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PETER S. DU PONCEAU PAPERS

1787-1844

.21 linear feet, 1 box

Series I. Correspondence (1787-1834)
Series II. Documents (1844)

August 2005

Descriptive Summary**Repository**

Library Company of Philadelphia
1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-5698

Call Number

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Creator

Du Ponceau, Peter Stephen, 1760-1844

Title

Peter S. Du Ponceau Papers

Inclusive Dates

1787-1844

Quantity

.21 linear feet (1 box)

Language of Materials

Materials are in English and French.

Abstract

The Peter S. Du Ponceau Papers holds both incoming and outgoing correspondence with friends and business associates. Most of the letters in the collection, however, are in the second subseries: twenty-six letters written to Du Ponceau by the Marquis de Lafayette, and two by his secretary Auguste Levasseur. They range in date from January 1825, during their tour of America, until just prior to Lafayette's death in 1834. Lafayette's correspondence deals partly with personal and family topics, but also raises contemporary political issues.

Administrative Information**Restrictions to Access**

The collection is open to researchers. It is on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and should be accessed through the Society's reading room at 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA. Visit their website, <http://www.hsp.org/>, for reading room hours.

Acquisition Information

Gift of John A. McAllister; forms part of the McAllister Collection.

Processing Information

The Peter S. Du Ponceau Papers were formerly interfiled within the large and chronologically arranged McAllister Manuscript Collection; the papers were reunited, arranged, and described as a single collection in 2005, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the William Penn Foundation. The collection was processed Edith Mulhern, a University of Pennsylvania Summer Research Intern. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Preferred Citation

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Online Catalog Headings**Subject Names**

Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain, 1768-1844--correspondent
Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834--correspondent
Levasseur, Auguste--correspondent
Peyre, Antoine Marie, 1770-1843--correspondent
Livingston, Edward, 1764-1836--correspondent
Barnet, I. Cox (Isaac Cox), d. 1833--correspondent
Vaux, Roberts, 1786-1836--correspondent
Beaumont, Gustave de, 1802-1866
Tocqueville, Alexis de, 1805-1859

Subject Topics

Revolutions
Prisons--United States

Subject Places

United States--History--19th century--Sources
France--History--July Revolution, 1830--Sources.
France--Politics and government--19th century.
Paris (France)--Politics and government.
Poland--History--Revolution, 1830-1832--Sources.
Belgium--History--Revolution, 1830-1839--Sources.

Related Collections

Other materials related to Du Ponceau are held at the American Philosophical Society, the Historical Society of Philadelphia, the Delaware Historical Society, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Pennsylvania. Bryn Mawr College has a family letter from the Comte d'Orsay to Du Ponceau. Extensive Lafayette collections are held by Cornell University (the Arthur H. and Mary Marden Dean Lafayette Collection) and the Library of Congress (Papers of the Marquis de Lafayette, on microfilm).

Biographical/Historical Notes

A noted linguist, Peter Stephen Du Ponceau was born in St Martin de Ré, France, on June 3, 1760. He was a good student and gifted at languages, but after graduating from seminary he chose not to enter the priesthood. Instead, in 1777 he came to the American colonies as secretary to Prussian military officer Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus, Baron von Steuben (1730-1794) during the War of Independence. Du Ponceau served as a captain in the American army until 1781 when illness forced him to resign; afterward, he remained in America, eventually settling in Philadelphia and becoming a lawyer. He was an active member of the city's cultural organizations, eventually serving as president of three: the American Philosophical Society (elected to membership in 1791), the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. He was a founding member of the French Benevolent Society of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Bar Association. Du Ponceau's greatest scholarly contribution was to linguistics; encouraged by Thomas Jefferson, he studied and wrote on Native American languages, as well as Chinese. Peter Du Ponceau died in Philadelphia in 1844.

Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834), was a French aristocrat and military careerist who actively supported the colonists during the American Revolution. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1777, and joining the army as a volunteer, served as a distinguished troop leader through the war's end in 1781. Lafayette returned to France and was a prominent activist in the French Revolution and various political events throughout his life. Declared a traitor in 1792 by the Revolutionary Government, he was imprisoned in Prussia and Austria until 1797; he returned to France in 1799 and established a residence near Paris at Chateau La Grange, Seine et Marne.

