William J. Canby Papers: Finding Aid

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Manuscripts Department
1151 Oxford Road
San Marino, California 91108
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Overview of the Collection

Title: William J. Canby Papers

Dates (inclusive): 1758-1975

Bulk dates: 1905-1959

Collection Number: mssHM 46017 (1-39)

Creator: Canby, William J., active 1870.

Extent: 110 pieces; 2 boxes.

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Abstract: This collection contains papers related to the speech of William J. Canby, the grandson of seamstress Betsy Ross (1752-1836), before the Pennsylvania Historical Society in 1870, which was the first time that Canby publicly shared his family's tradition that Ross had made the first United States American flag. There is also correspondence relating to George Canby and his research, and genealogical data on Canby, Ross, and Claypoole families.

Language: English.

Access

Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item]. William J. Canby Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance

Gift of Marion Balderston, 1974-1975.

Biographical Note

William J. Canby, grandson of the seamstress Betsy Ross, read a paper in March, 1870 in the Pennsylvania Historical Society relating for the first time in public his family's tradition that Betsy Ross (Elizabeth Claypoole) made the first U.S. American flag. His theory was criticized for the lack of corroborative evidence. Upon Canby's death, his brother George continued research on the story, and his findings were published by Lloyd Balderston in The evolution of the American flag / from materials collected by the late George Canby by Lloyd Balderston (Philadelphia : Ferris & Leach, 1909).

Scope and Content

Correspondence, manuscripts, and documents relating to William J. Canby's speech in the Pennsylvania Historical Society, including a copy of the presentation and sworn affidavits from Margaret Boggs, Rachel Fletcher, Sophia B. Hildebrandt; Susan Satterthwaite Newport, Susanna McCord Turner and Margared McCord Smith; William J. Canby's "My own recollections of Grandmother Elizabeth Claypoole," and the pencil notes to his mother and aunts.

George Canby and his research are represented by his correspondence with his brother, John Quincy Adams, secretary of the American Flag House and Betsy Ross Memorial Association, London firm B.F. Stevens and Brown, and other persons. There are also a manuscript of his "Evolution of the American Flag" and correspondence of Lloyd Balderston, John L. Balderston, and Marion Balderston regarding the Betsy Ross story and the debates over its authenticity.

The collection also includes genealogical and historical data relating to Ross, Canby, and Claypoole families, including the daybook of Isaiah Canby covering 1797-1802.

The ephemera include pamphlets, newspaper clippings, postcards and photographs.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library's Online Catalog.

**Subjects**
- Canby, William J., active 1870.
- Canby, George, 1829-1907.
- Ross, Betsy, 1752-1836.
- Flags -- United States -- History.
- Pennsylvania -- Genealogy.
- United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783.

**Forms/Genres**
- Letters (correspondence) -- United States.
- Affidavits -- United States.
- Genealogies -- United States.
- Family papers -- United States.
- Journals (accounts) -- United States.
- Histories -- United States.

**Additional Contributors**
- Canby, George, 1829-1907.
- Canby, Isaiah, active 1797-1802.

**Indexing: Subjects**
- Balderston, Lloyd, b. 1863.
- Balderston, John L.
- Canby, George, 1829-1907
- Canby, Isaiah, fl. 1797-1802.
- Ross, Betsy, 1752-1836 Canby family
- Claypoole family
- Ross family
- American Flag House and Betsy Ross Memorial Association (Philadelphia, Pa.) Flags -- United States -- History.
- Pennsylvania -- Genealogy.

**Box 1 A-H**

**Folder 1**

**Adams, John Quincy Letters to George Canby. 1905-1906**

*Physical Description:* 3 letters
John Quincy Adams: secretary of the American Flag House and Betsy Ross Memorial Association (Philadelphia, Pa.). Re: the affairs of the House. Also included are letters addressed to George Canby from W.Y McAllister (1893), Elizabeth Moore Hallowell (2 A.L.S, 1897); George Bech (1900); Historical Society of Pennsylvania (1902), and two unsigned letters.

**Folder 2**

**Alreght, Mabel Letter to Mae Lawry. 1950, Feb. 16**

*Physical Description:* 1 A.L.S.
Betsy Ross' genealogy.

**Folder 3**

**Balderston, John L. Letter to George E. Hastings. 1939, Mar. 21**

*Physical Description:* 1 typescript letter, with a carbon copy.
Folder 4  Balderston, Lloyd (b. 1863) Letter to the Editor of Public Ledger (Philadelphia). 1908, June 24
Physical Description: 1 typescript letter, including an additional carbon copy

Folder 5  Burnham, Smith Letters to Lloyd Balderston. 1908 - 1909
Physical Description: 3 letters
Re: George Canby and his research

Folder 6  Canby, George The History of the Flag of the United States. ca. 1900
Physical Description: A.M.S., 81 p. (25 cm.)
The work was never completed. In 1909 Lloyd Balderston published "The evolution of the American flag / from materials collected by the late George Canby ; by Lloyd Balderston (Pnphiladelphia : Ferris & Leach, 1909.

