 22 November 1809, West River Farm (MD).

Scope and Content

Regarding the establishment of a National Agricultural and Manufacturing Society and the raising of money for it.

J[oe]l Barlow to John Mason, 3 September 1805.

Rob[ert] Andrews to John Mason, 8 March 1816, Bordeaux.

Chand[ler] Price to John Mason, 8 August 1823, Philadelphia.

Certification for the Merino ram, Grand Turk, 1810.

Tailor's account for John Mason, 1789, Paris.

Bill, John Ott (Drugs & Medicine) to Genl. John Mason, 5 February 1813.

Receipt, Fenwick & Mason to George Mason, Jr., 1790, Alexandria.

Scope and Content

On account of William Hartshorne and Gurden Chapin.

Shipping and Mercantile Business (part 1), date range 1794-1824.

Box 1

Extent

74 manuscripts.

Scope and Content

A group of 74 manuscripts, composed of papers relating to the ships Pigeon, 1794-1800 (16 pieces); St. Ubes, 1796-1822 (6 pieces); Prosperity, 1793-95 (22 pieces); Maryland, 1793-1803 (20 pieces); and Molly, 1794-1824 (10 pieces).

Shipping and Mercantile Business (part 2), date range 1790-1834.

Box 2

Extent

219 manuscripts.

Scope and Content

There are more manuscripts for 1790 than for any other single year, caused by the large number of receipts and other papers concerned with workmen employed by Mason.

Arrangement

Chronological.