



James Smith Colburn Papers SCHS #551.00

Description: 1.5 Linear Feet (6 boxes)

Biog./Historical Note: James Smith Colburn (1780-1859) was the son of General James Colburn (ca. 1757-1803) of Concord, Massachusetts. He went into business in Boston in 1798 with Thomas Otis in the firm of Otis & Colburn and shortly afterwards traveled to England and operated as a merchant there for several years. According to Colburn's memoirs, during his travels in Europe he met Benedict Arnold and Madame Recamier. In 1799 he married Susan Lorimer, the daughter of James Lorimer of London. Colburn decided to return to America in 1802 and his wife died during that sea voyage. They had one son, James Bussey Colburn (1801-1867), who married Martha Bradford of Alabama. James Smith Colburn ended his partnership with Thomas Otis and set up a store in Boston in partnership with William Gill under the name of Colburn & Gill. William Gill married Colburn's sister Rebecca Colburn (b. 1785) in 1805 and took her abroad for many years. Colburn recorded in his memoirs: "We purchased the regular importing business; Mr. Gill attending to all the European affairs, and purchasing and shipping, and I to the American business." In 1808 Colburn married again, to Sarah Dunn Prince of Boston. They were the parents of three sons, Frederick C. Colburn, Benjamin P. Colburn, and John Henry Colburn. As recorded in his memoirs, when the War of 1812 began, James Smith Colburn "became an agent for Privateers and Letters of Marque ... I became agent for nearly all the Privateers out of New York, Baltimore and Charleston." In 1818 he moved to Charleston, South Carolina (possibly because of financial difficulties in Boston; see the case of Colburn v. Holland). The 1822 Charleston city directory lists him as a dry goods merchant on Broad Street. In 1845 he went into partnership with Parker J. Holland under the name of Colburn & Holland. James Smith Colburn died in Charleston in July 1859.

Scope and content: This collection chiefly consists of business records of James Smith Colburn, a merchant of Boston, Massachusetts, and later Charleston, South Carolina. Colburn and his business partners spent a number of years abroad, principally dealing with English merchants and manufacturers, and these business dealings are reflected in many of the papers. The bulk of the papers are account books, but they also include business correspondence, order and shipment records, miscellaneous loose items, and a logbook. The logbook (1812-1816) documents the voyages of at least two vessels, the *General Colburn* and the brig *Apollo*, the latter possibly

being a privateer captured during the War of 1812. An account book (1812-1814) relates to some privateer vessels including the *Ann Green* (or *Anne Green*) and the *Scourge*, as well as a prize ship. Another volume contains the diary of a passenger on a ship sailing from Boston in 1805 and was likely written by William Gill, a business partner of James Smith Colburn. There are also papers of the Prince family of Boston as well as a Charleston merchant named John H. Benson, whose name appears in Colburn's business records. Benson's papers consist of a cash account book (1816), and a handwritten history of voyages in the Pacific Ocean (signed Jean H[enri] Benson). Miscellaneous loose items include pay to bearer instruments (checks) and stub books, receipts, printed material, an insurance policy (1809) on a house on Beacon Street in Boston, and a list of subscribers of shares in a shipment of goods on the ship *Ann Green*. Of note is a bill of lading (1775) for a shipment of indigo dust from Charleston to London.

Preferred citation: Colburn, James Smith, 1780-1859. James Smith Colburn papers, 1775-1822 (bulk 1798-1819). (0551.00) South Carolina Historical Society.

Container Listing:

BOX 1

- 1 Photocopy of pages from "The Personal Memoirs of James Smith Colburn, 1780-1859" (1949).
- 2 Two fragments of stub books for checks (pay to bearer instruments); and a small memorandum book (1799-?) which includes lists of goods, mostly fabrics.
- 3 Account book, one section (1815-1816) documents cash purchases of household goods, clothing and other items, as well as cash paid for services such as postage, advertising, servants, laundry, tailoring, etc. Another section (1818) contains accounts for goods (including fabrics, furniture and carpeting) shipped on various vessels. This book also includes memoranda (1816) relating to accounts with individuals in Charleston, S.C.
- 4 Account and memorandum book, 1801. Names appearing include Naylor Summers & Company and Brown, Cobb & Stokes. Most entries deal with cargos shipped on various vessels including the *Minerva* and the *Galen*.
- 5 Bill of lading, 1775, for a shipment of indigo dust from Charleston, S.C., to John Wilson, a London merchant.
- 6 Account and memorandum book, 1799, documenting transactions with various individuals and firms probably in England. It also contains some personal accounts.
- 7 Volume which begins with lists of goods shipped on various named vessels. Following this section, there is a diary of a passenger on a ship from Boston, Massachusetts, in June 1805, "Robert Hinckley commander." The writer mentions (6 June) his "dear wife," who

is also a passenger. She is later referred to as “Mrs. G” so this is likely the diary of William Gill, the business partner of James Smith Colburn. Another section lists “Bills of Exchange [given to] Thomas Otis payable [to] Brown Cobb & Stokes, London” (1803). An additional section contains notes on English merchants and their products.

