

Archives and Special Collections

Dickinson College

Carlisle, PA

COLLECTION REGISTER

Name: **Fisher, Thomas (1741-1810)** **MC 2004.1**

Material: Family Papers (1776-1857)

Volume: 0.75 linear feet (Document Boxes 1-2)

Donation: Gift of Mrs. Boyd Lee Spahr, Jr. and Mrs. Edward Wanton Smith, 1955

Usage: These materials have been donated without restrictions on usage.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Thomas Fisher was born on May 6, 1741 in Lewes, Delaware to Joshua and Sarah Rowland Fisher. In 1746 Joshua moved the family to Philadelphia, where he established a shipping and mercantile business that was the first in the region to regularly sail packet ships to and from London. "Joshua Fisher & Sons" became a prosperous business, and Thomas and his three brothers were educated well. The Fishers also belonged to the Society of Friends. Thomas entered business with his father and was sent to England in 1762. En route, Thomas' ship was captured by a Spanish privateer and was taken to Bilboa, Spain. Thomas finally reached London in March 1763 and made many business and social calls. He also visited France and Holland, returning to America in 1764.

On March 17, 1772 Thomas married Sarah Logan (1751-1796). They had seven children, two of whom died in infancy. When Joshua Fisher died in 1788, Thomas and his brothers Samuel (1745-1834) and Miers (1748-1819) changed the name of the mercantile business to "Thomas, Samuel, and Miers Fisher." Thomas and Miers also formed a partnership with Thomas Hough and Caleb Bickham in a lumber business. In addition, the two brothers and two of their nephews owned paper mills on the Brandywine Creek. In 1800, Thomas formed a partnership with Leonard Snowden, and bought a brewhouse in hopes of establishing a business for his son James (1783-1814).

During the American Revolution, Thomas and his brothers supported peace with England in part for business reasons, but also because of their religious beliefs. In 1777 all four of the Fisher brothers were imprisoned as traitors in Winchester, Virginia because they refused to take an oath that they would not provide intelligence to the British army. Their confinement was not onerous, but it lasted eight months. Thomas' wife stayed in Philadelphia with their children.

After the war, Thomas remained active in the local community. He was one of the founders of Westtown Boarding School, of which he was elected the first treasurer in 1794. He was also the manager of the Pennsylvania Hospital and was one of the early members of the

American Philosophical Society in 1768. He died in his home in Philadelphia on Second Street on September 6, 1810. He is buried on the grounds of the Arch Street Friends Society in Philadelphia. At the time of his death, his estate, including extensive holdings in western lands, was estimated at \$150,000. In his will he included donations to the Pennsylvania Hospital and toward the education of Indian children.

Thomas' brother, Jabez Maud (1750-1779), traveled to England for the family business in May 1775. He received a degree of popularity in the coffee houses of London for his ability to recite the speeches made in Parliament the previous night. These speeches were forbidden to be printed, but addressed interesting issues such as the American movement for independence. In 1778 he sailed to New York, then under British control. Unable to return home to Philadelphia, he sailed to England again in 1779. He died there in December of that same year.

Thomas' son William (1781-1862) lived in a Quaker community in New Bedford, Massachusetts where he manufactured woolen goods. He married Mary Rodman (1781-1813) on November 25, 1802. When William was expelled from the community, he returned to Pennsylvania and operated an ironworks in Duncannon with his brother James (1783-1814) that manufactured nails. William was also the author of numerous writings concerning such topics as law, society, war and the Sabbath day. Both Thomas and William were known for their opinions against slavery and for aiding the American Indians.

William's daughter Sarah (1806-1891) married William Wister from Germantown in 1826 and lived in Philadelphia. They had eight children. William Wister was also involved in the Duncannon Iron Company. Sarah enjoyed working in her garden and did so her entire life. She was known for her simple and religious life as a member of the Society of Friends in addition to her dependable and charitable personality. Little else is known of Sarah's life.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The Thomas Fisher collection is housed in two document boxes and has been organized into three series: Financial Records, Notebooks, and Travel Journals. This collection was acquired for the college by Mrs. Boyd Lee Spahr, Jr. and Mrs. Edward Wanton Smith in 1955.

The Financial Records series includes four small notebooks kept by Thomas' brother, Jabez Maud Fisher, during his trip to Europe from 1775 to 1778. The notebooks are undated and their precise chronological order is unknown. In the first three books Jabez wrote the names and addresses of contacts he made during his trip in England. These addresses are organized by town. The opposite side of the notebooks were used as personal account books where Jabez noted his expenses, mostly road tolls and travel expenses. These books also include a few sketches of buildings and one of a person's profile. The fourth book contains some notes of daily activities, reminders, business notes, and a trip itinerary for his voyage back to America, as well as a few names of contacts on the reverse side. A personal account book of Sarah Logan Fisher (Mrs. Wister), Thomas' granddaughter, is also a part of the Financial Records series. The contents of this account book are Wister household expenses from 1845-1850. The final item in the Financial Records series is a ledger kept by both William Logan Fisher and James Logan Fisher. The ledger of William Logan Fisher is a mix of family expenses, transactions dealing with the family estates in Maryland, brewery business, construction expenses, and personal loans. Page 41 begins the section of the ledger that James Logan Fisher kept and contains detailed business transactions of the Duncannon Iron Company.

