De Lancey Family Papers, 1659–1889 (bulk 1722–1839)
1 box

Museum of the City of New York
1220 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10029

Telephone: 212-534-1672
Fax: 212-423-0758
research@mcny.org
www.mcny.org

© Museum of the City of New York. All rights reserved.

Prepared by Mary LaMotte Silverstein, July–August 2018. Description is in English.

Descriptive Summary
Creator: Unknown
Title: De Lancey Family Papers
Dates: 1659–1889 (bulk 1722–1839)
Abstract: The De Lancey Family Papers collection consists of 141 objects documenting the lives of the De Lanceys, a wealthy and prominent colonial family that resided in Manhattan and Westchester County. Objects include correspondence; legal, financial, and business documents; military commissions and orders; genealogical material; and a broad range of oversize real estate documents. The collection provides a rich and deep source of information about the personal and political lives of New York City–region Loyalists before, during, and after the Revolutionary War.
Extent: 1 box
MCNY Numbers: 40.190
Language: English
Historical Note
A brief discussion of the historical context of the De Lancey Family Papers collection is critical to deciphering the connections within and among the collection’s series. The majority of the items date from the early-1700s to the mid-1800s and originate from the New York City region, primarily the settlements in and around Manhattan and Westchester County. This period, encompassing the Colonial, Revolutionary, and early National years, was one of volatility, conflict, and incessant change in the area.

After the British seized New York City from the Dutch in 1664, the region’s population soared and diversified as immigration grew and slaves were brought over from Africa. The atmosphere in the city became a potent stew of rapidly increasing prosperity, racial conflict, and rising frustration with British rule. The French and Indian War (1754-1763) increased tensions as the two European powers struggled to gain control over the vast colonial territory of North America. In 1765, in an attempt to recover some of the losses sustained in the French and Indian War, the British moved to impose the Stamp Act on the American colonists, throwing New York City into turmoil as residents both protested the tax and anticipated the coming unrest. A sense of restlessness and unease permeated the city, building slowly until word finally came of the dispute at Lexington and Concord in 1775—long-simmering resentments had finally erupted into outright armed conflict and the war was on. From 1776 until the passing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783 the British occupied the islands of Manhattan, Staten Island, and western Long Island, ruling with unrelenting military law and imposing rigid regulations on the densely packed area. Continental troops remained in the vicinity as well during these seven years, first in New Jersey and later north of the city, and residents of the entire region weathered the strain of close proximity to two large and voluble armies in a standoff, each operating with the emotional intensity of youth and a deeply held sense of moral imperative.

The De Lancey family members were Loyalists who remained faithful to the British during the war. Key to understanding the milieu in which the family existed is the fact that, contrary to public declarations from leaders on both sides of the conflict, in many areas there was little definitive separation between those who pledged allegiance to the revolutionary cause and those who renounced it. They lived in intimate relation to their supposed enemies; differences in opinion existed even within families. With food and fuel scarce, ideological boundaries were blurred and military lines crossed as Patriots and Loyalists breached both to visit with family and friends and do business in the thriving black markets. For Loyalists, reasons for remaining true to the crown varied in accordance with economic, racial, and regional contexts. While some Loyalists, such as the De Lanceys, were members of the wealthy privileged elite with obvious interests in maintaining the status quo, many were not. Some were poor and feared losing what modicum of protection the British provided. Some were slaves who had been promised freedom if they crossed military lines to side with the British. Many were refugees from surrounding colonies who flowed into the city to join with British forces out of a sense of duty or, in some cases, to seek respite from the violence being
perpetrated in rural areas by Patriots who demanded uncompromising loyalty to the revolutionary cause. Regardless of the reasoning, rarely were their decisions unadulterated by socioeconomic concerns and familial bonds.

The early postwar years in the New York City region were a blur of debate, political jockeying, and transformation as the young nation (and city) sought to establish stable political and economic systems. After the British departed in defeat, estates and property that had been confiscated in the name of independence were suddenly up for grabs. Patriots and Loyalists alike raced to claim (or reclaim) lands. In 1779, New York had enacted the anti-Loyalist Act of Attainder, requiring “the forfeiture of real and personal estate” of 59 prominent Loyalists, who were then to be considered enemies of the state—the Act also banished those named from the state entirely. Several eminent De Lanceys were among those named in the Act, the immediate effect of which was to virtually decimate some of the large Loyalist estates in Westchester and Suffolk Counties. In the war’s aftermath, Loyalist families were often violently attacked, their families uprooted and their possessions plundered; formerly prosperous members of the Colonial elite now found themselves run out of town, humiliated.

By the early-mid 1800s, relative stasis had resumed in the region, but the area had seen a remarkable in- and outflux of inhabitants and continued to experience significant change as interests clashed and power consolidated and shifted. It is against this backdrop of displacement, divided loyalties, and political instability that the objects in this collection are set.