8 Account book, 1817-1819.

BOX 2

1 Printed material: *Catalogue of Hardware to be Sold at Auction on Thursday, May 21, at Store No. 66 Broad Street*” (printed in Boston, 1818).

2 Printed material: *A Sermon on the Freedom and Happiness of the United States of America, preached in Carlisle, on the 5th Oct. 1794 ... by Robert Davidson, D.D.*” Printed in Philadelphia, 1794 (uncut pages).

3 Printed material: fragment of a pamphlet (a Fourth of July address by David Ramsay, 1820); and *An Introduction to English Grammar* by Marvin Gates, 1817.

4 Cash account book, 1816-1817. Bound volume (with a label for Schenck & Turner, Charleston stationers and booksellers). The name “Jno. H. Benson” is inscribed on the first page with the dateline: “Charleston 23 Octr. 1816.” (J. H. Benson is listed in the 1816 Charleston city directory as doing business at 118 King Street, residing at the Merchants Hotel. In the 1819 directory, he is listed as John H. Benson, Merchant, corner of King and Broad streets.)

5 Fragments of stub books, 1818-1822.

6 Small notebook containing accounts of William Gill with the Union Bank, 1810-1811.

7 Cash account book, 1808.

8 Miscellaneous loose items, including an account of Luther W. Pope with Colburn & Gill, 1807-1808; account of James Smith Colburn with W. B. White, 1815; receipts of Colburn & Gill, 1805-1808; and pay to bearer instruments (checks) issued by Mssrs. Brown, Cobb & Stokes of London, 1801-1802.

9 Account book, 1802, including accounts of Brown, Cobb & Stokes with Otis & Colburn.

10 Notebook containing a handwritten account entitled “An Abridged History of the Voyages of the Pacific Ocean.” It describes various islands and their inhabitants, including New Zealand, New Caledonia and Easter Island. One section is followed by the inscription

“La Description des isles de Marquises par traduire de la Monsieur de la Harpe,” and below this, the name of “Jean H[enri] Benson a Charleston, S.C. en l’Amerique.”

- 11 Account book, 1819.
- 12 Printed material: handbill or pamphlet fragment (n.d.) advertising the “Terms of Sale” for unspecified goods.
- 13 Shipment record, 1817, listing goods such as sugar, whiskey, pots, lead, shoes, etc.
- 14 Shipment record book listing marks, numbers, types of packaging, ships’ names, and “how disposed of.” The name of John H. Benson appears among the names of individuals and firms. The date of 1817 appears on page 24 and later.
- 15 Account book, 1799-1801.

BOX 3

- 1 Miscellaneous loose items, including a certificate, 1813, issued by the Collector’s Office, District of Boston and Charlestown, certifying that James S. Colburn, William Gill and Thomas Cushing of Boston can sign bonds for goods imported by James S. Colburn; and a bond (1814?).
- 2 Correspondence, including a letter (23 Sept. 181[5]) from William [Page] in Philadelphia, to James S. Colburn, mainly concerning business matters; a letter (April 2, 1800) to James S. Colburn from Joseph Jennings; a letter (Dec. 17, [1816]) to James S. Colburn in Boston from a merchant in Philadelphia; and a note (n.d.) to James S. Colburn regarding expenses relating to a court martial.
- 3 Miscellaneous loose items, including a record of “Invoices of Six Bales Goods now in William Appleton’s hands in Philadelphia for sale on my acct, Jany. 1812;” an account of goods “Bought of James Brown & Co.” in London by James S. Colburn; bills; and an insurance policy, 1809, issued to James S. Colburn by the Phoenix Assurance Company of London, for a house on Beacon Street in Boston, and furniture and household goods contained therein.
- 4 Account book, 1806-1810. The volume also contains a list of note holders; copies of three business letters; and a “Statement of Losses Since the Copartnership of Colburn and Gill Commenced” (n.d.).
- 5 Ledger index containing the alphabetized names of individuals and firms including John Benson, Hindley Hindley & Company, and Naylor Summers & Company.

