

WILLIAM C.C. CLAIBORNE LETTERS AND DEPOSITIONS
(Mss. 5018)
Inventory

Compiled by
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Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
Louisiana State University Libraries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

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SUMMARY

Size	0.1 linear ft. (20 items)
Geographic Locations	Louisiana; Mobile, Ala.
Inclusive Dates	1799-1846
Bulk Dates	1805-1812
Languages	English
Summary	Correspondence and other documents relating to William C.C. Claiborne's tenure as governor of Louisiana Territory. The majority are letters and depositions from John Sibley and Edward Turner describing residents' attitudes toward the U.S. Government, Spanish presence in the area, and relations with Native American tribes.
Access Restrictions	Patron use is restricted to photographic copies.
Reproduction Note	May be reproduced.
Copyright	Copyright of the original materials in this collection has expired, and they are therefore in the public domain.
Related Collections	David B. Morgan Papers, Mss. 668, 1096, 2883. Francisco L.H. Carondelet Papers, Mss. 59. Louisiana Purchase Collection, Mss. 4559. William C.C. Claiborne Letter Book, Mss. 71, 603, 965. William C.C. Claiborne Letter, Mss. 3031 & 2419.
Citation	William C.C. Claiborne Letters and Depositions, Mss. 5018, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
Stack Location(s)	Photographic copies housed at Misc:C; Originals housed in Vault 61

BIOGRAPHY/HISTORY NOTE

William C.C. (Charles Cole) Claiborne was born in Sussex County, Va., in 1775. He attended the College of William and Mary and the Richmond Academy before serving under John Beckwith, the clerk of the United State House of Representatives. After studying law for several years, Claiborne relocated to Tennessee to set up practice in 1794 and was appointed to that state's Supreme Court two years later. The following year he ran successfully for the United States House of Representatives, serving until 1801 when he was appointed governor of the Territory of Mississippi. In 1803, Claiborne oversaw the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France and served as territorial governor in New Orleans through 1812. Upon being achieving statehood, Claiborne became Louisiana's first elected governor, serving until 1816. That year he was elected to the United States Senate, but served only a short time before his death on April 4, 1817.

John Sibley was born May 19, 1757, in Sutton, Mass., the son of Timothy and Anne (Waite) Sibley. He studied medicine, served in the American Revolution as a surgeon's mate, and later opened a practice at Great Barrington, Mass. He moved to Fayetteville, N.C., and established the Fayetteville *Gazette*. In September 1802 Sibley moved without his family to Natchitoches, Louisiana. In March 1803 he made a journey up Red River and from that date became an authority on Indians of the Red River region and Spanish Texas. In March 1804 Sibley opened a correspondence with President Thomas Jefferson, who appointed him contract surgeon to the United States Army at Natchitoches, La. Late in 1804 he was appointed to the council of Governor William C. C. Claiborne. From 1805 to 1814 Sibley was Indian agent for the Orleans territory and succeeded in keeping the Indians as far west as Matagorda Bay friendly to the United States, a fact that aroused Spanish authorities against him. After his dismissal as Indian agent in 1814, he entered local politics and became a captain of militia, a parish judge, and a member of the Louisiana Senate. Sibley died on April 8, 1837.

Edward D. Turner was born in Boston, Mass., and served during the Revolutionary War under General Anthony Wayne. By 1803 Captain Turner was commandant at Fort Adams in the Mississippi Territory, and on December 9 of that year he lead a group of commissioners and 300 soldiers to New Orleans to witness the formal transfer of the Louisiana Territory to the United States. Turner was chosen to oversee the territorial border between the U.S. and Spanish Texas from the old colonial post of Natchitoches. On February 24, 1804, Claiborne presented Turner with his commission as Civil Commandant of the District of Natchitoches, where he remained until his resignation on November 30, 1805. Turner served as Natchitoches Parish judge from 1806 until 1808, then moved to Ascension Parish where took up planting and continued as a justice of the peace. Turner died October 13, 1811.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of records relating to William C.C. Claiborne immediately after the establishment of the Louisiana Territory from 1805 to 1812. The most substantial correspondence was written to Claiborne from Dr. John Sibley, a judge and U.S. Indian Agent in Natchitoches. Correspondence from Sibley throughout 1805 discusses several aspects of territorial business, including native and slave affairs, resident opinion, and political intrigue within the region. For example, in a letter from March 3, 1805, Sibley describes efforts to equip the local Native Americans for farming and to win their allegiance over the Spanish, as well as the organization of the Caddo nation and fighting and alliances among its members.

Further, Sibley addresses topics from the need to regulate weights and measures to disputes about how to handle runaway slaves, how national politics are playing out locally, and the sense of those in the “Interior of the Territory” that they are being neglected in favor of New Orleans.

At Claiborne’s request Sibley gathered sworn depositions from residents of Natchitoches who provided firsthand accounts of the Spanish in the area. These statements offer a granular account of the material life of citizens and describe conditions under French and Spanish colonial rule. For example, two affidavits forwarded by Sibley describe instances of “Spanish depredations” against citizens in which they took horses and goods. Additional affidavits record Natchitoches residents’ experiences living at and knowledge of the location of “ancient” French posts and Caddo settlements, apparently in an attempt to identify lands useful for further settlement.

In addition to the Sibley letters, the collection includes miscellaneous documents related to Claiborne’s family, a letter from Claiborne to his father recommending Gen. James Wilkinson (whom he describes as having served his country with fidelity), and two letters from Captain Edward Turner, Civil Commandant of the District of Natchitoches. Turner’s letters further illustrate the uneasy relations between the Creoles and the Americans. He reports the Creoles’ “wait and see” attitude about embracing the Americans, with them apparently hoping for the territory to be taken by the Spanish, and the role religion played in the mingling (or not) of the two populations.