Lafayette toured America between July 1824 and September 1825, where he received, as a gift from the United States government, a township of land (at what is now Tallahassee, Florida) and \$200,000. He returned to France and was active in public life as a deputy in the French Parliament until his death.

Auguste Levasseur was Lafayette's secretary and accompanied him on his tour of the United States in 1824-1825. Antoine Marie Peyre (1770-1843) was a French architect, and an associate of Lafayette from the time of his military career.

Joseph, Comte de Survilliers was the pseudonym of Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain (1768-1844), and Napoleon's older brother. After the Bonaparte family was exiled from France, Joseph was smuggled to America under an assumed name and lived at an estate, Point Breeze, in New Jersey, and in Philadelphia. He returned to Europe in 1839 and died in Italy. Joseph Bonaparte was active in the Franco-American community and was an associate of Stephen Girard.

James Vanuxem (1746-1824) was a French-born Philadelphia merchant active in the shipping trade. He was a director of the Bank of Pennsylvania and of two Philadelphia insurance companies. Edward Livingston (1764-1836), was a lawyer and politician, and member of a prominent Hudson Valley family. He represented New York City in Congress for three terms, and served as mayor of the city. After relocating to New Orleans in 1804, he sat in both the House of Representatives and the Senate before being appointed secretary of state by President Andrew Jackson. Livingston also served as minister to France from 1830 to 1835.

In an October 7, 1861, letter to his friend Benson J. Lossing, John A. McAllister wrote "My wife's grand father, Godfrey Weber Esq, of this city has several letters of Lafayettes, lately given to him by Miss Garesche, a granddaughter of the later Peter S Duponceau, with whom Lafayette had an extensive correspondence" (Lossing Papers (Coll. 1807), Historical Society of Pennsylvania). McAllister most likely received these letters from Mr. Weber.

Collection Overview

The Peter Stephen Du Ponceau Papers span the years 1787 to 1844. They are divided into two series: Correspondence and Documents.

Series I, Correspondence (1787-1834) includes letters in both French and English to and from friends and business associates. It is arranged in two subseries: Letters from Du Ponceau; and Letters to Du Ponceau. The first subseries holds three letters written by Du Ponceau to his daughter Louisa in Bristol, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and four others written to associates in Paris and Philadelphia. His letter to Isaac Cox Barnet (d. 1833), a professional diplomat who served as U.S. Consul in Belgium and France for many years, concerns a financial matter and includes the bank draft discussed in the letter. With James Vanuxem, he discusses an ongoing legal case at Bordeaux. In a short letter to Quaker reformer Roberts Vaux, Du Ponceau requests access to a 1683 Indian treaty for his research.

Most of the letters in the collection, however, are in the second subseries: twenty-six letters written to Du Ponceau by the Marquis de Lafayette, and two by his secretary Auguste Levasseur. They range in date from January 1825, during their tour of America, until just prior to Lafayette's death in 1834. Lafayette's correspondence deals partly with personal and family topics, but also raises contemporary political issues, particularly that of European revolutions, such as in Poland, occurring at the time. The letters are in French; a précis of each follows the box and folder list in this finding aid.

Among the Lafayette letters in one written in March 1831 as an introduction for Alexis de Tocqueville (1802-1866) and Gustave de Beaumont (1805-1859), who were preparing to leave for the United States to research their book *Du Système Pénitentiaire aux Etats-Unis, et de son application en France* (*On the Penitentiary System in the United States, and its application in France*)

(1833). In his letter, Lafayette wrote his opinion of American prisons, and endorsed Tocqueville and Beaumont's project.

The subseries also holds two letters from Joseph Bonaparte regarding real estate issues, and two from Edward Livingston.

Series II, Documents (1844), holds one item: an invoice from John Homan & Thomas M. Hughes' Ready Made Coffin Warehouse for Du Ponceau's burial and the sodding of his grave.

Box Folder

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE

1787-1834

Arranged in two subseries: Letters from Du Ponceau; and Letters to Du Ponceau, thereunder alphabetically by correspondent.

