

A Guide to the Dickinson Family Papers, 1778-1845

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28 items.

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Access

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Acquisition Information

Miss Althea Smart, the granddaughter of William R. Smart, donated the Dickinson Collection to the Mary Ball Washington Museum, Lancaster, Virginia in 1991, and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation subsequently acquired it in 2000.

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Dickinson Family Papers, Manuscript MS 2001.9, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Biographical/Historical Information

Edmund Dickinson was a cabinetmaker in Williamsburg, Virginia.¹ He was born in Norfolk and, although it is unclear when he moved to Williamsburg, he was listed as an employee of Anthony Hay in 1764. Hay operated a shop on Nicholson Street [Block 28, Building 72] that passed into the hands of Dickinson in 1771.² Dickinson made furniture for prominent Virginians such as Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson, and he advertised in *The Virginia Gazette* on several occasions. He was elected captain of recruits from the District of York on February 4, 1776. He served in the 1st Virginia Regiment, reaching the rank of major in October 1777. He camped with the army at Valley Forge and died at the Battle of Monmouth in 1778.³ George Washington specifically mentioned Dickinson's death in his personal correspondence. In a letter to Governor Patrick Henry on July 4, 1778, General Washington stated that the loss of Major Dickinson "ought much to be regretted by his friends and Countrymen as he possessed every qualification to render him eminent in the Military line."⁴ Although Dickinson was a bachelor at the time of his death, he was survived by his five sisters: Agnes Dickinson, Lucy Dickinson, Judith Farrer, Elizabeth Warren, and Mary.

Lucy married Robert Gibbons after her brother had died. Louisa Gibbons, the daughter of Lucy and Robert, married William Smart. William Robert Smart (b. 1827) was their son. It appears that Lucy and Robert Gibbons were responsible for initiating the claim to Dickinson's military pension and land grants. In 1798, Senator Tazewell regretfully informed the Gibbons family that only the direct descendants of soldiers (wives and children) were entitled to military benefits from service during the Revolutionary War. William Smart continued the claim in 1832. The governor of Virginia eventually awarded Dickinson's heirs land, in addition to the land bounty that had been granted in the early 1780s.

Scope and Content Information

The Dickinson collection contains a total of 28 pieces, including one letter from Edmund B. Dickinson (?-1778) and several letters from his collateral descendants that document their attempts to obtain land grants and pensions for Dickinson's military service during the Revolutionary War. The letter from Dickinson was written to his sister Lucy while at Valley Forge, and he makes reference to the newly established alliance with France. The collection contains a letter from Senator Henry Tazewell, a noted Virginia politician. Transcriptions are available for many of the documents in the collection. Colonial Williamsburg also has a portrait of Edmund Dickinson, which was probably painted in the 1770s. The portrait is housed in the Department of Collections.

Index Terms

Family Names:

Dickinson family.

Persons:

Dickinson, Edmund B., d. 1778.

Bassett, Burwell, 1764-1841.

Coke, Richard, d. 1851.

Gibbons, Lucy.

Gibbons, Robert, fl. 1798-1800.

Smart, William, fl. 1832.

Tazewell, Henry, 1753-1799.

Tyler, John, 1790-1862.

Warrington, Camilla.

Subjects:

Military pensions-- United States--Revolution, 1775- 1783.

Land grants--Virginia.

Geographical Names:

Valley Forge (Pa.)

Arrangement

Chronologically arranged.

Contents List

Edmund Dickinson, Camp Valley Forge, PA, to Lucy Dickinson, Williamsburg, 9 May 1778.

Folder 1

Scope and Content

Dickinson makes reference to the newly established alliance with France. He thanks his sister for sending him shirts.

Will of Edmund Dickinson, 28 March 1778.

Folder 2

Scope and Content

After all of his debts were paid, Dickinson indicated that Lucy and Agnes would each get half of his estate. He also gave money to his married sisters, Elizabeth Warren and Judith Farrer, and he set aside sixty pounds for his nephew's education.

