Mason Fitch Cogswell Papers

A Guide to the Mason Fitch Cogswell Papers at the Connecticut Historical Society

Collection Overview
Repository: Connecticut Historical Society
Creator: Cogswell, Mason Fitch
Title: Mason Fitch Cogswell Papers
Dates: 1779-1830
Extent: 4.2 feet (26 boxes)
Abstract: Collection consists of correspondence to and from Mason Fitch Cogswell, and some of his bills, accounts and receipts.
Location: Ms Cogsm1830
Language: English

Biographical Sketch

Mason Fitch Cogswell was born on September 28, 1761 in Canterbury, Connecticut, the third son of the Reverend James Cogswell and Alice Fitch. Mason Cogswell's mother died when he was 11 years old. Rev. James Cogswell relocated to New Scotland Parish in Windham, CT and soon remarried. Mason remained behind and was looked after by the Honorable Samuel Huntington.

Cogswell graduated from Yale College as the valedictorian of the class of 1780. Thereafter he studied medicine under his brother Dr. James Cogswell, first in Stamford, CT, as Examining Surgeon of Volunteers in the Revolutionary...
War, and later in New York City. In 1789, Cogswell established his practice in Hartford. He was active in the social life of the city and was intimate with the "Hartford Wits," a coterie of leading intellectual and literary figures.

In 1812 Cogswell played an important role in the founding of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb (originally named the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons). He was spurred, no doubt, by the needs of his own daughter, Alice, who was rendered deaf and mute from an illness she suffered at age two. With Mr. Gilbert, an attorney from Hebron, CT, Cogswell ascertained the number of deaf mutes in the state, and petitioned the State Legislature for funds for a school. Several years later, funds had been secured to send Dr. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet to study at the Paris school of Abbe Sicord with the intent of opening an institute in Hartford. In 1816 he returned, along with Laurent Clerc, one of Abbe Sicord's most respected physicians. The school opened in 1817, with Alice Cogswell registered as its first pupil.

The school was a success, and many young physicians came to Hartford to learn from Dr. Cogswell. When the Yale Medical Institution was established in 1810, Cogswell was invited to take the chair of Surgery. When it became known that Nathan Smith, a medical educator of Dartmouth and Harvard, was available, Cogswell withdrew. Cogswell was instrumental in establishing the State Medical Society, and served as its Secretary, Vice-President, and President. He was also the first presiding officer of the Hopkins Medical Society, precursor of the Hartford Medical Society, organized in 1846. Cogswell was awarded the honorary degree of MD by the Connecticut Medical Society in 1810, and by Yale College in 1818.

Cogswell was an innovative surgeon, working mainly in surgical ophthalmology. He was amongst the first in the United States to operate on cataracts. Additionally, in November 1803 he was the first American surgeon to ligate the carotid artery. Cogswell was married to Mary Austin
Ledyard, only daughter of Colonel Austin Ledyard and Sarah (Sheldon) Ledyard, of Hartford. They had four daughters and one son. Mason Fitch Cogswell died of pneumonia on December 17, 1830

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**Scope and Content**

Collection consists predominantly of correspondence to and from Mason Fitch Cogswell and the account books from his surgery. Other material concerns his acting as executor for the Estate of John Sutton, and legal papers for the reclaim of monies due him. Of particular note is a lesson book of Alice Cogswell, the first pupil at the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons.

Materials are organized into five series based on content.

Series I: Correspondence consists of letters to and from Mason Fitch Cogswell, predominantly of a personal nature.

Series II: Financial records consists of two sub-series:
- Account books (predominantly business records), and
- Personal and Business Accounts (predominantly personal and household records, with some business accounting). The Account Books sub-series includes account books, ledgers, day books, and their associated indexes. Personal, household and business bills, receipts, articles of sale and promissory notes may be found in the Personal and Business Accounts sub-series.

Series III: Legal Papers consists of three sub-series.

The *Jonathan Averil Papers* consists of a grant of Power of Attorney to Jedidiah Emworth, and returns for expenses while serving as Surgeon's Mate. Emworth was authorized to collect the $30 000 owed Averil by the Government at the close of the War.
The *Estate of John Sutton* consists of bills, receipts, letters and other records concerning Cogswell's acting as Executor of the Estate of John Sutton.

