PEAES Guide: Athenaeum of Philadelphia

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# ECONOMIC HISTORY IN THE PHILADELPHIA REGION

GUIDE TO MANUSCRIPTS AND PRINT RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH Written by Cathy Matson & Wendy Woloson

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The Athenaeum of Philadelphia

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#### **Contact Person:**

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#### **Scope of the collection:**

The Atheneum is a special-collections library founded in 1814 to collect materials "connected with the history and antiquities of America." The scope of the Athenaeum's collections is the history of architecture, interior design, building technology, and decorative arts from about 1800-1945, although its main emphasis is the post-Civil War era. It is free and open to researchers using the collections.

The collection contains manuscript materials, but is stronger in printed materials and strongest in architectural drawings, and prints and photographs of buildings. About 95% of the book collection, 85% of the drawings, and only a few of the manuscript collections are accessible via Athena, the online catalogue, which is also accessible from remote locations.

The Athenaeum includes a substantial library of books, including biographies and histories on topics that overlap with the manuscript collections of other locations in the Philadelphia area. The institution is a member of PACSCL, which permits users to access listings of published print titles from computers at other locations.

#### **Printed materials:**

Of the collection's over 560 trade catalogues, about 19 date before or up to 1860. Extending beyond the Philadelphia region, the catalogues advertise general consumer goods as well as materials needed specifically for the building trades and decorating professions. In addition, the collection is rich in primary printed materials related to the building trades, including cabinet-makers' guides, builders' assistants, and a wide range of books on practical architecture illustrating designs and layouts for residences, structures of internal improvement (e.g. bridges), and working buildings used for manufacturing.

## Prints, photographs, and architectural drawings:

The collection contains over 350,000 photographs and 180,000 architectural drawings representing

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the work of over 1,000 architects. Many images can be viewed via the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project (www.philadelphiabuildings.org). Researchers can conduct searches by architect's name, by building name or type, and by location. PBA is especially useful for those interested in tracing bank architecture, mill and manufactory design, and technological improvements as evidenced via architectural design and engineering.

### Papers:

The Athenaeum houses many collections of architects' papers, and a few of them date to before 1860. Most notable are the Thomas Ustwick Walter collection, and the Thomas Fletcher papers.

## Thomas Ustick Walter Collection, papers (1837-ca. 1900)

Thomas Ustick Walter (1804-1887), born in Philadelphia, is considered one of the most important American architects of the time. He began his architectural career in 1831 with a design for the Moyamensing Prison and went on to design the extension of the United States Capitol in 1850. The Walter papers, arranged chronologically and comprising 17 boxes of material, span the years from 1837 to about 1900. Containing diaries, ledger books, letter books, and account books, the papers record Walter's career as a self-employed businessman/architect, documenting the rise and fall of his fortunes and his constant struggle to maintain his family's standard of living in the face of mounting indebtedness. There is a finding aid for the collection consisting of box inventories.

#### Thomas Fletcher papers, (ca. 1780s-1880s)

Fletcher was a member of a Philadelphia silversmithing family and conducted business as Fletcher & Gardiner and Fletcher & Bennett during the nineteenth century. The papers, uncatalogued, are comprised of 13 boxes arranged chronologically. They contain personal and business correspondence, insurance policies, letters of commission, balance sheets, letter books (1813-1832), and account books (1809-1819), in addition to information regarding brother Charles's business as a commission merchant.

# William Palmer collection of architectural drawings and personal papers, 1787-1815

Thirty-seven architectural drawings including those for a steam pipe, residences, and a cotton works.

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