

Collection Overview

The Watson & Paul Business Records spans the period from 1792-1807 and primarily contains correspondence and financial documents relating to their trade arrangements with a variety of local and national vendors and merchants, as well as those in Europe and the West and East Indies. As Watson & Paul were involved in the carrying trade (bringing products from the East and West Indies and reselling them to Europeans), the files hold bills of lading, some landing certificates, invoices, and many prices current, in addition to the correspondence with merchants and suppliers, all of which gives a detailed view of the business of shipping at the time. The collection is divided into two series: Correspondence; and Financial Documents.

Series I, Correspondence (1794-1807) holds letters written to the Watson & Paul firm confirming business agreements, giving details of the goods and specifics of their transportation and value, and occasional news of the growing and harvesting conditions, states of the market, local politics, and weather.

In America, Watson & Paul dealt with merchants and farmers from New York to Charleston who supplied mostly agricultural products to the firm. Typical of the vendors was William Hartshorn Jr. of Norfolk, Virginia, from whom Watson & Paul procured 186 kegs and 14 barrels of hog's lard between March and June 1801. One local New Jersey merchant, Jonathan Hill, reveals a more typical exchange of trade in a letter from 1798: "I have sent 158 bbls By Saml Kikendall he will Expect you to pay him the Frt which I would be glad you would do if in your power – give him a back load of Plaister with one Bble Tar and half Bus. Red Clover Seed, send a bill with the prices of the articles."

The papers in this series may or may not represent the complete commercial relationship between Watson & Paul and any of the merchants found in the files. Some merchants, such as Joseph Byrnes of Charleston, are represented by just a few letters advertising their goods and services. In contrast, the New York firm of David & Philip Grim, merchants located on Old-Slip, has five folders that hold more than eighty letters demonstrating a more extensive business association. The correspondence, bills of lading, and ship invoices show the company shipping cargo pork, prime beef, whale oil, and pickled shad, among other goods, to Philadelphia, and answering Watson & Paul's request for plaster of Paris, salmon, and gin. The Grims also report on the state of the markets in New York, as well as passing on other news of interest such as a fire at a nearby bake house, and the November 1796 suicide of a fellow merchant (and Watson & Paul supplier) Robert Bruce, who hung himself in his store ("this was the end of as good a man, by reputation as any person in the City").

Among Watson & Paul's international relationships were those with merchants John Darrieux and Caleb Newbold, who shipped a dozen boxes of indigo and fifty-nine bales of fabrics on consignment from Calcutta to Philadelphia in 1806. From Canton in 1805 came chests of Hyson tea sent by Charles Ross, and by John Field, fifteen boxes each of enameled cups and saucers,