Folder 7  Canby, George To Hubert Hall. 1902
Physical Description: 3 pieces

Folder 8  Canby, George To H.E. Laurence and Co. (firm). 1902
Physical Description: 3 pieces
Getting a book from the publisher

Folder 9  Canby, George Letters to B.F. Stevens & Brown (firm). 1902 - 1903
Physical Description: 5 letters

Folder 10  Canby, Isaiah Day book. 1797-1802
Physical Description: A.M.S.
Expenses

Physical Description:
Also included: notarized affidavits of Margaret Boggs, Rachel Fletcher, Sophia B. Hildebrandt; Susan Satterthwaite Newport, Susanna Mc. Cord Turner and Margared Mc Gord Smith; William J. Canby's "My own recollections of Grandmother Elizabeth Claypoole." Copies, apparently prepared by Lloyd Balderston for publication.

Physical Description: Typescript copy; with the Foreword and Introduction

Folder 13  Canby, William J. The History of the Flag of the United States: A Paper read before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Mar 14, 1870. After 1975
Physical Description: Typescript copy; with the Foreword and Introduction

Folder 14  Canby, William J. Letters to George Canby. 1876, Nov. -- 1878, Feb
Physical Description: 3 letters
History of the American flag

Folder 15  Claypoole, James Receipt: Thomas Wharton. 1758
Physical Description: 1 piece
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 16</th>
<th>Hall, Hubert Postcards to George Canby. 1902</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 3 postcards; with envelopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research in the Public Record Office</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 17</th>
<th>Harris, Agnes Letter to Lloyd Balderston. 1926, June 19</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copyright of “The evolution of the American flag.”</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Folder 18</th>
<th>Hastings, George E. Letter to Lloyd Balderston. 1926, June 19</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 1 letter</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 2</th>
<th>M-Z and ephemera</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Folder 19</td>
<td>McDonough, Roger H. Letter to Justin G. Turner. 1954, Mar. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 1 letter + enclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage bond of John and Betsy Ross</td>
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<tr>
<th>Folder 20</th>
<th>Morris, Robert The Truth about the Cowpen's Flag. 1978</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: bound ms. 22 leaves; typescript</td>
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<tr>
<th>Folder 21</th>
<th>Nevins, Allan Letter to Oliver Jensen. 1959, July 3</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 1 typescript letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter of recommendation for Marjorie Balderston.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Folder 23</th>
<th>Smith, Margaret McCord &quot;To My Family...&quot; [Addition to the affidavit of Margaret McCord Smith]. 1912</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: Typescript copy</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 24</th>
<th>Stafford, Sarah Smith Letters to William J. Canby. 1873, July 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 1 A.L.S., 3 p.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 25</th>
<th>Stevens, B.F. &amp; Brown (firm) Letters to George Canby. 1902-1903</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 7 letters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal of William Digby.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 26</th>
<th>Turner, Justin G. Letters to Marion Balderston. 1956</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 17 A.L.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correspondence between Justin G. Turner and Marion Balderston re: Betsy and John Ross’ marriage bond, and other documents pertaining to Betsy Ross. Also included letters to Marion Balderston from Roger H. McDonogh (New Jersey Historical Archives), Emma V. Duffield of Gloucester Historical Society (New Jersey); Edith C. Clapp, and others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Folder 27 | Photocopies of portraits of William J. Canby, Rachel Fletcher, Clarissa J. Wilson, and Jacob Wilson. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 28</th>
<th>Miscellaneous copies of letters and documents re: Betsy Ross.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 18 pieces</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder 29</th>
<th>Newspaper clippings re: to Betsy Ross.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 18 pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Included is the letter to George Canby signed &quot;your nephew Will&quot; on the letterhead of the Astor Mining Company&quot; forwarding a newspaper clipping.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Folder 30  
Genealogical data re: Claypool, Griscom, Ross, and Wilson families.  
Included are William Canby's first pencilled notes to his mother and aunts, and notes of his interview with Margaret Boggs, and his mother Jane. The rest is typescript fragments and newspaper clippings.

Folder 31  
Ephemera.

Folder 32  
Ephemera.

Folder 33  
Ephemera.

Folder 34  
Ephemera.

Folder 35  
Newspaper clipping from the Harper's Weekly July 13, 1872.

Folder 36  
Newspaper clippings.

Folder 37  
Newspaper clippings.

Folder 38  
Ephemera (Newspaper clippings)