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McA MSS 009

OSWALD FAMILY PAPERS

1792-1816

.21 linear feet, 1 box

Series I. Correspondence (1809-1816)
Series II. Documents (1792-1814)

August 2005

Descriptive Summary**Repository**

Library Company of Philadelphia
1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-5698

Call Number

McA MSS 009

Title

Oswald Family Papers

Inclusive Dates

1792-1816

Quantity

.21 linear feet (1 box)

Language of Materials

Materials are in English, French, and Italian.

Abstract

The Oswald Family Papers are those of William Hunter Oswald, a merchant living and working in Malta and Italy in the early nineteenth century, his father Eleazer, and his brother John. Primarily William Hunter's incoming and outgoing correspondence, the papers also include his diary covering eighteen months during 1809 and 1810, when he was traveling from Philadelphia to Malta and around Mediterranean area. Other materials in the collection are documents that Eleazer Oswald assembled to request payments due him from the French government for his military service, records of a ship owned and sold by John H. Oswald, and passports for the two brothers.

Administrative Information**Restrictions to Access**

The collection is open to researchers. It is on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and should be accessed through the Society's reading room at 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA. Visit their website, <http://www.hsp.org/>, for reading room hours.

Acquisition Information

Gift of John A. McAllister; forms part of the McAllister Collection.

Processing Information

The Oswald Family Papers were formerly interfiled within the large and chronologically arranged McAllister Manuscript Collection. The papers were reunited, arranged, and described as a single collection in 2005, under grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the William Penn Foundation; they were processed Edith Mulhern, a University of Pennsylvania Summer Research Intern, and Sandra Markham. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Preferred Citation

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Online Catalog Headings**Subject Names**

Oswald, Eleazer, 1755-1795
Oswald, John H., 1777?-1810
Oswald, William Hunter, b. 1787
Paine, Thomas, 1737-1809--correspondent
Appleton, Thomas, 1763-1840--correspondent
Mifflin, Samuel, 1776-1829--correspondent
Bouchotte, J. (Jean), 1754-1840--correspondent
Dumouriez, Charles François Du Périer, 1739-1823--correspondent
Bonaparte, Lucien, prince de Canino, 1775-1840

Subject Topics

Malta--Description and travel
Italy--Description and travel
Voyages and travels
Transatlantic voyages
Merchants--Correspondence

Document Types

Diaries
Letters

Related Collections

Additional Eleazer Oswald papers are at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; they were also a gift from John A. McAllister.

Biographical/Historical Notes

The papers in this collection relate to three members of the Oswald family: Eleazer, John H., and William H. Oswald, though the bulk of the material concerns William Oswald's life and career.

Eleazer Oswald (1755-1795) was born in England, and came to America in the early 1770s and apprenticed with the New York printer John Holt (1721-1784). Oswald served in the colonial army during the Revolution; after the war he returned to printing, first in Baltimore, then in Philadelphia (where he published *The Independent Gazetteer, or The Chronicle of Freedom*) and

New York. Oswald married Elizabeth Holt (died 1797), the daughter of John Holt and Elizabeth Hunter Holt (died 1788), who was also a printer. In 1792, Eleazer Oswald joined the French Revolutionary Army and served from September 18, 1792, until the summer of 1793. As a colonel of the artillery, Oswald participated in the Battles of Jemmapes and Liège in Belgium, and was sent on a secret mission to Ireland to assess the feasibility of a successful French invasion. After filing his reconnaissance report in France, Oswald returned to the United States, and soon after died in New York from yellow fever.

John Holt Oswald (1777?-1810) was the eldest son of Eleazer and Elizabeth Oswald, and also involved in international commerce. According to contemporary newspaper obituaries, "His acquirements in most of the living languages were proofs of an indefatigable zeal and industry in erudite pursuits." It was reported in *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* for August 23, 1810, that he had died in Carthage (though whether in Spain or Colombia is not known) the month before, leaving behind in Philadelphia, "a bereaved widow, three children, and affectionate brothers and sisters." His wife Emily died the following year.