The second series, Notebooks, contains personal writings by Jabez Maud Fisher and

Sarah Logan Fisher. Jabez wrote "History of France, 1592- 1603" during his voyage from Portsmouth to New York in 1778. The back of this small book also contains a key to both volumes of the book *Adventures of a Guinea*. The second item in this series is a commonplace book kept by Sarah Logan Fisher in 1823 which contains poems she authored as well as poems by family members and published authors. The other notebook written by Sarah is the second volume of a translation of a French work she prepared for her father, William Logan Fisher, in 1827. After the "Morals of the Chinese" was completely translated, she finished the notebook with selected sentences translated from a French book of sentences on the subject of Confucius.

The third series, Travel Journals, is composed of 15 journals by members of the Fisher family. They are arranged alphabetically by author, then chronologically. Jabez Maud Fisher filled six journals during his trip to England from 1776 to 1778. His journals also include his trip to France and Wales. The journals are mostly personal reflections about his travels, but include some sketches of buildings, maps, and ships. The majority of the sixth of Jabez's journals is dedicated to writing on various subjects. The first of these subjects were constellations and planets, which he copied from a work of Newton. The second and larger writing is a history of the Religious Wars in France which, in the end, Jabez compares to the situation between the English Parliament and America in 1778. The travel journal of Sarah Logan Fisher describes her journey from Philadelphia to New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1826 to visit family members. Lastly, there are 8 journals written by Thomas Fisher during his trip to England, 1762-1764. Thomas' first journal is devoted to his voyage from New York to Europe. On the first page of the second journal, Thomas recorded his altered travel itinerary due to his ship's capture by pirates and unexpected trip to Bilboa, Spain. This second journal recounts his business calls (mostly dealing with clothing), daily activities, and sightseeing in London. In the third through sixth journals Thomas wrote about his travels throughout England, while at the same time keeping a residence in London where he stayed periodically to conduct business. Beginning toward the end of the sixth journal and continuing through the entire seventh journal, he recounted his trip through the Netherlands, Belgium and France. In the eighth journal Thomas finished his travels in France and returned to London to conclude his business in order to return to America. The end of the eighth journal contains an account of his voyage, some architectural sketches, financial notes, and a list of books read during his return voyage.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

BOX 1 - MC 2004.1

FINANCIAL RECORDS

Fisher, Jabez Maud

- Folder 1) Address and personal account book (I) - 1775-1778
Address and personal account book (II) - 1775-1778
- Folder 2) Address and personal account book (III) - 1775-1778
Address and personal account book (IV) - 1775-1778

Fisher, Sarah Logan (Mrs. Wister)

- Folder 3) Personal account book and notes - 1845-1850

Fisher, William Logan and James Logan Fisher

- Folder 4) Ledger books - 1809-1812 and 1848-1857

BOX 1 - MC 2004.1 (cont.)

NOTEBOOKS

- Fisher, Jabez Maud
Folder 5) "History of France, 1592-1603" - 1778
- Fisher, Sarah Logan
Folder 6) Commonplace book - 1823
Folder 7) "Morals of the Chinese, vol. 2" - 1827

TRAVEL JOURNALS

- Fisher, Jabez Maud
Folder 8) England - Jan. 4-Mar. 5, 1776
England - Apr. 11-Apr. 18, 1776
- Folder 9) Sheffield, England - Aug. 11-Aug. 15, 1776
England to France - Sept. 27-Oct. 2, 1776
- Folder 10) England and Wales - Jun. 29-Jul. 12, 1777
Portsmouth to New York - May 25-Aug. 17, 1778

BOX 2 - MC 2004.1

TRAVEL JOURNALS (cont.)

- Fisher, Sarah Logan
Folder 11) Philadelphia to New England - Sep. 29, 1826
- Fisher, Thomas
Folder 12) Philadelphia to Europe - Dec. 12, 1762-Mar. 27, 1763
England - Mar. 27-Jul. 20, 1763
- Folder 13) England - Jul. 21-Aug. 28, 1763
England - Aug. 29-Nov. 5, 1763
- Folder 14) England - Nov. 6, 1763-Mar. 9, 1764
England and Holland - Mar 10-Apr. 27, 1764
- Folder 15) Netherlands, Belgium and France - Apr. 28-May 17, 1764
France and England to Philadelphia - May 18-Jul. 14, 1764

This collection register was prepared by Cassandra Pyle, January 2004.