**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Joseph Priestley was born on 13 March 1733 to Jonas and Mary Swift Priestley. Jonas Priestley was a dyer and dresser of woolen cloth. Joseph’s mother died when he was young, so much of his early education was provided by his aunt, Sarah Keighley. He went on to study at a local grammar school, and in 1751 entered Daventry Academy.

In September 1755 he obtained a parish in Needham Market, Surrey, and he was finally ordained on 18 May 1762. He was called as a tutor to Warrington Academy and taught modern history and languages from 1762 to 1767. He married Mary Wilkinson on 23 June 1762, shortly after beginning work at Warrington. For reasons regarding Mary’s health, the two of them moved to Mill Hill in 1767 where Joseph obtained another congregation.

Lord Shelburne (William Petty) hired Priestley as his librarian in 1772, retaining his services until 1880. Priestley then moved on to the New Meeting congregation in Birmingham where he remained until the Birmingham Riot of July 1791. During the riot, Joseph Priestley’s home was burned, he and his family narrowly escaping. The family settled in London for a few years, but sailed for the United States in 1794.

Joseph Priestley was a well known figure in his day, and therefore was greeted with much attention when he reached America. After being received in New York, Priestley moved on to Philadelphia, a city of which he was not very fond. He decided to move to central Pennsylvania and purchased land in Northumberland, where his son, Joseph Priestley, Jr., had already settled. In 1795 Henry, Joseph and Mary’s youngest son, died at the age of eighteen. Mary herself passed away the following year, both deaths seriously affecting Priestley.

For the ten years that he lived in the United States, Joseph Priestley continued to write, perform experiments, correspond with friends and colleagues, and occasionally preach to Unitarian congregations. He died on 6 February 1804 at his home in Northumberland.

Joseph Priestley is perhaps best known for his discovery of oxygen while performing
experiments with gases in 1774. Ultimately, Priestley identified nine distinct gases, including carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide. He is credited with developing a sound method for infusing carbon dioxide into water, thus establishing himself as the father of carbonation. He met Benjamin Franklin in 1765 in London, at which time Franklin reputedly encouraged Priestley to continue experiments he was conducting with electricity. Priestley also met Antoine Lavoisier, apparently in Paris in 1774 shortly after isolating oxygen. It is believed that Lavoisier expanded on Priestley’s experiments in this area.

Science, however, was really only ever a hobby of Priestley’s, his primary interest being theological studies. He was forever reexamining doctrine, constantly publishing his opinions, occasionally preaching, and often times altering his religious views. He produced a voluminous body of writing, publishing on subjects as varied as politics and philosophy, electricity and other scientific matters, history and biography, and, of course, theology. He is considered, in many ways, to have been a Renaissance man of his age.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The Joseph Priestley Miscellaneous Papers are housed in three document boxes and two oversized folders. The materials in this collection are divided into the following six series: Articles, Clippings, Ephemera, Genealogical Materials, Manuscripts, and Miscellaneous. The papers were donated by various people, often the authors of the articles themselves.

The series entitled Articles consists exclusively of published works, or off-prints and photocopies thereof. The articles cover a variety of topics, but most deal in some way with Joseph Priestley, his various scientific accomplishments, his scientific apparatus, or with the Priestley House, located in Northumberland, Pennsylvania. The materials in this series are arranged alphabetically by author, and then by article title.

The series entitled Clippings consists of photocopies of newspaper and magazine articles written about Joseph Priestley and other related topics. The materials in this series are arranged chronologically.

The series entitled Ephemera consists of materials relating to Joseph Priestley and the various commemorative celebrations held in his honor. The bulk of this series consists of programs and notices for Priestley celebrations, and these materials are further arranged according to the entity holding the event. Other materials included in this series are postcards, a Priestley bookplate, and a folder containing Priestley commemorative stamps and envelopes. This series is arranged alphabetically by folder title.