Camilla Warrington, Williamsburg, to Lucy Dickinson, [ca. 1770's]

Folder 2

Scope and Content

The letter was written on a Sunday morning before church. Camilla complains that she has not been able to spend more time with Nancy.

Unsigned poem, [ca. 1770's]

Folder 2

Unsigned poem, [ca. 1770's]

Folder 2

Scope and Content

This poem appears to be a rough draft.

Unsigned poem, [ca. 1770's]

Folder 2

Scope and Content

The poem has the name "EDMUND DICKINSON" written vertically in the right hand column. The name is also written vertically in the left hand column in such a way that the letters begin each line of the poem.

Note, 7 July 1783.

Folder 2

Scope and Content

This note contains information about Dickinson's military salary.

Official statement, 19 June 1785.

Folder 3

Scope and Content

Agnes Dickinson authorized Robert Gibbons to handle the estate of Edmund Dickinson.

Mr. Nourse, Washington, to Senator Henry Tazewell, ca. 1798.

Folder 3

Scope and Content

Dickinson's descendants are not entitled to commutation. The writer of the letter appears to be a government official.

Henry Tazewell to Robert Gibbons, Gloucester, 12 June 1798.

Folder 3

Scope and Content

Senator Tazewell regretfully informs Robert Gibbons that only the direct descendants of soldiers are entitled to commutation.

Note, 23 October 1800.

Folder 3

Scope and Content

This document records Lucy's marriage to Robert Gibbons.

Note.

Folder 4

Scope and Content

Julia Gibbons notes that Edmund Dickinson was her mother's only brother.

Will of John Dickeson. 21 September 1801.

Folder 4

Burwell Bassett, Washington, to Robert Gibbons, 22 February 1817.

Folder 4

William Smart, Gloucester, to Representative Coke, Washington, 31 March 1832.

Folder 5

Scope and Content

William Smart requests assistance with the family's claim to Dickinson's pension and land grants.

Representative Coke to William Smart, Gloucester, 5 April 1832.

Folder 5

Scope and Content

Coke acknowledges the receipt of Smart's letter.

William Smart, Gloucester, to Thomas Nelson, 19 April 1832.

Folder 5

Scope and Content

William Smart requests legal assistance from Nelson in his attempt to get compensation for Dickinson's military service in the American Revolution.

William Smart, Gloucester, to Representative Coke, 19 May 1832.

Folder 5

Scope and Content

Smart makes reference to his March letter. He explains that he has been unable to figure out the specific details of Major Dickinson's participation in the Revolution.

Official records, 31 May 1832.

Folder 5

Scope and Content

This document contains important background information about the Dickinson claim.

Representative Coke, Washington, to William Smart, Gloucester, 8 June 1832.

Folder 5

William Smart, Gloucester, to Senator John Tyler, 9 August 1832.

Folder 5

Scope and Content

Smart requests assistance from Senator Tyler in regards to the Dickinson claim.

Heath[?], Washington, to William Smart, Gloucester, 27 August 1832.

Folder 5

Scope and Content

Heath apologizes for not responding more quickly. He explains that repairs at the Capitol have prevented access to necessary documents.

Statement of Elizabeth Nicholson, [ca. 1830's]

Folder 6

Scope and Content

Nicholson testified that Edmund Dickinson participated in the Revolutionary War and that he died at the Battle of Monmouth.

Gloucester Superior Court, [ca. 1830's]

Folder 6

Scope and Content

The court is satisfied with the Elizabeth Nicholson's testimony.

Gloucester Superior Court, [ca. 1830's]

Folder 6

Scope and Content

This appears to be a copy of the previous document.

Letter from Richardson to [?], 6 April 1838.

Folder 6

Scope and Content

The governor believes that Dickinson's heirs should be entitled to additional land.

Richard Randolph, Williamsburg, to [?], 15 June 1840.

Folder 6

Scope and Content

Dickinson's heirs are owed money.

Newspaper article from Neal's Saturday Gazette, 25 October 1845.

Oversize 1X

Scope and Content

This article briefly discusses Major "Dickerson's" [sic] participation in the Battle of Monmouth.