

UNEXPECTED TREASURES:

Family History in the American State Papers

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Disability.	When & where disabled.	Residence.	To what pension entitled.		Remarks.	
			Monthly allowance.	Arrangements.		
Wounded on the head, being scalped on the forehead with a stroke from a hatchet, which does not appear to have disabled in any way; also disabled in two the left hand, and wounded in the right breast; all which he received in the service of the United States, against Major Frieson's party.	1780, King's mountain.	Albemarle county.	-	-	There are no militia rolls in this office.(1)	INVALID PENSION CLAIMS
the left leg, which now appears not to be disabled; he labors under a large and very open ulcer in the left groin, which he says was caused by a musket ball, and that the ball had been extracted.	Brandywine.	-	-	-	Enlisted January 17, 1775, for three years.(2)	
the head at the Waxhaws, so as to render the eye useless, and a livelihood.	Waxhaws.	-	\$1 16 9	\$300 00	There are no militia rolls of the Virginia line for 1781.(1)	
the left hand, at the battle of Brandywine; the fingers shot off, likewise wounded in the right hand by a musket ball.	Brandywine.	-	3 35 1	300 00	This man does not appear on the militia rolls of this regiment.(2)	
each passed across the river, and fell on the left side of the river, in the service of the United States, at the battle of Camden, in South Carolina.	April, 1781, Camden, South Carolina.	-	3 35 1	300 00	There are no militia rolls in this office.(1)	
of his left eye, while in the service of the United States, occasioned by a carriage taking the coach, by a musket ball passing the stage of Charleston.	May 29, 1780, South Carolina.	-	3 35 1	150 00	Not to be found on the rolls.(1)	
several places, while in the service of the United States, at the battle of Col. Abraham Buford.	May 29, 1780, South Carolina.	-	-	-	Peter Howard mustered in May, 1778, enlisted for the war.(1)	

Overview: The American State Papers reflect the history of a new nation in its formative years. A collection of 38 volumes of legislative and executive documents from 1789 to 1838, the volumes cover everything from Indian affairs to public lands—and they contain a wealth of family information often not available anywhere else.

The history of the American State Papers

In 1831, publisher partners Joseph Gales and William Seaton proposed the publication of a compilation of Congressional documents. Congress voted to subscribe to the publication—effectively getting it off the ground—in 1831, but conditioned its approval on oversight of the selection of documents to be included. 4 Stat. 471 (1831). As the volumes were produced, between 1831 and 1861, Congress continued to authorize its participation in the project.

The compilation includes 6,278 documents for the years 1789-1838. It effectively fills the gap for the years between the first Congress, which met in 1789, and the publication of the documents for the years 1817-1818 in what became the first volume of the U.S. Congressional Serial Set.

The organization of the American State Papers

The Secretary of the Senate (Walter Lowrie) and Clerk of the House of Representatives (Matthew St. Clair Clarke) undertook the rules of compilers and editors of the documents because of their official role with the two houses of Congress and their responsibilities for their archives.

Gales and Seaton also left to Lowrie and Clarke the job of deciding how the work was to be organized. They considered organizing the papers purely chronologically or by topic and then chronologically within the topic. They chose the latter, and organized the papers into 10 classes.

The classes as ultimately published are shown with the number of volumes and date ranges of documents:

- Class I. Foreign relations. 6 volumes, 1789- 1828
- Class II. Indian affairs. 2 volumes, 1789-1827
- Class III. Finance. 5 volumes, 1789-1828
- Class IV. Commerce and navigation. 2 volumes, 1789-1823
- Class V. Military affairs. 7 volumes, 1789-1838
- Class VI. Naval affairs. 4 volumes, 1794-1836
- Class VII. Post Office Dept. 1 volume, 1790-1833
- Class VIII. Public lands. 8 volumes. 1789-1837
- Class IX. Claims. 1 volume, 1790-1823
- Class X. Miscellaneous. 2 volumes, 1789-1823

Finding the American State Papers

The American State Papers can be found and accessed both in physical form, at various libraries, and in digital form.

The physical volumes can be found at most major libraries and at most, if not all, Federal Government Depository libraries. For a searchable Federal Depository Library Directory, see <https://ask.gpo.gov/s/FDLD>.

In addition to the physical volumes, digitized collections of the American State Papers can be found in all of the digital book services—Google Books, HathiTrust Digital Library, and Internet Archive—and on the FamilySearch Digital Library. The major advantage to digital access to the ASP is that the volumes are word searchable, including by individual names and places. The quality of the search results will depend on the quality of the optical character recognition (OCR) in the digital scan so it may be prudent to use more than one digital source.