Letters from Du Ponceau

1	1	Barnet, Isaac Cox	1828 Dec 3
	2	Du Ponceau, Louisa	1802-1808
	3	Vanuxem, James	1787 Jan 7
	4	Vaux, Roberts	1835 Dec 23
	5	White, Thomas	1824 Aug 10

Letters to Du Ponceau

6		Joseph Bonaparte, Comte de Survilliers	1819-1820
		Lafayette, Marie Joseph Gilbert Du Motier, Marquis de	
7		Letters	1825-1827
8		Letters	1828-1829
9		Letters	1830-1834
10		Levasseur, Auguste	1825, 1827
11		Livingston, Edward	1823, 1829

Peyre, Antoine Marie

See: Marquis de Lafayette, April 1828

SERIES II. DOCUMENTS

1844

12		Receipt for burial	1844 Apr 4
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APPENDIX

Descriptions of twenty-six letters from the Marquis de Lafayette, and two letters from Auguste Levasseur, to Peter S. Du Ponceau, dated from January 1825 to April 1834.

1. Lafayette, from Washington, January 12, 1825.

Lafayette tells Du Ponceau that he has received a letter from Irenée DuPont, which he hopes will prepare the way for reconciliation. The DuPont family owes him 30,000 francs. He writes that he needs to go to Richmond to see the Virginia Assembly and that he will come back to see the Pennsylvania Assembly. It appears to him that the Washington Monument Committee will not be ready for February 22. He will then travel to the Carolinas, to Georgia, and to New Orleans before going to Boston to lay the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill Monument. He mentions two German professors, Fuller and Beck, who have been forced to leave by the Holy Alliance and who are now in America. They will spend some time in Philadelphia, so he asks Du Ponceau to go and see them.

2. Lafayette, from Harrisburg, February 1, 1825.

Lafayette relates that he has sorted out affairs with DuPont since his last letter, and tells which cities he has visited and intends to visit shortly. He expresses his concern about Italian refugees in London, saying they have not received the same treatment as Spanish refugees. He has sent a letter to Joseph Bonaparte, the former king of Naples, hoping that he can help them.

3. Lafayette, from Washington, February 6, 1825.

Lafayette wishes Du Ponceau to find a copy of the *Commentaire sur Montesquieu*, as President Monroe is interested in it. He also writes in support of an acquaintance, Doctor Nourens, who has been conducting research on the brain, and who Lafayette wishes considered for membership in the American Philosophical Society. In news from Europe, he speaks about conservative measures instituted by the government of Charles X in France, and about impending British action in Greece against the Ottomans, including plans to buy a steamship.

4. Lafayette, from Washington, August 12, 1825.

Lafayette asks Du Ponceau to give advice, and to make introductions for two arrivals from Europe who are friends of General Foy.

Levasseur, aboard the *Brandywine* (returning to France), September 25, 1825.

After traveling for two weeks, they encountered a boat from Liverpool going to the States and seized the occasion to send their thanks and love.

5. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, January 22, 1826.

Lafayette writes that they have not had any news of Du Ponceau since his November 26 letter to Barnet, and he and his son express their sympathy about the sad news in it. He says that George's daughter was very ill, but recovered, and that he hopes that they will hear better news from Du Ponceau very soon.

6. Lafayette, from Paris, March 27, 1826.

Lafayette says this letter will be given to Du Ponceau by General Narvaez, Bolivar's aide-de-camp. Narvaez stopped in Paris after bringing his republic's treaty to Great Britain. Lafayette says that he thinks the United States is a better moral example to the new republics in South America than the states in Europe. He also expresses the wish that Dom Pedro will not remain on the throne of Brazil for much longer. Finally, he asks Du Ponceau to introduce Narvaez to their friends, and mentions Levasseur.

7. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, December 26, 1826.

Lafayette sends Du Ponceau a copy of a letter from Monsieur Beauséjour, a former fellow deputy, who speaks about a young man, Amedée duFour, and his teacher. Lafayette thought the Quaker referred to was Mr. Maclure, an educational reformer in Germantown who, he believes, took over from Robert Owen at New Harmony. The inside of the letter contains the copy of Beauséjour's letter.

8. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, October 2, 1827.

Lafayette wants him to undertake some business for him and to consult with people either in New York or in other places.

Levasseur, from Chateau La Grange, November 29, 1827.

Levasseur describes the unrest in the French parliament and the resignation of Villèle, a conservative minister. He further relates that Lafayette has been elected as a deputy for Meaux. He also relates some personal news from General Lafayette: the death of a friend's son; the imminent marriage of his granddaughter Natalie to Adolph Perrier; and greetings from his son, George Washington Lafayette, who has just returned from Auvergne.