William Hunter Oswald (born 1787), another son of Eleazer and Elizabeth Oswald, also had a career in international trade during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Prior to his life in Europe, he had worked in Jameson Hunter's counting house in England. Oswald arrived in Sicily in 1809 from Philadelphia and once there held a variety of positions, mostly in or near Malta. Also in 1809, according to his diary, he was sharing quarters with Theophilus Richards Jr., whom Oswald described as a young Englishman "forming an Establishment in Malta." In the summer of 1810, Oswald made an extensive tour of Sicily to improve his health. Throughout his time in Europe, he maintained contacts with family friend and Philadelphia merchant Samuel Mifflin (1776-1829). In 1814, he made an overland trip from Naples to Trieste and in 1815, went into business with British merchant Richard Nuttall in Trieste. An 1814 passport, issued in Naples to Oswald by the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, described him as 26-year-old trader, born in London, and tall with chestnut hair. Genealogy and local history records state that he married Sarah Stamper Hall (born 1792); his date of death is unknown.

Collection Overview

Series I, Correspondence (1809-1816) is arranged in three subseries: Incoming, Outgoing, and Miscellaneous, and includes letters written to, written by, and copied to William Hunter Oswald. They primarily concern issues of trade and shipping, though they also mention world affairs, local conditions and landscapes, and news of America.

As Oswald was conducting international business subject to unreliable communication services, he made and retained copies of his outgoing correspondence. Some letters reflect his personal opinions; in a letter to his brother, he gave a positive review of Palermo except for its citizens, ending with "Nature appears to have bestowed her bounties upon a people not capable of profiting by them." Napoleon and the European wars figure in many of the letters, particularly in relation to their effect on business, duties, availability of goods, and transportation. In a letter

to Samuel Mifflin at Cadiz, Oswald described local events such as the arrival of American ship *Hercules* with Lucien Bonaparte and family on board. The ship was detained by the frigate HMS *Pomone*, and Bonaparte, who had been trying to escape to America, surrendered to British authorities.

The letters in Series I are written in English with two exceptions: one in Italian from Lambro Nacco in Livadia [Greece] on December 22, 1812, details the purchase and delivery of wheat for 2000 tallari (a local currency), and expresses his hopes that the transaction will be finalized. The second of the two letters is in the third subseries, Miscellaneous, and was probably received by Oswald as an enclosure. Also in Italian, it is from Gio (possibly Giorgio) Bonfort to Theophilus Richards Jr., and is marked at the top "copia" (copy). Written from Scalanova [Anatolia, now Turkey] on January 17, 1812, it declares him to owe 11628 [pieces of currency] to Richards, and acknowledges the difficulties of repaying such debt in a short-term period. Bonfort's letter suggests the following plan: if "la fortuna aiuterà" (good luck assists) he will repay the debt as soon as he can with any proceeds he earns. And to assist him, Richards will provide job orders to Bonfort who should recognize the commissions earned from these services as credits to be applied towards his debt. The second letter in the subseries is a copy, in Oswald's hand, of a letter from the British merchant Jameson Hunter to an unknown colleague; in it Hunter, as a former employer of Oswald, recommends Oswald's service and reputation.

Series II, Documents (1809-1816), is arranged in four subseries, one each for Eleazer Oswald, John Holt Oswald, and William Hunter Oswald, and one Miscellaneous. The series holds documents related to the personal and lives of the Oswalds, including a diary, passports, and business agreements.

John Holt Oswald's subseries holds an 1808 passport issued to him by the United States government, signed by James Madison as secretary of state. It also includes a set of documents covering the sale of the schooner *Nancy* to Florimond Dusar, a Philadelphia merchant, in 1809, as well as some records of shipping on the *Nancy* during that period and in January 1810.