*Writs* consists a facsimile of a writ served on Phinahas Miller and John C. Nightengale by their creditors, including Mason Fitch Cogswell.

Consists of bills, receipts, letters and other records concerning Cogswell's acting as Executor of the Estate of John Sutton.

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Series IV: Medical Papers

Consists of medical notes taken by Cogswell from other sources on a remedy for topical cancer and whooping cough.

Series V: Cogswell Family Papers consists of a Hymn for Mr. Flint's Ordination, April 20, 1791; an unpublished poem; a writing sample of Sarah Lloyd Cogswell; a list of household articles to be moved to Hartford; a lesson book of Alice Cogswell's work with Dr. Gallaudet.

Within each series the material is arranged chronologically.

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**Restrictions**

**Access Restrictions**

There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

**Use Restrictions**

Use of the material requires compliance with the Connecticut Historical Society's Research Center
regulations.

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Subject Headings

Personal Names

Flint, Abel, 1765-1825.

Corporate Names

Second Congregational Church (Hartford, Conn.).

Subject Headings

Physicians Connecticut Hartford.

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Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Item, Collection Title, Collection number (Box #, Folder #). Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

Processing Details

Collection was processed by Marilyn Paul-Lewis under an NHPRC grant (#89-003) in November, 1998.


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Related Material

An index of catalog cards is available to aid access to this collection. Access is through writer, recipient and date. The card catalog is located in the Research Center.

Contents:

I. Correspondence

Box  Folder
1  1  Correspondence, primarily to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1780-1784 (24 items)
1  2  Correspondence, primarily to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1785-1789 (36 items)
1  3  Correspondence, primarily to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1790-1794 (27 items)
1  4  Letters to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1795-1799 (20 items)
1  5  Letters to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1800-1804 (31 items)
1  6  Correspondence, primarily to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1805-1809 (11 items)
1  7  Letters to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1810-1814 (16 items)
1  8  Correspondence, primarily to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 1815-1830 (9 items)
1  9  Letters to Mason Fitch Cogswell. 18--? (17 items)
1  10 Correspondence, primarily to Mason Fitch Cogswell; fragments of letters 18--? (16 items)

II. Financial Records

Financial Records-- Account Books 1791-1833 25 boxes; 29 items (volumes)

Box  Folder
n/a  1  Day book B. 1791-1794
n/a  2  Day book. 1801-1802
n/a  3  Day book. 1803-1804
n/a  4  Day book. 1805-1807
Day book. 1807-1809
Day book. 1809-1812
Ledger B. (Contains separate index volume). 1797-1795 (2 items)
Account book, 1794-1801
Ledger D. (Contains separate index volume). 1793-1798 (2 items)
Ledger E. 1796-1799
Index to Ledger E. 1796-1799
Ledger F. 1802-1805
Index to Ledger F. 1802-1805
Ledger G. 1802-1805
Index to Ledger G. 1802-1805
Ledger H. 1804-1806
Index to Ledger H. 1804-1806
Ledger I. (Contains separate index volume). 1805 (2 items)
Ledger K. (Contains separate index volume). 1806-1821 (2 items)
Ledger M. 1808-1809
Ledger N. 1809-1820
Account Book, 1822-1830
Account Book, 1823-1833
Index to Account Book, 1823-1833
Account Book (pocket sized). 1828
Financial Records-- Personal and Business Accounts 1779-1830
Accounts. 1779-1789 (16 items)
Accounts. 1790-1799 (63 items)
Accounts. 1800-1804 (112 items)
Accounts. 1805-1809 (86 items)
Accounts. 1810-1814 (127 items)
Accounts. 1815-1819 (86 items)
Accounts. 1820-24 (38 items)
Accounts. [before 1830] (38 items)
Accounts. 1820-24 (38 items)
III. Legal Papers

Jonathan Averil Papers

Box  Folder
2  2  Jonathan Averil Papers. 1777-1788 (3 items)
     John Sutton Estate Papers

Box  Folder
2  3  John Sutton Estate Papers. 1781-1789 (21 items)
     Writs 1797 1 folder; 1 item

Box  Folder
2  4  Writ facsimile. 1797 (1 item)

IV. Medical Papers

Box  Folder
2  5  Remedies for cancer and whooping cough. [before 1830] (1 item)

V. Cogswell Family Papers

Box  Folder
2  6  Cogswell family papers 1791-18--? (5 items)