

George Town, a prosperous river port in Frederick County, Maryland, was founded in 1751. In 1790 it was encompassed within the boundaries of the new federal District of Columbia, along with the likewise independent municipalities of the City of Washington and the City of Alexandria. It was formally annexed by the City of Washington in 1871. In this finding aid, the spelling of Georgetown is one word, as is Fredericktown, though most of the correspondents use the two-word forms in their letters

Collection Overview

The Bank of Columbia Records spans the dates 1794 to 1828, and is arranged in two subseries: Correspondence, and Documents. The bank's clients included businessmen, private individuals, and several women, primarily located along the east coast from New Hampshire to South Carolina, but concentrated in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC. Another prominent client was the United States government; the bank was involved with numerous financial transactions, primarily loans to the United States Treasury Department. Most of the correspondence in the collection is addressed to William Whann, the bank's cashier, with many letters also addressed to bank directors John Mason, Benjamin Stoddert, Thomas L. McKenney, and John Threlkeld, and to Richard Smith (1784-after 1860), who served as the bank's agent in the Treasury Building, Washington.

These papers were found in a collection of manuscripts assembled by an antiquarian whose aim was most likely to preserve documents signed by notable people (as an example, see McAllister's annotations on the outside of John Jacob Astor's letters in folder 2), and not necessarily to preserve a corporate archive. While not complete in breadth of depth, the papers present a detailed, though partial, picture of the functions of an early American bank.

Series I. Correspondence (1796-1828) contains letters from the bank's clients and from the United States Treasury Department; it comprises the bulk of the collection. The correspondence is nearly all incoming, with the few examples of outgoing letters foldered at the end of the series, and generally concerns payment of notes and dividends as well as routine financial business such as overdrawn accounts and payment and stop payment requests.

Other letters, from the Department of the Treasury and the Bank of the United States, provide a window on the bank's operations, debt, and failure to fulfill its obligations. The Bank of Pennsylvania's folder holds a four-page letter addressing troubles with the Bank of Columbia in 1820, and the Bank of the United States' folder holds material of a similar nature. There are several letters in the U.S. Department of the Treasury folder describing large financial transactions that the bank, through their agent in Washington, made with the government in 1815. Twenty other letters from the Louisiana Bank were tied together with deposit slips that document funds sent to New Orleans from 1812-1813 to cover military payroll during the war.

Some letters carry technical information relating to bank management: a letter from James Cox, cashier of the Bank of Baltimore, lists the salaries paid to officers and staff members of his