

petitioning the Assembly for public appointment, for debtor's relief, or for a contract to supply the state with services.

Individuals also brought intimate issues before the General Assembly: on file are several appeals, from both men and women, for divorce or annulment of marriage, ranging in date from 1808 through the 1830s. As might be expected, those files contain compelling personal narratives as well as character endorsement from neighbors and family members. Two examples show the wide variety of these appeals, which came from all parts of the social spectrum. The first, from Adams County resident John Smith, was filed in October 1811 (7344.F.47). Smith's wife had delivered a baby girl which, in Smith's words, "to the surprise and Mortification of your Petitioner is a Mulatto." The file holds statements from various parties attesting to the paternity of the child, whose father was a servant, "a Negro man of the Neighborhood where she [John Smith's wife] had formerly lived." The second example was filed in 1831 by the great-great-granddaughter of Philip Livingston (1716-1778, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence) (papers held in two files, 7370.F.84 and 7372.F.65). Catherine Louisa Livingston Welsh wrote from Paris to state that at the age of sixteen, and against the wishes of her father, she had married John Welsh, a British citizen who was then a resident of Philadelphia. The petitioners, including her mother (in London) and her father (in Jamaica), attest that Catherine had never lived with her husband, that she "has long since manifested the utmost regret and repentance for the unfortunate act into which she was persuaded," in addition to which she had been in social seclusion since the marriage while Welsh had "long been living in open adultery" in England.

Aside from their personal and local concerns, some of the commonwealth's petitioners were acting in favor of or against national, and even international, issues. Again, these concerns vary widely: in 1838, residents of York and Bucks counties remonstrated against the annexation of Texas; in 1847, the women of Philadelphia County petitioned to abolish the death penalty; and in 1817, a citizen, T.N. Newton, petitioned for several laws including one which would enable women to vote. There is one undated petition (7386.F.8) from a group of Philadelphia merchants to Thomas Jefferson regarding the shipment of goods on the River Plate (Río de la Plata) in South America.

The petitions were primarily handwritten, usually by a scrivener, though a few were printed; the latter are indicated by an \* [asterisk] after the folder number. A few of the petitions are still bound by their original ribbons: examples can be seen in folders 7334.F.4 and F.6, and in 7357.F.55. A small number of the documents include watercolor maps or diagrams of areas discussed; examples can be found in folders 7314.F.39 and in 7334.F.4 and F.6.

Dates appearing in the far right column of the box and folder list come from various places on the document, but are primarily the docket date, the date when the petition was filed with the clerk or read to the Assembly. Very few of the petitions were dated when composed and their length of time in circulation prior to filing with the legislature is unknown. In addition, many of