9. Lafayette, from Paris, April 10, 1827.

Lafayette says his letter will be delivered by a young Mr. de Lillier, who is traveling in America and was recommended to Lafayette by one of LaRochefoucauld's sons; he hopes Du Ponceau will introduce him to their friends in Philadelphia. He says he was touched by a letter of condolence he received from the American Philosophical Society, but that they made a mistake and it was Louis Lasteyrie, the nephew of Charles Lasteyrie, who had died. Lafayette comments on the death of Victor Dupont and says he plans to write to his brother. He asks after Du Ponceau's grandchildren and hopes they have recovered from their illness. He was very pleased by the cards Du Ponceau sent him and eagerly awaits the next one. After asking Du Ponceau to take care of some affairs for him and urging Du Ponceau to visit him in France, he speaks about the current political situation in France, with the opinion that while the new generation is less ardent than that of 1789, it is more rational.

10. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, September 26, 1828.

Lafayette writes in recommendation of Mr. Dupré, a young wigmaker who was successful in London and wishes to establish himself in the United States. He also talks about Levasseur's account of their journeys and says he has not looked at the manuscript but that he would like

Du Ponceau to do so. He mentions that Levasseur is now established independently with a bookstore.

11. Lafayette, from Paris, April 18, 1828.

Lafayette sends a letter from Mr. Peyre, Lafayette's former aide-de-camp in the National Guard, recommending a Mr. Lepaye who wants to come to Philadelphia. He thanks Du Ponceau for his last letter and the *American Quarterly Review* that came with it. He adds that Levasseur has opened a bookstore.

Enclosure: letter from Antoine Marie Peyre in Paris to Lafayette, April 16, 1828.

Peyre, a government architect, asks Lafayette to help Leopold Philippe Lepaye, a young Frenchman who wants to travel to the United States. Peyre states that although Lepaye has done excellently with his studies, his most important characteristic is his patriotism, his constitutional opinions, and his fine moral character.

12. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, October 10, 1828.

Mr. de la Cretas, who will deliver the letter, was recommended to Lafayette by his friend Mr. d'Argenton. De la Cretas is a pharmacist and is interested in settling in Florida, where Lafayette has land. Lafayette says he has already spoken to Du Ponceau about Levasseur's manuscript, which could only be published after Levasseur has left his position with Lafayette. The manuscript needs to be reviewed by Du Ponceau, to remove any details that might be offensive. He also emphasizes that he does not want to be involved in the manuscript or its publication because he does not want to influence it.

13. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, November 13, 1828.

Lafayette thanks Du Ponceau for translating some essays for him. He also makes an introduction for Charles Philip Francis, who was recommended to him by his friend Madame de Maurville, and who has a factory on South Water Street in Philadelphia. Lafayette expresses the hope that Greece will become independent and comments on the continued anti-liberal currents on the part of the French court. He also mentions that his son and daughter-in-law have gone to Grenoble to see their daughter Natalie Périer's children.

14. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, September 29, 1829.

Lafayette says he has just sent a letter with Messrs. D'Otrante, but since they might stay in New York for some time before going to Philadelphia, he has sent this letter. He says the rapid advance of the Russians in Turkey is worrying, as is the appointment of Polignac, which he fears will result in a counter-revolutionary push.

15. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, November 6, 1829.

Lafayette writes to Du Ponceau about the political situation in France. A new minister [Polignac] has just been appointed, whom Lafayette fears will have a negative effect and there have been large demonstrations in Paris. Associations are forming to resist paying taxes that are viewed as unjust.

16. Lafayette, from Paris, March 8, 1830.

Lafayette writes that he imagines Du Ponceau must be anxious about the political situation in France. He says that it is not sure what will happen, if the minister will resign, if the Chamber of Deputies will adjourn, or even be dissolved. He also mentions the French Expedition in Algeria, the fact that the French government favors Prince Leopold for the Greek throne, and that public opinion is against Dom Miguel in Portugal. He sends Du Ponceau an article from the paper *Le Constitutionnel*, clarifying some American claims.

17. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, March 27, 1830.

Lafayette writes from La Grange because there has been a prorogation of the assembly. He believes that the prorogation will be followed by dissolution of the assembly, and fears the definite counter-revolutionary stance of the king, his son, and Polignac. He awaits developments when he returns to Paris. If illegal measures are put in place, the left wing intends to stop paying taxes. Preparations are being made to attacks Algiers, but success depends on the weather conditions. He sends a newspaper clipping with a petition that he and a deputy from Lyon presented.

