Dutilh family business records
1770–1861
(bulk dates 1780–1810)

Abstract: The late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century business records of Philadelphia merchant Etienne Dutilh and his descendants. The records include ships’ payrolls, bills of lading, bills of exchange, shipping records, and cargo insurance policies.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 573
Creator: Dutilh family.
Title: Dutilh family business records
Inclusive Dates: 1770–1861
Bulk Dates: 1780–1810
Extent: 1 linear foot (2 upright manuscript boxes)
Language: Materials in English and French.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 573, Dutilh family business records, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.
Shelving Summary: Boxes 1-2: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes
Location: Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/
Source: Gift of the Moyerman family, 1972.
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Biographical Note

The mercantile house of Dutilh & Wachsmuth operated in Philadelphia from 1790 until approximately 1798. The business was formed in 1790 by the partnership of French-born Etienne Dutilh (1748–1810) and Philadelphian John Godfried Wachsmuth (1748–1828). The partnership drew on both Dutilh’s family and personal history with the world of commerce as well as Wachsmuth’s connections to Philadelphia and the new American state.

Etienne Dutilh immigrated to Philadelphia from his native France in 1783 and by 1784 he had established the import-export house of E. Dutilh & Co. Having been a merchant in both Rotterdam and London prior to arriving in Philadelphia, Dutilh had established many European and West Indian contacts to benefit his new business. One of these many contacts was the Havana-based John Dutilh, who was presumably Etienne’s brother.

By 1788 Dutilh had crossed paths with Philadelphian John Godfried Wachsmuth. In 1790 Etienne Dutilh and John Godfried Wachsmuth formally established a business partnership, and E. Dutilh & Co. became Dutilh & Wachsmuth. In about 1798 Dutilh & Wachsmuth disbanded and Wachsmuth partnered with John Soullier, who himself was an associate of Dutilh.

While the Dutilh & Wachsmuth mercantile house was disbanded at some point in the late 1790s, the partnership between Etienne Dutilh and John Godfried Wachsmuth continued on into the nineteenth century with records existing that link the two in business transactions as late as 1803. Indeed, the connectedness of the two families did not end with the dissolution of Dutilh & Wachsmuth. When Dutilh (who had anglicized his first name to “Stephen” in 1804) passed away in 1810, Wachsmuth married Dutilh’s widow and raised Dutilh’s three sons until his own death in 1828. It is likely that two of these sons were Charles and Edward Dutilh. Both men appear to have initially followed in their father’s and stepfather’s footsteps by entering the commerce business, with Charles later making a name for himself in Philadelphia by becoming the president of the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities sometime in the 1860s.

Sources:


The Dutilh Family Business Records at the University of Delaware Library, spanning the dates 1770–1861, represent only a small portion of Dutilh family papers available in several archival repositories across the country. The records demonstrate the everyday business of a late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Philadelphia mercantile house. The majority of the items housed in the collection are bills of exchange, promissory notes from the company, and "sight drafts" for pay to ships' workers. Sight drafts are documents commonly used in international trade that allow the bearer of the sight draft to receive a specified payment from a bank or importer upon "sight." Approximately one third of the collection is in French, with French being employed more often in the earlier years of the company and for business correspondence between Dutilh family members. Though Dutilh & Wachsmuth only formally existed as an enterprise for less than a decade, the papers in this collection span a much greater period of time, from 1770 to 1861, with the majority of the material hailing from the period between 1780 and 1810. The collection provides many items of use to the researcher, including manifests illustrating the types of material being imported into Philadelphia at the turn of the century, bills of exchange and promissory notes that were utilized as payment for both the import of goods as well as for the wages of workers, and several well-preserved examples of cargo insurance policies. These policies are fine early-American printing specimens of the Philadelphia printer James Humphreys.

Some time after receipt by the University of Delaware Library in 1972, this collection was organized into two series of "Outgoing" and "Incoming" documents and filed by decade, an order that has been retained. An additional series, Series III. Miscellany, has been added to house items of uncertain origin.

The majority of the items in Series I. Outgoing Documents are promissory notes from Dutilh & Wachsmuth to various individuals. Conversely, the majority of the items in Series II. Incoming Documents are either sight drafts for sailors' wages or bills of exchange from foreign ports. The origination of these bills of exchange highlight the areas where Dutilh & Wachsmuth did the greatest share of their business: Port-au-Prince and Cape Francis, St. Domingue (now Haiti); Kingston, Jamaica; and, Havana, Cuba. Throughout Series I. and Series II. there exists letters and financial transactions between Dutilh & Wachsmuth and Philadelphians of some local fame, including Stephen Girard and Peter Stephen Du Ponceau.