Perhaps the most remarkable writing in the Oswald Family Papers is the journal kept by William Oswald from May 16, 1809, when he left Philadelphia for Malta, through December 1810. Oswald periodically notes the events and places he observed during those eighteen months, writing of local politics, ships captured by privateers working on the Mediterranean, various blockades, and the types of merchandise being forwarded to Cadiz, Naples, Russia, the Levant, England, and America. He writes also of the personalities he encounters, from the arrivals and departures of British and American merchants including Philadelphians Mifflin, Walker, and Lewis, to the death of another Philadelphian, Captain William Smith of the Brig *Dolphin*, washed overboard in a local gale. Oswald himself traveled to Palermo, Messina, Girgenti [Sicily], Catania, and Syracuse, and made notes of those trips. The subseries also includes an 1811 agreement between Oswald and Nuttall, in which Nuttall agrees to pay Oswald's expenses and 5 per cent of any sales he makes in Sardinia and Madelena; an 1812

invoice for wine sent by Oswald on the ship *San Vittorio* to Nuttall in Malta; and a passport issued to Oswald by the Kingdom the Two Sicilies in 1814.

The fourth subseries, Miscellaneous, holds only one document, a lease agreement in Italian for a ship. It is a contract between Francesco Pace, the vessel's captain, which transfers the ship to a consortium of men (Giuseppe Vincenzo Testaferrata, Lorenzo Pullicino, Carlo [Charles] Livingston, and Luigi Brista), who accept the leasing of the vessel under the eight terms and conditions spelled out in the agreement. The document was made in Malta in 1812. The document's connection to the Oswald family is unclear, but Series I includes a copy of a letter from William Oswald to Livingston which indicates an existing business relationship between the two.

Of particular interest in the Documents series is a group of papers held in the first subseries. They consist of copies of documents Eleazer Oswald assembled to request payments that he felt were due him from the French government for his military service. These documents consist of two sets of letters with attachments, two notes on one sheet of paper, and two invoices. All but one of the documents is written in French.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania holds a key document that was formerly attached to these papers. Titled "Memoire," dated September 3, 1793, and signed by Eleazer Oswald, it functioned as a cover letter for the papers in this collection. It was written to the National Convention, the legislative assembly that governed France from 1792 to 1795; in it Oswald details his case for reimbursement, and gives a brief description of the seven attachments he is submitting to support his claim. He ends by writing that it is only after spending numerous weeks trying to obtain his compensation that he is appearing before them. A single page, the "Memoire" was given to the Historical Society by John A. McAllister on February 20, 1886, along with Oswald's certificate of membership in the St. George's Society of Philadelphia. The text of the letter (but dated September 1, 1793) was printed in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* in 1880 and reprinted there in 1914; in 1880 it was owned by Oswald's descendant Richard W. Oswald. A photocopy of the Historical Society's "Memoire" is foldered with the first document set.

The men mentioned in the documents are noted French officials. Jean Baptiste Noël Bouchotte (1754-1840) was the French War Minister from April 1793 until March 1794. Charles François Du Périer Dumouriez (1739-1823) was a general in the French Revolutionary Army; he was instrumental in the declaration of war against Austria, planned an invasion of the Low Countries, and was victorious at Jemappes on November 6, 1792. After a defeat, Dumouriez fled in January 1793 to the Austrian camp with the future Louis Philippe. A third official named in the documents, Pierre Henri Hélène Marie Lebrun-Tondu (1763?-1793), was the French Minister for Foreign Affairs from August 1792 until June 1793.

A précis of each document in the four sets follows.

Document set 1: petition from Oswald to Bouchotte, dated July 11, 1793, with seven numbered attachments.