Biographical Note (names in bold indicate representation in the collection)

The De Lanceys were among the wealthiest and most influential families in Colonial New York; their name carries on via Delancey Street in Lower Manhattan and various other namesake locations and institutions. Because almost all De Lancey family members were Loyalists during the Revolution, many eventually fled New York for other areas of the British Empire. Some had their property confiscated and were banished from the state as a result of the 1779 New York Act of Attainder. Some returned in the late 1780s, resettling in their original places of residence, but many remained abroad for the rest of their lives, having been granted seats of political power elsewhere in the British colonies.

Notable De Lanceys represented in the collection:

James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) married into the De Lancey family via Susan Augusta De Lancey (1792–1852). James was a hugely popular nineteenth-century author whose works include numerous historical novels—the most well-known being *The Last of the Mohicans*—naval histories, and social criticism. The Fenimore Coopers’ places of residence included Westchester County, Cooperstown, and Manhattan.
Edward Floyd De Lancey (1821–1905) was the eldest son of Bishop William Heathcote De Lancey (1797–1865) and Frances Munro De Lancey (1797–1869). Born in Mamaroneck, NY, Edward was a lawyer, historian, and writer who served as the second president of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society and the first president of the Westchester County Historical Society. He wrote several works of well-received non-fiction, including *The Capture of Fort Washington, November 16, 1776, the Result of Treason* (1877) and *Origin and History of Manors in the Province of New York and in the County of Westchester* (1886). He was a lifelong member of the New-York Historical Society, for which he edited and supervised the issuing of Judge Thomas Jones’s Loyalist text *History of New York City during the Revolutionary War and of the Leading Events in Other Colonies in That Period* (1879).

James De Lancey (1703–1760), son of Stephen (Etienne) De Lancey and Anne Van Cortlandt De Lancey, served as Chief Justice of the Province of New York from 1733 until his death and Lieutenant Governor of the Province of New York for five intermittent years. He married Anne Heathcote, daughter of Caleb Heathcote, a mayor of New York and the first Lord of the Manor of Scarsdale. In 1754, Chief Justice De Lancey granted a royal charter for the establishment of King’s College, now Columbia University.

James De Lancey (1732–1800), son of Chief Justice James De Lancey and Anne Heathcote, was a Loyalist soldier, an officer of the Associated Loyalists of America, and a member of the New York assembly. He married Margaret Allen, daughter of Chief Justice of Pennsylvania William Allen, and is said to have had an earlier union with an unknown woman named Mary, who bore him three children as well. He was attainted under New York’s 1779 Act of Attainder and his prodigious lands were auctioned off in his absence. He lived in exile in England until his death.

James De Lancey (1785–1857), son of James De Lancey (1732–1800), was a British lieutenant-colonel who served in South America and England, where he died unmarried.

John (Jack) De Lancey (1765–1809), son of James De Lancey (1732–1800), was a British captain who served in the West Indies and Jamaica. He was posted to Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands, where against his father’s wishes he married Caroline Carey (dates unknown), daughter of the wealthiest merchant on the island. He resided there until his death.

John Peter De Lancey (1753–1828), son of Chief Justice James De Lancey (1703–1760) and Anne Heathcote, was a British major who commanded a regiment of Pennsylvania Loyalists and participated in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. John Peter was an advocate of repayment from the Crown for Loyalist lands seized by Patriots during the war. Postwar, he and his wife Elizabeth Floyd De Lancey resided at Heathcote Hill, in Mamaroneck, NY, until their deaths.
Brigadier General Oliver De Lancey (1718–1785), son of Stephen (Etienne) De Lancey and Anne Van Cortlandt De Lancey, was a successful merchant and lifelong soldier. In 1742 he married Phila Frank (dates unknown). A Loyalist, Oliver raised and equipped at his own expense a three-regiment brigade during the Revolution known as De Lancey’s Brigade, after which he was made Brigadier General. His estate north of the city, Bloomingdale, was burned down by the rebels in 1777. In 1782 he was attainted under New York’s 1779 Act of Attainder and his property was confiscated, compelling him to seek asylum in Yorkshire, England, where he remained until his death.

Susannah De Lancey (ca. 1742–1778) was the daughter of Brigadier General Oliver De Lancey and Phila Frank. In 1770 she married Sir William Draper, a British military officer who had conquered Manila in 1762.

Stephen, née Etienne, De Lancey (1663–1741) was the first De Lancey to arrive in America. Stephen was a French-Huguenot refugee who disembarked in 1686 with only £300 to his name; subsequent decades would see him rise to prominence as one of the most successful merchants in the city. His descendants followed suit in commercial, legal, political, and military realms region-wide. Stephen’s house (purchased from his wife Anne Van Cortlandt’s father, New York City mayor Stephanus Van Cortlandt), was sold in 1762 to Samuel Fraunces, who transformed it into Fraunce’s Tavern, the site of many noteworthy events during and immediately after the Revolution—Washington used the tavern to bid farewell to his officers in 1783, and John Jay’s Department of Foreign Affairs, from which he strove to enforce the Treaty of Paris, was located on the second floor.