Of particular interest in the collection are ships' manifests and financial records that indicate the type of goods that were being sold and purchased during this period. The majority of Dutilh & Wachsmuth's trade was to or from the West Indies; however, they also conducted business through many other ports worldwide, including Rotterdam, London, Bordeaux, the Bay of Campeche (Mexico), and Canton. Coffee appears to have been their number one commodity, but sugar was also frequent cargo. Other items, such as linens, foodstuffs, and spices are also noted in these records.

In addition to these financial records, the collection also includes several large ships' insurance policies (located in the oversized folder) printed by Philadelphian printer James Humphreys. Nine of the policies found in the collection hail from The Delaware Insurance Company of Philadelphia and were issued between 1804 and 1809. Another policy from the Marine and Fire Insurance Company of Philadelphia (1807) is also included. Rounding out this group of insurance materials is an 1801 statement from Philadelphia insurance broker Natbro Frazier. The statement itemizes the multiple policies that Dutilh acquired from Frazier over
time, and thus provides a useful listing of the names and destinations of a variety of Dutilh’s vessels. The sight drafts issued by Dutilh & Wachsmuth also highlight the names of the vessels the company used. The vessels most often sited are the schooners *Hannibal*, *Isabella*, *John Adams*, *Little Will*, and *Young Charles*; the ships *Pilgrim*, *Laluma*, and *Active*; and the sloops *Abigail* and *Minerva*.

Finally, Series II. (F14-15) contains several affidavits and depositions pertaining to a legal case in which Dutilh was involved. The case revolved around a shipment of coffee from Cuba that arrived aboard the Schooner *Eliza* in 1804. Though the documents provide no clear indication of the exact problem with the cargo, it can be intuited that the freight was suspicious to American officials whether for poor quality or due to fears that the coffee was brought onto the vessel as contraband. The depositions detail the physical appearance of the casks of coffee (the conditions of the staves, the markings on the barrels, the locations in which it was stored, and the names of those that had access to it in the storage facility). The case was brought before both the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and the U.S. Circuit Court. The existing records in this collection do not indicate whether any clear resolution to the case was reached.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Dutilh, Etienne, 1748-1810.
Wachsmuth, John Godfried, 1748-1828.
Humphreys, James, 1748-1810.
Dutilh, Charles.
Girard, Stephen, 1750-1831.
Du Ponceau, Peter Stephen, 1760-1844.
Soullier, John M., d. 1824.

Corporate Names

Dutilh & Wachsmuth (Philadelphia, Pa.)
E. Dutilh & Company.

Topical Terms

Merchants--United States--18th century--Sources.
Merchants--United States--19th century--Sources.
Coffee industry--United States--19th century--Sources.
Sugar trade--United States--19th century--Sources.

Geographical Terms

Port-au-Prince (Haiti)--History--19th century--Sources.
Cuba--History--19th century--Sources.
Kingston (Jamaica)--History--19th century--Sources.

Form/Genre Terms

Bills of lading.
Bills of exchange.
Drafts (negotiable instruments)
Promissory notes.

Insurance policies.

Depositions.

Shipping records.

**Occupation**

Merchants.

**Related Materials in Other Repositories**


Arrangement

Series I. Outgoing Documents, 1780–1811
Series II. Incoming Documents, 1770–1861
Series III. Miscellany, 1785–1820
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Outgoing Documents, 1780–1811

1780–1789 [Box 1 F1]

1790–1799 [Box 1 F2-F5]

1800–1811 [Box 1 F6]

Series II. Incoming Documents, 1770–1861

1770–1779 [Box 1 F7]

1780–1789 [Box 1 F8]

(1 of 5), 1790–1799 [Box 1 F9]

(2 of 5), 1790–1799 [Box 2 F10]

(3 of 5), 1790–1799 [Box 2 F11]

(4 of 5), 1790–1799 [Box 2 F12]

(5 of 5), 1790–1799 [Box 2 F13]

(1 of 2), 1800–1809 [Box 2 F14]

(2 of 2), 1800–1809 [Box 2 F15]

1810–1819 [Box 2 F16]

1820–1829 [Box 2 F17]

1830–1839 [Box 2 F18]

1840–1849 [Box 2 F19]

1850–1861 [Box 2 F20]

undated [Box 2 F21]

Series III. Miscellany, 1785–1820

Items of unknown origin, 1785–1820 [Box 2 F22]