In his petition, Oswald presents his case to Bouchotte: he explains how he left his family in America and accepted a post as colonel of artillery under General Dumouriez. He left his American army certificates at the French War Office. He recounts his secret mission in Ireland and indicates that he returned to Paris on June 8. Despite having been reimbursed for the costs of his journey, he observes that his horse, bought in London for 40 guineas, was left in Minister Lebrun-Tondu's stables and died. He requests an indemnity for the horse and the return of the certificates that he deposited at the War Office. Employed since September 18, 1792, but only having received two months' pay, he requests the payment for the other months. Since his present certificate is insufficient, he asks for a new one so that he can continue his military service. He adds that he commanded 4 out of 24 units at Jemappes and 4 of 12 at Liège. There are four attachments currently remaining with the letter [attachments numbered 3 and 7 are missing at present]; they are numbered on their versos:

"No. 1 & 2," dated August 23, 1793: Certified transcripts, in French, of two testimonials documenting Eleazer Oswald's military service. The first testimonial, from September 17, 1791, certifies Oswald's participation in the American Revolution as a lieutenant colonel of artillery, and was issued in Philadelphia before the Commandant General of the Artillery. The second, from August 28, 1792, certifies that Oswald is a citizen of Pennsylvania, remarks that he served with distinction in the American Army, and was signed and sealed by Thomas Pinckney in London. The certificate of the translator follows. The document translation took place at the War Office in Paris.

[**"No. 3"** relates to the purchase of a horse in London; it is not in the Oswald Family Papers]

"No. 4," October 29, 1792: Declaration of General Dumouriez, who declares that, in recognition of Oswald's military talent and civic spirit, he confers upon him the grade of colonel in the artillery and issues to him this certificate.

"No. 5," January 6, 1793: Permit for a month's leave. The commandant of the French Army in Belgium gives Oswald a month's leave with the understanding that he will return to his post at the end of that time. The second portion is from the Commandant of the second artillery certifying that Oswald left the town of Tirlemont on January 16.

"No. 6," June 21, 1793: Certificate of Oswald's secret mission by Minister of Foreign Affairs Lebrun-Tondu. The document certifies that from February 20 until June 8, Oswald was engaged on a secret, delicate, and dangerous mission. Lebrun-Tondu presents the certificate, which he has signed, and which was countersigned by the Secretary General of Foreign Affairs.

[**"No. 7"** is relative to the horse's stabling fee; it is not in the Oswald Family Papers]

Document set 2: Letter from Oswald to Bouchotte, dated Paris July 23, 1793, with two attachments

Having received no answer to his communication of ten days earlier, Oswald writes again and encloses a copy of a letter of reference from Thomas Paine. Oswald also refers to the documents relating to his service that he sent with the previous letter (document set 1).

Two attachments: copies of Thomas Paine's letter of introduction

July 21, 1793, certified translation of a letter from Thomas Paine to the War Minister. Paine recounts how he met Oswald in London the previous September when Oswald was anxious to serve in France in order to repay the debt he believed Americans owed the French for their support. At the end of the campaign, he was sent to Ireland by Lebrun-Tondu to report on rising tensions, where he fulfilled his mission admirably, especially since, being American, his presence did not arouse suspicion. Paine adds that since Oswald will not return to America until the following spring and would like to continue his service in the army, and since he is an excellent artillery officer and an intrepid soldier, Paine would be pleased if the War Minister would grant Oswald an interview. There follows an inscription from the public interpreter, certifying the fidelity of his translation.

July 21, 1793, draft of above letter from Paine to Bouchotte in support of Oswald.

Document set 3: Two notes on one sheet

The first, dated September 9, 1793, in which the secretary indicates that he has sent the letter concerning Citizen Oswald of Philadelphia to Citizen Bouchotte, the war minister, having received it from Citizen Merlino. Following that is another note, dated September 14, 1793, in which the secretary adds that Bouchotte ought to have received the attached pieces on September 9, and that he had asked Bouchotte to look at them.

