James Mease papers, 1794-1848

Processed by Pat L. Walter.
Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library History and Special Collections Division
History and Special Collections Division
UCLA
12-077 Center for Health Sciences
Box 951798
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1798
Phone: 310/825-6940
Fax: 310/825-0465
Email: biomed-ref@library.ucla.edu
URL: http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/biomed/his/hisdiv.htm
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Descriptive Summary

Title: James Mease Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1794-1848
Collection number: 185
Creator: Mease, James 1771-1846
Extent: 0.8 linear feet (2 document boxes)
Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library. Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library History and Special Collections Division

Abstract: James Mease (1771-1846), physician, scientific thinker and author, was one of Philadelphia's most prominent citizens and an ardent booster of both the United States and Pennsylvania. His interests were wide-ranging, as were his contacts with notable figures in science, agriculture and natural history in the United States and abroad. The papers consist of two folio volumes, over fifty letters mostly addressed to Dr. Mease, and some newspapers and other miscellaneous materials. One of the folio volumes is a letterbook, containing mostly précis, but sometimes entire copies, of outgoing correspondence over the years 1802-1836. The other volume is a register of Mease's agricultural notes, experiments, theories, plus notes on conversations and correspondence.

Physical location: History and Special Collections Division, Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, University of California, Los Angeles

Language of Material: Collection materials in English

Access
The collection is open for research. Contact the History and Special Collections Division, Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, UCLA, for information.

Conditions of Use
Publication Rights

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], James Mease papers (Manuscript collection 185). Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library History and Special Collections Division, University of California, Los Angeles.

UCLA Catalog Record ID
UCLA Catalog Record ID: 6709456

Acquisition Information

Biography
James Mease (Aug. 11, 1771-May 14, 1846), physician, scientific thinker and author, was one of Philadelphia's most prominent citizens and an ardent booster of both the United States and Pennsylvania. His interests were wide-ranging, as were his contacts with notable figures in science, agriculture and natural history in the United States and abroad.

Mease was born in Philadelphia into a wealthy and patriotic shipping merchant family; during the Revolutionary War his father, John Mease, served in the Philadelphia Troop of Light Horse. James graduated from the College of the University of Pennsylvania, and received an M.D. degree in 1792 from the same institution. He married Sarah Butler, the daughter of a South Carolina senator, in 1800. During part of the War of 1812 the younger Mease served as a hospital surgeon. Mease was one of the managers of the "Company for the Improvement of the Vine," in connection with which he developed a vineyard; he was a prominent member of The Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, a member, curator, and councilor of the American Philosophical Society, and one of the founders and first vice-president of the Philadelphia Athenaeum.

Mease belonged to an informal international network of scientifically-inclined thinkers who shared information, books, pamphlets, geological samples, seeds, etc. in an ongoing exchange. He wrote to Count Rumford, to Sir Joseph Banks, sent a pamphlet to Cuvier, had a lively correspondence with the Scottish horticultural writer, John C. Loudon, and sent rocks to Donald Stewart, mineralogist of the Dublin Society. On the subject of the Pennsylvania penal system and general criminal reform he wrote to the President of the United States, cabinet department heads, state governors, and numerous federal and state legislators. He was interested in a wide range of agricultural and horticultural topics, in various technologies, in geology, in the medicinal properties of plants. All together these papers render a portrait of a remarkably intelligent, dedicated and thoughtful individual.
Scope and Content
The papers consist of two folio volumes, over fifty letters mostly addressed to Dr. Mease, and some newspapers and other miscellaneous materials.

One of the folios volumes is a letterbook containing mostly précis, but sometimes entire copies, of outgoing correspondence over the years 1802-1836. The timing of entries is quite uneven, sometimes recording several letters a day, at other times indicating intervals of three or four months or even a year between entries. Dr. Mease noted the name of the recipient, the date, and occasionally a marginal note indicated how the letter was to be conveyed: the name of a ship, perhaps the captain's or the courier's name.

The other volume is a register of Mease's agricultural notes, experiments, theories, plus notes on conversations and correspondence. The topics cover a wide range of agricultural and horticultural subjects, methods and theories. There is a fairly complete index to topics included.

Aside from a few autobiographical pages, there is little trace of Dr. Mease's personal life in this collection. The correspondence contains only an occasional greeting to his wife; his letters rarely mention his own state of health or being, and almost never mention the family. There is also very little information on his activities as a clinical physician.