Stephen De Lancey (1748-1798), the Chief Justice of the Bahamas and Governor of Tobago, was the son of Brigadier General Oliver De Lancey and Phila Frank. He married Cornelia Barclay.

Bishop William Heathcote De Lancey (1797–1865), born in Mamaroneck, NY, was the son of John Peter De Lancey and Elizabeth Floyd De Lancey, and the father of Edward Floyd De Lancey. He was married to Frances Munro De Lancey (1797–1869). William was the first bishop of the Diocese of Western New York and the sixth provost of the University of Pennsylvania.

Other colonial New Yorkers represented in the collection include Margaret Selyns, owner of a Lower Manhattan property known as Dominie’s Farm that was later sold to James De Lancey; and the Palmer family, who were among the first settlers of Mamaroneck, NY, and left many descendants in the area.

Note on Names:
Married names for female spouses have been used throughout.
Scope and Content

The De Lancey Family Papers collection consists of 141 objects documenting the lives of the De Lancey family, one of the New York City region’s most wealthy and successful Colonial families. Residing primarily in and around Manhattan and Westchester County, the De Lanceys rose to prominence in commercial, legal, political, and military realms region-wide. The collection’s objects date from the early Colonial through the Civil War years and include correspondence; legal, financial, and business documents; military commissions and orders; genealogical material; invitations and programs; and a broad range of oversize real estate documents. Subject matter of the bulk of the material sheds light on real estate in Westchester County, military issues, and the business/mercantile dealings of the De Lancey extended family, most of whom were Loyalists who remained faithful to the crown during the Revolutionary War. Historically significant items such as a 1775 letter describing the Battle of Bunker Hill from Oliver De Lancey, Jr., to his father, Brigadier General Oliver De Lancey, Sr., and several pieces discussing the military movements of the French and Indian War, are included. Other notable items include 11 slave bills of sale, several manumission documents, programs and invitations for historical commemorations such as the 100th Anniversary of Washington’s inauguration, and one of the earliest-known impressions of the Seal of the City of New York. Letters from famed novelist James Fenimore Cooper to William Heathcote De Lancey are also included.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into two series. In Series I (De Lancey Family Members), the sub-series are arranged chronologically by family member birth date, and chronologically within. In Series II (Related Family Papers), the sub-series are arranged alphabetically by type of document, and then chronologically within.

All undated material is arranged before dated material. If two documents of the same date exist, these are arranged alphabetically. Oversize material is housed separately.

Series I: Family Members (undated, 1686-1893)

Sub-Series A. Stephen (Etienne) De Lancey (1686-1766)
Sub-Series B. James De Lancey (undated, 1736-1761)
Sub-Series C. Oliver De Lancey, Sr. (1750-1783)
Sub-Series D. Susannah De Lancey (1770-1778)
Sub-Series E. Stephen De Lancey (1763-1779)
Sub-Series F. John Peter De Lancey (1789-1828)
Sub-Series G. John (Jack) De Lancey (1781-1791)
Sub-Series H. James De Lancey (1805-1834)
Sub-Series I. William Heathcote De Lancey (1816-1839)
Sub-Series J. Edward Floyd De Lancey (1889-1893)
Series II: Related Family Papers (undated, 1659-1840)
Sub-Series A. Genealogies (undated, 1840)
Sub-Series B. Real Estate Documents (1722-1785)
Sub-Series C. Other Papers (undated, 1659-circa 1810)

Series Descriptions

Series I: Family Members (undated, 1686-1893)
This series, organized chronologically by family member, dates primarily from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and reflects a broad range of De Lancey family materials including financial items such as bills and receipts, correspondence; real estate documents centering around Westchester County and upstate New York; and military-related documents. Notable pieces in this series include 11 slave bills of sale, several manumission documents, programs and invitations for historical commemorations such as the 100th Anniversary of Washington’s inauguration, and one of the earliest-known impressions of the Seal of the City of New York. Letters from famed novelist James Fenimore Cooper to William Heathcote De Lancey are also included. The series illuminates both the public and private concerns of wealthy New Yorkers during the eighteenth century.

