

Collection Overview

The autographs in this collection are arranged in three series: Series I, Individual Signatures; Series II, Group Signatures; and Series III, Civil War Signatures.

Series I, Individual Signatures holds fragments clipped from letters, account and receipt books, bank drafts, and deeds, bonds, and other financial and legal instruments. In addition, many of the autographs of congressmen and cabinet members are simply envelopes that were saved because their signature served as franking during their terms in office. As a number of the envelopes are addressed to Edwin Stanton (1814-1869) as secretary of the War Department (a post he held from 1862 to 1868), it is likely that John A. McAllister either had a friend working in that office, or acquired a trove of discarded envelopes through another means. The McAllister Collection, however, does not hold the letters that had been enclosed in the envelopes. Additional envelopes (without notable autographs) are filed in Series III.

With a few exceptions, the autographs are not annotated to identify the signature; one exception is for Anton Probst (1842-1866), on which someone wrote "autograph of Probst the Murderer." Probst axed to death of six members of the Dearing family, their farm hand, and a family guest, on April 7, 1866. In the case of artist Thomas Sully (1783-1872), his folder holds both a clipped autograph and a calling card on which a facsimile of his signature was engraved. Another interesting item is the autograph of naval commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones (1790-1858) of Georgetown, which is on a promissory note dated 1833. The verso of the note is annotated in red ink: "Taken from the/residence of T. Ap/Catesby Jones by/Dr. W.T.W. Dickeson/Surg 4th Pa Res. Vol/October 1861," and as such marks it as an item collected for John A. McAllister.

Most of the men and women listed have single signatures in their folders, but if more than one appears, it is indicated in the box and folder list. Occasionally there are multiple signatures; for example, there are a dozen for Samuel Delucenna Ingham.

Series II, Group Signatures holds ten fragments of paper which were signed by several people on each piece. These were clipped from documents such as petitions and legal documents and probably were meant to be further cut down. In one case, individual signatures had already been clipped out of the group. The individual signers in each group are listed.

Series III, Civil War Signatures is arranged in two subseries: Autograph Album; and Clipped Signatures. The first is not an actual bound album, but is a collection of nineteen sheets of ordinary lined paper blind-stamped with "E.H. OWEN," each of which holds four or fewer signatures of military men, with their rank, unit, and home town. It is not known who compiled the pages, but if it was John A. McAllister, who did not serve in the military, the signatures might possibly have been those of servicemen who passed through the Cooper Shop or Union volunteer refreshment saloons in Philadelphia, or were patients in one of the local army hospitals.