Family history in the American State Papers

The range of information of genealogical significance that can be found in the American State Papers is almost unlimited. A few examples will show the range of information to be found:

- ❖ **Post Office (volume 27):** Joseph Barnard was a postrider in Massachusetts in 1789-90, riding 60 miles three times a week in the summer and twice a week in the winter.
- ❖ **Commerce and Navigation (volume 14):** Henry P. Dering was the collector of customs at Sagg Harbor, New York, from 1790-1793, and saw a steady decline in the value of exports during those years.
- ❖ **Finance (volume 9):** In 1789, citizens of Baltimore complained in a petition that Maryland manufacturers were being ruined by cheap imports and urged the new Congress to swiftly enact duties to aid the

development of American businesses. The list of signers takes up almost three printed pages, and includes, for example, Peter Daushong signing with a mark, Enoch Levering and Enoch Levering, senior, and H. Ridgely who added “of Baltimore.”

- ❖ **Indian Affairs (volume 7):** David Rankin and James Hays were witnesses to the aftermath of the murder of Lewis Parker in Bourbon County, Kentucky on 12 May 1790. Parker had received “several wounds, with balls, tomahawks, and knives” and had been scalped.
- ❖ **Claims (volume 36):** Thomas Carhart of Flemington in Hunterdon County enlisted January 1777, served as a corporal in Capt. T. Patterson’s company of the 3rd New Jersey regiment, was wounded by a ball in the knee at Elizabethtown Point and taken prisoner in August 1779.

What about after the American State Papers?

The American State Papers only cover government documents produced during the years 1789-1838. As noted, however, it was the second collection of Congressional documents: the first began with the publication of the documents for the years 1817-1818 in what became the first volume of the U.S. Congressional Serial Set.

Continuously published to today, the Serial Set is described by the Library of Congress as “a compilation of journals, reports, and documents from House and Senate proceedings as well as documents from executive departments and independent agencies. Documents cover a wide variety of topics and may include reports of executive departments and independent organizations, reports of special investigations made for Congress, and annual reports of non-governmental organizations. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, executive-branch materials were also published in the Serial Set. In addition to providing context for the federal legislative process, the Serial Set is a useful resource for understanding issues that have been investigated by Congress throughout history, including the geographical expansion of the United States, the nature of international affairs, national museum acquisitions, and much more.” [Library of Congress, “About this Collection,” <https://www.loc.gov/collections/united-states-congressional-serial-set/about-this-collection/>]

There are currently more than 17,000 volumes of the Serial Set, each assigned a number. Some select portions of the Serial Set are now available online through the Library of Congress Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation website. Major digitization efforts are underway in a cooperative effort between the Library of Congress and the Government Publications Office. Until those efforts are complete, the entire Serial Set will not be readily available online except through subscription services such as HeinOnline and ProQuest. Print copies are generally available at the Federal Government Depository libraries.

Resources for Further Study

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2. DeSimone, Bailey. "From (and Before) the Serial Set: Collecting the American State Papers." *In Custodia Legis* Blog, posted 18 June 2020. <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2020/06/from-and-before-the-serial-set-collecting-the-american-state-papers/>
3. Hartley, Jeffrey. "Genealogy Research Using the U.S. Congressional Serial Set." National Archives video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMn7W6hj04>
4. —. "Using the Congressional Serial Set for Genealogical Research." *Prologue*, Spring 2009. National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2009/spring/congressional-serial-set.html>
5. Judson, Katharine B., compiler. *Subject Index to the History of the Pacific Northwest and of Alaska... in the American State Papers*. Olympia: Washington State Library, 1913.
6. Library of Congress. "American State Papers: Public Lands and Claims." Finding Aid. <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/naturalization/403-american-state-papers-land-claims.pdf>
7. McMullin, Phillip W., ed. *Grassroots of America: A Computerized Index to the American State Papers: Land Grants and Claims, 1789-1837, with other Aids to Research (Government Document Serial Set Numbers 28 through 36)*. Salt Lake City, UT: Gendex Corporation, 1972.
8. Naylor, Chris. "Public Lands and Claims in the American State Papers, 1789-1837." U.S. National Archives Know Your Records Lecture. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne_HDeMS2AE
9. —. "Those Elusive Early Americans: Public Lands and Claims in the American State Papers, 1789-1837." *Prologue*, Summer 2005. National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/summer/state-papers.html>
10. Potter, Constance. "'Whatever Happened To...?': A Brief History of the Records of the National Archives." *APG Quarterly* 24 (June 2009): 77
11. Sayre, Rick. "The Genealogy in Government Documents." <https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/the-genealogy-in-government-documents/>
12. Svetson, Andrea. "Delving into the U.S. Congressional Serial Set." Federal Depository Library Program webinar. <https://www.fdlp.gov/training/delving-us-congressional-serial-set>

The American State Papers Online

13. FamilySearch Digital Library. <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>
14. Google Books. <https://books.google.com/>
15. HathiTrust. <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
16. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/>
17. Library of Congress, *American Memory Project*. "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation." [Note: Old version, in transition to new, sometimes unstable.] American State Papers: <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html>
18. —. "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation." [Note: New version, in transition, incomplete.] <https://www.loc.gov/collections/century-of-lawmaking/>

Web addresses verified as of 9 February 2024