Sub-Series A. Stephen (Etienne) De Lancey (1686-1766)
Sub-Series B. James De Lancey (undated, 1736-1761)
Sub-Series C. Oliver De Lancey, Sr. (1750-1783)
Sub-Series D. Susannah De Lancey (1770-1778)
Sub-Series E. Stephen De Lancey (1763-1779)
Sub-Series F. John Peter De Lancey (1789-1828)
Sub-Series G. John (Jack) De Lancey (1781-1791)
Sub-Series H. James De Lancey (1805-1834)
Sub-Series I. William Heathcote De Lancey (1816-1839)
Sub-Series J. Edward Floyd De Lancey (1889-1893)

Series II: Related Family Papers (undated, 1659-1840)
This series contains De Lancey family genealogical materials, such as family trees and notes on family history, and a number of oversize real estate documents, most of which concern land and properties in Westchester County (some do not appear to be De Lancey family-related).

Sub-Series A. Genealogies (undated, 1840)
Sub-Series B. Real Estate Documents (1722-1785)
Sub-Series C. Other Papers (undated, 1659-circa 1810)

Language of Materials

The materials are in English.

Access and Use
The Museum of the City of New York collections must be examined on site. Appointments to examine materials must be made in advance by contacting the Archivist through e-mail at research@mcny.org.

Collection use is subject to all copyright laws. Permission to publish materials must be obtained in writing from the Rights and Reproductions Office at the Museum of the City of New York. For more information please contact:
  Rights and Reproductions office
  Museum of the City of New York
  1220 Fifth Avenue
  New York, NY 10029
  Telephone: 212-534-1672, ext. 3375
  Fax: 917-492-3960
  rightsandrepro@mcny.org

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation
[Title, date.] De Lancey Family Papers (1659–1889), Museum of the City of New York. Accession # 40.190.

Custodial History
The collection was donated to the Museum in 1940 by former Board President (1938–1948), Beverley R. Robinson. Since then it has remained in the Museum’s care. It is believed that prior to its donation, the collection had been in the possession of William H. De Lancey of Geneva, NY, but detailed custodial information is not available.

Acquisition Information
The collection was donated to the Museum in May 1940 by former Board President (1938–1948) Beverley R. Robinson.

Processing Information
The processing of the De Lancey Family Papers collection was made possible by the generous support of the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation. The collection was processed and finding aid created by Mary LaMotte Silverstein in July and August of 2018. The original order is unknown. The Museum holds another collection, the Edward Floyd De Lancey Collection of Family Papers (see Related Material); the notes and handwriting of Edward Floyd De Lancey, creator of this related collection, were identified on several of these pieces as well, and many of the same De Lanceys are represented. Thus, we suspect that these two collections were part of a whole that at some point was separated.

Related Material
Museum of the City of New York
The Museum holds another collection (accession number run 42.315), purchased through the Mrs. Elon Huntington Hooker Acquisitions Fund in 1942, that contains many documents closely related to those in the De Lancey Family Papers collection. Numerous De Lancey family members, including Chief Justice James, Brigadier General Oliver, John Peter, John (Jack), and Edward Floyd, appear in this collection as well. We suspect that these two collections were part of a whole that at some point was separated.

Collections in Other Repositories

New-York Historical Society
James De Lancey Papers, 1747–1759 (8 items)
https://library.nyu.edu/persistent/lcn/nyu_aleph004146863?institution=NYU&persistent

James De Lancey Family Papers, 1735–1869 (1.5 linear feet)
https://library.nyu.edu/persistent/lcn/nyu_aleph001616341?institution=NYU&persistent

Stephen De Lancey Papers, 1712–1775 (9 items)
https://library.nyu.edu/persistent/lcn/nyu_aleph004151858?institution=NYU&persistent

Stephen De Lancey and Oliver De Lancey Papers, 1647–1905 (3 boxes)

Access Points

Personal names
Cooper, James Fenimore, 1789–1851
De Lancey, Edward F. (Edward Floyd), 1821–1905
De Lancey, James, 1703–1760
De Lancey, James, 1732–1800
De Lancey, Oliver, 1718–1785
De Lancey, Oliver, 1752–1822
De Lancey, William Heathcote, 1797–1865
Munro, Peter Jay, 1767–1833
Watts, John, 1749–1836

Topical subjects
American loyalists--New York (State)
Great Britain. Army. Provincial Corps. De Lancey’s Volunteers
Judges
Landowners
Military
New York (State)--History--Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775
New York (State)--History--Revolution, 1775-1783
New York (State)--History--Revolution, 1775-1783--British forces
New York (State)--History--Revolution, 1775-1783--Social aspects
New York (State)--Politics and government
New York (State)--Politics and government--1775-1865
Real property--New York (State)--New York--19th century
United States--Continental Army--Military life
United States--Foreign relations
United States--History--Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775
United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783
United States--Politics and government—1783-1789
United States--Social life and customs

Geographic subjects
Manhattan (New York, N.Y.)
New York County (N.Y.)
Nassau County (N.Y.)
Queens County (N.Y.)
Suffolk County (N.Y.)
Westchester County (N.Y.)

Sources