Document set 4: Memo of arrears due to Citizen Oswald

September 29, 1793, draft of an account of payments due for the period that Oswald was a colonel of artillery. Included are: pay, food, feed for horses, and compensation for his horse.

September 30, 1793, final copy of memo of arrears due to Oswald, signed by him and with a note referring to the decree of the National Convention which entitles him, along with every officer who served in the Belgian Army, to their pay up to April 1, 1793.

Box Folder

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE

1809-1816

Arranged in three subseries: Incoming, Outgoing, and Miscellaneous.

Incoming

1	1	Appleton, Thomas, Leghorn [Livorno]	1815 Nov 10
	2	Aspinall, Nicholas J., Malta	1812 Feb 14
	3	Boulton, J. B., Sardinia	1812 Jan 1
	4	Broadbent, John, Messina, Sicily	1815 Oct 14
	5	Clerici, L., Trieste	1814 Jul 20
	6	Cope, Thomas, Mahón, Spain	1812 Jan 12
		Federici, W. See: J. B. Boulton	
	7	Frederick Degen & Company, Naples	1814-1815
	8	Guldenstein, Gibraltar	1816 Sep 17
	9	Hight, William B., Naples	1816 Mar 19
	10	Nacco, Lambro, Livadia [Greece]	1812 Dec 20
	11	Richards, Theophilus, Jr., Venice & Leghorn [Livorno]	1815
	12	Roberts, Joseph L., Philadelphia	1816 Feb 10
	13	Unidentified correspondent, Cadiz (incomplete)	1814 Jun 13

Outgoing

	14	Aspinall, Nicholas J., Malta	1811-1815
	15	Bingham Richards & Co., London	1810 Apr 20
	16	Burleigh, Robert, Gibraltar	1815 May 22
	17	Cope, Thomas, Mahón, Spain	1812 Jul 25

Box Folder

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE, cont.

Outgoing, cont.

[1]	18	Darby, George F., Cagliari, Sardinia	1811 Dec 21
	19	Forresté, George, Janina [Ioánnina, Greece]	1812 Sep 24
	20	Frederick Degen & Co., Naples	1814 Oct 10
	21	Goodchild, Calvert & Lauder, Malta	1815 May 9
	22	Livingston, Charles, Malta	1812 Sep 24
	23	Mifflin, Samuel, Philadelphia	1810-1812
	24	Nelson, Richard J. R.	1815
	25	Oswald, John Holt	1809 Jul 28
	26	Parnell, Thomas, Patras [Greece]	1815 Sep 7
	27	Richards, Theophilus, Jr., London	1810 May 23
	28	Rowlandson, Samuel, Malta	1815 May 30
	29	Strané, Nicholas, Patras [Greece]	1812 Sep 21
	30	Unidentified correspondent	1811 Oct 8
	31	Unidentified correspondent [Paul]	1815 Apr 23

Miscellaneous

	32	Bonfort, Gio, to Theophilus Richards Jr.	1812 Jan 17
	33	Hunter, Jameson, to unidentified correspondent	1810 Dec 24

Box Folder

SERIES II. DOCUMENTS

1792 -1814

Arranged in four subseries, one for each of the Oswald men, followed by Miscellaneous documents.

Oswald, Eleazer

[1]	34	Document set one	1792-1793
	35	Document set two	1793
	36	Document sets three and four	1793

Oswald, John Holt

	37	Passport, issued by the United States government	1808 Jun 10
	38	Sale of the schooner <i>Nancy</i> and shipping documents	1809-1810

Oswald, William Hunter

	39	Journal	1809-1812
	40	Copies of letters of introduction from Somerville, Hight, and Federici	1811 Oct
	41	Contract with Richard Nuttall	1811 Oct 21
	42	Invoice for wine shipped from Alghero, Sardinia, to Malta	1812 Mar 5
	43	Passport, issued by Kingdom of the Two Sicilies	1814

Miscellaneous

	44	Contract for lease of ship, Malta	1812 Oct 12
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