The collection is organized into the following series:

- **Series 1. Biographical materials.** 2 folders
  - Box 1, Folder 1  Biographical sketches.
    - Scope and Content Note typed transcripts of personal accounts by JM, original manuscript and transcriber unknown; tells of JM's early medical training, for a short time under Dr. Romeyn in New York, then under Dr. Rush in Philadelphia (4 p.); also, personality and character of JM's mother (1 p.)
  - Box 1, Folder 2  John Mease's (father) Revolutionary War service. 1823
    - Scope and Content Note facsimile of a letter of discharge from The Philadelphia Troop of Light Horse signed by George Washington, dated Morris Town, 23 Jan. 1777; cover letter from Captain J. R. D. Smith to John Mease, dated 8 May 1823, stating that Mr. Mease was an active member of the Troop at the time of discharge

- **Series 2. Writings and Speeches, 1799-1836.** 1 document box plus 7 folders
- **Series 3. Correspondence, 1794-1842.** 5 folders
- **Series 4. Miscellaneous Papers, 1787-1847.** 2 folders

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects
Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture
Agriculture--United States--History--19th century.
Physicians--United States--Archival resources.
Physicians--United States--History--19th century.
Prisons--Pennsylvania--History--19th century.
Box 2, Folder 1  Letterbook. 1802-1836  
Physical Description: folio volume, 21 x 33 cm., 272 pp.; bound in contemporary reversed sheepskin; spine title: “Letter Book No. 2”; signature inside front cover  
Scope and Content Note  
records and summaries, sometimes complete copies, of outgoing letters

Box 2, Folder 2  Agricultural Register.  
Physical Description: folio volume, 21 x 33 cm., 184 pp.; alphabetical tabs in front of the volume for index  
Scope and Content Note  
records of JM's horticultural and agricultural interest, thoughts, experiments

Box 1, Folder 3  Agricultural Register.  
Scope and Content Note  
photocopies of outside and inside covers of folio volume, showing jottings and list of books

Box 1, Folder 4  Eulogium on Dr. Cooper. 1799  
Scope and Content Note  
text of address delivered to the Medical Academy of Philadelphia, Jan. 10, 1799 on the death from yellow fever of Dr. Samuel Cooper, 1772-1798

Box 1, Folder 5  Plan of a Corporation Bank to enable the Council always to anticipate the City funds, respectfully submitted by James Mease, Philadelphia, June 30, 1801. 1801  
Scope and Content Note  
three pages

Box 1, Folder 6  Biography of General Thomas Mifflin.  
Scope and Content Note  
partial draft and scattered notes on Mifflin's military career during the Revolutionary War, plus some additional information on his earlier and later life

Box 1, Folder 7  Natural history of the alligator.  
Scope and Content Note  
manuscript notes, including a sixteen-page collection, on the alligator, caiman and crocodile; also, a few printed pages (page proofs?) from "The English Reader," part I, chapter IX: "Promiscuous Pieces," with the word "Alligator" written across

Box 1, Folder 8  A speech to young people.  
Scope and Content Note  
partial draft of 3+ pages concerning the duty of performing one's assigned tasks to the best of one's abilities

Box 1, Folder 9  Fragments and notes.  
Scope and Content Note  
seven scraps of paper with writing usually on both sides, found between the pages of the "Letterbook"

Series 3. Correspondence 1794-1842  
Physical Description: 5 folders
Box 1, Folder 10  Letters from JM to: 1814-1815  
Scope and Content Note  
TILTON, James, M.D. (physician and Surgeon General), 10/7/1814 and 4/13/1815; WATTS, David (not in letter format, but folded to letter size and addressed to Watts), undated

Box 1, Folder 11  Letters to JM from U.S. correspondents: 1803-1842  
Scope and Content Note  

Note  
on verso of Miller letter, shows profile of crest line of 15 miles of the summit of the Allegheny Mountains, based on a 1830 survey

Box 1, Folder 12  Letters to JM from abroad: 1794-1841  
Scope and Content Note  

Box 1, Folder 13  Letters to JM from John C. Loudon, Bayswater. 1827-1837  
Scope and Content Note  
five letters from the Scottish horticultural writer and editor of "Gardener's Magazine"

Box 1, Folder 14  Other letters.  
Scope and Content Note  
* from Dr. Akinside to M. Wilkes in St. John's St., London, 5/21/1745: at head of sheet "Fac simile of Dr. Atkinson's hand-writing"; * from Gouvernor Morris, Morrisania, to David C. B. Ogden, 10/2/1816
| Box 1, Folder 15 | **Map, Reading, Berks County, Pennsylvania.**  
Physical Description: 7 x 8" |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                 | **Box 1, Folder 16**  
**Newspaper clippings. 1826-1848**  
Scope and Content Note  
* "The Daily Union," City of Washington, Saturday Night, October 23, 1847; * "Public Ledger," Philadelphia, Saturday, November 11, 1848; * clippings of newspaper stories and poems, pasted into the front cover and on six leaves of a ledger, with some partial manuscript entries visible, dated newspaper items range from 1826 to 1838; * "Consolidation. An account of parties in the United States, from the Convention of 1787, to the present period", print columns pasted unto blank leaves, no date or source; * "Justice to the memory of John Fitch, who in 1785 invented a steam engine and steamboat, planned, constructed and put in operation the steamboat 'Perseverance,' of sixty tons, moving at the rate of eight miles an hour in 1788, by C. Whittlesey; from The February 1845 number of The Western Literary Journal and Monthly Review", print columns pasted unto blank leaves; bears a partially legible handwritten note: “from Hesperian vol. 2, p. 106 and Amer. Review...p. 22”; * miscellaneous newspaper columns, pasted unto blank leaves, no date or source |