

Note: William Lapsley, a tailor listed at Fearries' Court and author, with James Queen, of *The Taylor's Instructor, or, A comprehensive analysis, of the elements of cutting garments, of every kind* (Philadelphia: 1809) appears to be unrelated to the family businesses described above.

Collection Overview

The Lapsley Family Business Records span the period from 1805 to 1817 and contain correspondence and financial documents relating to the various carpet and dry goods firms in which the family members were actively involved in importing textiles from England to Philadelphia. The date span of the collection in no way matches the family's involvement in commerce, which lasted from the 1780s through the mid-nineteenth century. The collection is divided into two series: Correspondence; and Documents. Both hold a wealth of detailed information regarding the textile trade and in particular the textile importing business, from wholesale purchase to transportation to financing, told through letters, shipping invoices, and legal papers.

Series I, Correspondence (1805-1817) holds letters written to the Lapsley brothers in Philadelphia from their business contacts in England and America. Financial and other documents (such as shipping invoices or bills of lading) that were originally enclosed have been reunited with their cover letters here; the unattached financial documents are filed in Series II, Documents.

Invoices and correspondence in the files reveal that the Lapsleys imported, aside from a range of rugs and Venetian and Brussels carpets and borders, bales of fabrics commonly made and used in that time for clothing and household purposes. The material included cassimere (soft twilled wool fabric), bombazet (thin smooth-surfaced worsted fabric), dimity (sheer and usually corded cotton fabric woven in checks or stripes), cambric (fine thin white linen fabric), diaper (linen fabric woven in regular and repetitive pattern), nankeen (sturdy cotton cloth that is naturally of a brownish yellow color), sarsenet (silk fabric woven in a small-scale pattern), Kendal cotton and Welch plains (both wool cloths used for outer wear), as well as gingham, calicoes, and shirting. The Lapsleys also brought over quantities of finished goods including counterpanes (bedspreads), coverlets, rose blankets, Marseilles quilts, umbrellas, steel pins, tassels, and men's and women's gloves and hose.

More unusual in these papers is the shipment of freight that John Lapsley received from Bell & Balfour of Dundee, Scotland, in May 1809: sixty-eight crates of assorted earthenware and sixty-two barrels of copperas. The latter, a form of ferrous sulphate, was used extensively in the textile dyeing and leather tanning industries, as well as for making printing ink and gun powder.