- 6 Miscellaneous loose items, including payment orders (checks) of Mssrs. Brown, Cobb & Stokes, 1801-1802; a bond of James S. Colburn; a business card for Mr. George Pollack's Music School in Boston; fragments of documents; and an "Invoice of Goods Brought into Portland," 1814.

BOX 4

- 1 Ship's log, 1812-1816, documenting a voyage from the port of New York to Oporto (Porto, Portugal), and from Lisbon to Boston. Entries beginning in 1815 give the name of a ship, the General Colburn, and document its voyage from Boston to [La Rochelle?], ship's master Nathaniel Crosby; and a voyage of the same ship from "Rochelles" [La Rochelle?] to Charleston; and a voyage from "Rochelles" to Norfolk by the brig Apollo. (The Apollo was possibly a former British privateer captured during the War of 1812.)
- 2 Account book, 1808-1814. Names appearing in this volume include William Appleton & Company, Charles Coffin (of Boston), Langdon Cheves (Charleston, S.C.), and Isaac Lyman (York).
- 3 Order account book, 1806-1807. The book's inner covers are inscribed "Spring Orders" and "Fall Orders." It contains accounts of Colburn & Gill with [mostly?] English merchants.
- 4 Order account book, 1804-1805. Spring and fall orders of Colburn & Gill.

BOX 5

- 1 Miscellaneous loose items: a receipt (n.d.); and a small memorandum book, 1819, recording various purchases of foods and other goods, and payments for services.
- 2 Memorandum and order book, 1803. Contains notes on various English merchants and manufacturers, as well as orders of goods (mostly fabrics) placed by James S. Colburn and by Colburn & Gill. Of note are three small swatches of [cotton] fabric pasted into the volume.
- 3 Correspondence and bills pertaining to the Liverpool merchant firm of Lodges & Tooth, 1809-1813. Includes a business letter (1809) to Colburn & Gill (Boston) from Lodges & Tooth; a letter (1810) to James S. Colburn regarding shipping expenses; letters (1810), marked "Duplicate;" and a letter (1813) to James S. Colburn transmitting his account.
- 4 Sales accounts, 1800-1801, for sales of potash, pearl ash, codfish, sugar and other goods to various customers.

- 5 Ledger index containing the names of individuals and firms including John H. Benson, Jabez Colburn, James S. Colburn and Sweet & Weeks.
- 6 Account book, 1797-1798, containing accounts of purchases of goods from various individuals and firms.
- 7 Account book, 1798-1802. Includes entries for "Otis & Colburn Invoice Book," and records of purchases.

BOX 6

- 1 Miscellaneous loose papers, including an account, 1810, of James S. Colburn with John Barratt & Son; lists of subscribers (including James S. Colburn) relating to shares in a shipment of goods on the ship Ann Green, 1812; receipts (1810-1814); an order to pay (1814) by James S. Colburn; a certificate (1813) attesting that James S. Colburn has paid taxes on a carriage, signed by Edward Jones, Collector of the Revenue for the eleventh Collection District of Massachusetts; a bill of exchange (1814); and a business card for an English merchant.
- 2 Papers relating to the Prince family, including an account (1808-1809) of Dr. Samuel Prince with James S. Colburn; a bill of Mrs. Eliza Prince (1818); a receipt for tuition (1818) to Captain Prince; a receipt (1818), estate of "Widow Prince" to Amos Wood; a bill of Andrew Prince (1814); an account (1813) relating to Mrs. Prince's guardianship of four minor children; an account (1809-1813) of Andrew H. Prince of Boston with Robert G. Shaw; promissory notes (1809); and two orders to pay (1809).
- 3 Letter book, 1799, containing copies of business correspondence of Otis & Colburn and James S. Colburn in London. Correspondents include Thomas Otis, Lockwood & Gill, William Dabbs, and Naylor & Summers. The last few pages contain some accounts.
- 4 Fragments of a check stub book. Some stubs are dated 1809.
- 5 Fragments of a check stub book.
- 6 Account book, 1812-1814, containing accounts relating to the ship Ann Green, the brig Gossamer, and the ship Mary Ann; accounts of merchandise sales in Boston from the "Privateer Scourge;" accounts relating to "the Prize Ship George [Canning]; and accounts pertaining to other privateers.
- 7 Letter, 1833, from John Henry Colburn in Boston to his brother Benjamin P. Colburn expressing his desire to leave Boston, and describing a scandalous situation concerning their mother, Sarah Dunn Prince Colburn, who is allowing a "Mr. Ward" to visit her home in the evenings.

8 Letter, 1819, of J. H. Benson, to a friend who is about to leave on a voyage of “speculation” to the African coast.