18. Lafayette, from Paris, August 8, 1830.

Lafayette says they have had a marvelous Revolution. After receiving Charles X's ordinances on the 27th, Lafayette went to Paris and fighting was already in progress. They appointed the Duke of Orleans as king and imposed some restricting conditions upon him. Lafayette sends a copy of the speech he made. He mentions that he and George are together, and that he is commanding the National Guard.

Enclosure: Declaration made by Lafayette at the Hotel de Ville, July 31, 1830.

Since the latest aggression against liberty on the part of the royal family and the victory of public opinion in Paris, Lafayette declared that any reconciliation was impossible and that the royal family had ceased to reign.

19. Lafayette, from Paris, August 17, 1830.

Lafayette says the Revolution continues to go well. The royal family has gone to Cherbourg and will leave the country. Unlike the previous Revolution, a tribunal was not established, and a bill was introduced abolishing the death penalty. Although the three days were bloody, there has not been much violence since. Lafayette sends several clippings, which he is sure Du Ponceau will want to translate.

20. Lafayette, from Paris, October 20, 1830.

Lafayette imagines that Du Ponceau has seen news of some unrest in Paris, but he feels it is normal after a revolution. He sends some more clippings for Du Ponceau to translate.

21. Lafayette, from Paris, December 18, 1830.

Lafayette thanks Du Ponceau for his expressions of support and sends more press clippings. Belgian independence will be recognized. He also expresses enthusiasm for the revolution in Poland.

22. Lafayette, from Paris, March 26, 1831.

Lafayette writes a letter of introduction for Tocqueville and de Beaumont, who are visiting the United States to study the prison system. He acknowledges the debate on solitary confinement but emphasizes the goal of moral reformation for the prisoners and facilitation of the abolition of the death penalty. He believes the new prison building in Philadelphia could be used to isolate the prisoners at night, but to group them together by the gravity of their offense or their behavior during the day, and only use isolation as a punishment. He believes that American prisons are much better than European ones, and so Tocqueville and de Beaumont's study will be very useful. Lafayette also says that he has paid a debt for a Spanish man for whom Du Ponceau had written a letter of introduction, and had instructed him to pay Du Ponceau.

23. Lafayette, from Paris, July 30, 1831.

He says he has not yet seen Mr. Chibus, with whom he wishes to discuss his work, but that he has sent him tickets to a party. He relates that anniversary of the 1830 revolution went well, especially in comparison to the July 14 commemoration. There is a lot of public sympathy for the situation in Poland. Lafitte was nominated for the presidency. There was news of a Polish victory and of an insurrection in Hungary. He says that he will continue to represent Meaux. He imagines Du Ponceau has read the Duke of Orleans' speech and sends some press clippings.

24. Lafayette, from Paris, April 30, 1832.

Lafayette describes the cholera outbreak in France and tells that his granddaughter, Clementine Lafayette was ill but recovered. Casimir Périer, the premier is also ill. Lafayette's grandson Jules Lasteyrie is part of the Polish expedition. He also sends an article from *Le Constitutionnel* and a copy of a speech he made. He mentions the British having secured Spanish non-intervention.

25. Lafayette, from Chateau La Grange, September 28, 1832.

Lafayette hopes the United States has been spared the trouble that cholera is causing in Europe. The widespread outbreak has caused rumors of plots. Lafayette wants to know if the same rumors exist in America, because he is worried about criticism of republican institutions. He reports that there is growing opposition to Louis Philippe. Despite some public opinion and speeches by Lord Durham, Poland is destroyed, and Lafayette doubts the situation can be remedied without a European war. Unrest in the United States has attracted a good deal of attention in Europe, so Lafayette intends to send some clippings. In a postscript, Lafayette adds that he has just received a letter from his grandson Jules Lasteyrie, dated September 19, relating their battles against Dom Miguel's forces at Porto. He also asks Du Ponceau to correct any reports in the American newspapers that the Marquis de Fronteira has deserted, while he is actually fighting with the constitutional forces.

26. Lafayette, from Paris, April 2, 1834.

Lafayette reports that the American Treaty was rejected and he is upset that left wing deputies voted against it. Although he is still ill, Lafayette hopes to get well again. He has already sent Du Ponceau his message that was read to the Commission, and now sends a speech made by his son. He would like both of them to be translated and published in the United States.