The series entitled Genealogical Materials consists of correspondence, charts, and notes relating to the genealogy of Joseph Priestley. There is also material relating to the 1994 Priestley family reunion. The series is arranged alphabetically by folder title.

The series entitled Manuscripts consists of unpublished works dealing with Joseph Priestley and related topics. This series is arranged alphabetically by author’s name, when known (or article title if author is unknown) and then, if available, article title.

The series entitled Miscellaneous consists of materials relating to the First Unitarian Church and the Unitarian Universalist House in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Priestley House and Priestley Memorial Chapel in Northumberland, Pennsylvania; and a television program about Priestley produced by Harrisburg, Pennsylvania PBS affiliate WITF. The materials in this series range from correspondence to printed materials and are arranged alphabetically by folder title.
Two oversized folders consist of materials from the Ephemera series which have been separated out from the collection due to their size. The first folder contains a presentation page for the Priestley commemorative stamp and envelope, and the second contains posters for American Chemical Society programs.

**COLLECTION INVENTORY**

**BOX 1 - MC 2003.8**

**ARTICLES**


ARTICLES (cont.)
Folder 27) Great Meeting Chronicle. (Apr. 1898, Feb. 1904)
Folder 28) Griffin, Rev. Frederick. “Joseph Priestley, 1733-1804” 1933. [2 copies]
ARTICLES (cont.)


Folder 34) Journal of Chemical Education 4, no. 2 (1927). [2 copies]

Folder 35) Journal of Chemical Education 10, no. 3 (1933).


Folder 39) Lectures, Delivered at the Chapel in South Place, Finsbury.


Folder 45) Price, Derek J. de Solla. “Of Sealing Wax and String.” Natural History 84, no. 1: 49-56. [off-print]


BOX 2 - MC 2003.8

ARTICLES (cont.)


ARTICLES (cont.)

CLIPPINGS
Folder 20) Undated to 1969
Folder 21) 1970 to 1994
BOX 2 - MC 2003.8 (cont.)

EPHEMERA
Folder 22) Bookplate
Folder 23) Commemorative Stamps and Envelopes
Folder 24) Postcards
Folder 26) Programming – Bucknell University - 1980, 1983
Folder 27) Programming – Centennial of Chemistry - 1874
Folder 28) Programming – Delaware County Institute of Science - 1983
Folder 29) Programming – Dickinson College - 1994
Folder 31) Programming – Pennsylvania State College - 1952
Folder 32) Programming – Royal Society of Chemistry - 1983
Folder 33) Programming – University of Pennsylvania

GENEALOGICAL MATERIALS
Folder 34) Correspondence
Folder 35) Notes and Charts
Folder 36) Priestley Family Reunion, 1994

MANUSCRIPTS
Folder 37) “Archaeology at Priestley House”

BOX 3 - MC 2003.8

MANUSCRIPTS (cont.)
Folder 02) Davenport, Derek. “Joseph Priestley in America: 1794-1804”
Folder 04) Frick, George A. “Untitled.” [excerpts]
Folder 05) Hill, Andrew M. “Untitled.”
Folder 06) “An Introduction to Joseph Priestley.”
Folder 10) Smith, Edgar Fahs. “Priestley in America.”
Folder 12) Vuilleumier, Ernest A. “Untitled.”
BOX 3 - MC 2003.8 (cont.)

MANUSCRIPTS (cont.)

MISCELLANEOUS
Folder 14) First Unitarian Church, Philadelphia, PA
Folder 15) Priestley House, Northumberland, PA
Folder 16) Priestley Memorial Chapel, Northumberland, PA
Folder 17) Unitarian Universalist House, Philadelphia, PA
Folder 18) Television Program, WITF, Harrisburg, PA - 1968

OVERSIZED - OC 2003.8

EPHEMERA
Folder 01) Commemorative Stamps and Envelopes
Folder 02) Programming – American Chemical Society, 1983

This collection register was prepared by Robert K. Reeves, September 2003.