The collection also contains other items relating to Claiborne’s governing mandate and his relationship to notable political and military contemporaries including Zebulon Pike, Edmund P. Gaines, and Dominick Augustin Hall. In addition to the correspondence and depositions, the collection includes pieces of documents from around 1799 with the signature of Baron de Carondelet and a deed of sale from a New Orleans slave auction in 1846.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Following are brief content descriptions of the twenty items in this collection:

Letters from John Sibley to William C.C. Claiborne:

- January 8, 1805 – Writing from Natchitoches, Sibley discusses the political representation and organization in the Red River district, political opinions of the New York Herald, and Sibley’s personal concerns that the Spanish might seize his land holdings.
- March 8, 1805 – Writing from Natchitoches, Sibley discusses at length the public whipping of escaped slaves and the subsequent reaction within the community. Sibley also describes a large meeting and war dance involving numerous tribes in the Caddo Village.
- October 14, 1805 – Writing from Natchitoches, Sibley discusses the arrival of 220 troop reinforcements and writes of forwarding resident depositions that describe “Spanish depredations” toward the populace.
- August 16, 1812. Writing from Natchitoches, Sibley sends news and offers a general assessment of the military within his area. Mostly illegible.

Depositions taken by John Sibley at Natchitoches:

- September 15, 1805 – Julian Besson of Campti recalls living among French settlers and soldiers, and their interactions with various Caddo tribes.
- September 16, 1805 – Mary Louis Brevell of Natchitoches discusses living in the “Antient Caddo Village” with other French settlers.
- October 3, 1805 – Gaspar Bodin, Leves Bodin, and Andrew Chamar of Natchitoches testify to an altercation with Spanish soldiers on their way to Opelousas that resulted in the seizure of Chamar’s best horse by the Spanish commander.
- October 4, 1805 – Thomas F. Oliver of Natchitoches provides a list of items seized by Spanish soldiers at “Bayau Pierre” en route to Natchitoches from Caddo Nation. These items include 15 heads of horses, 110 buck skins, 3 Spanish saddles, and 2 bear skins.

Letters from Captain Edward D. Turner to William C.C. Claiborne:

- April 5, 1805 – Writing from Fort Claiborne, Turner discusses his support of Claiborne in the face of attacks from political enemies. Turner also describes his intention to avoid the political arena and acquire plantation holdings.
- May 3, 1805 – Writing from Fort Claiborne, Turner discusses religious freedom in the Red River District and the inhabitants’ fear of the Spanish troops.

Claiborne Family Correspondence:

- May 19, 1807 – Letter from William C.C. Claiborne in New Orleans to his father William Claiborne in Manchester, Virginia. The younger Claiborne discusses his time being taken up by the Aaron Burr trial and hope that Burr the “traitor” is found guilty.

- January 28, 1828 – Letter from Nathaniel H. Claiborne (possibly William C.C. Claiborne's brother) in Washington D.C. to George Penn in Covington, Louisiana, discussing Penn's family and thanking them for their political support.

Notable Correspondence:

- November 15, 1805 – Letter from Edmund P. Gaines at Fort Stoddert in the District of Mobile to Claiborne discussing 12% tax that Spanish commandant is exacting from the ships passing through the Bay of Mobile.
- March 26, 1812 – Letter from Zebulon Pike in Baton Rouge to General Wade Hampton discussing troop movements and Spanish bandits.

Other Claiborne Items:

- December 29, 1805 – Unsigned and incomplete letter to Claiborne from Attakapas County, Louisiana. The letter expresses dissatisfaction with Claiborne's handling of accusations of malfeasance against the writer (possibly Judge John Bartow Prevost) and describes the precarious position of judges serving in the Louisiana Territory.
- December 2, 1807 – Certificate signed by Judge Dominick Augustin Hall. The statement on the certificate references the Burr Conspiracy to invade Mexico and indicates Claiborne's willingness to cooperate with authorities to prevent any plots against the United States.
- December 30, 1811 – Letter from Woodson Wren at Attakapas Church to Claiborne in New Orleans. Wren discusses an apparent misunderstanding between him and Claiborne over documentation from the U.S. Treasury Department.

Miscellaneous Items:

- July 6, 1846 – Sheriff's deed of sale for slave named Toussaint at auction in New Orleans to settle estate of Marie Claire Fastiaux.
- 1799 – Two pieces of documents with signature of Baron de Carondelet.

INDEX TERMS

Materials relating to these people, places, and things can be found in this collection.

Autographs (manuscripts)

Burr, Aaron, 1756-1836.

Caddo Indians.

Carondelet, Luis Héctor, barón de, 1748-1807.

Claiborne, William C.C. (William Charles Cole), 1775-1817.

Depositions.

Fort Claiborne (La.)

Fortification--Louisiana--Natchitoches Parish.

Fugitive slaves--Louisiana.

Gaines, Edmund Pendleton, 1777-1849.

Hall, Dominick Augustin, 1765-1820.

Hampton, Wade, 175-1835.

Indians of North America--Louisiana.

Letters (correspondence)

Louisiana--History--1803-1865.

Louisiana--Politics and government—1803-1865.

Louisiana--War of 1812.

Pike, Zebulon Montgomery, 1779-1813.

Sibley, John, 1757-1837.

Slaves--Louisiana.

Spain--Foreign relations--United States.

Turner, Edward D., ca. 1768-1811.

United States--Foreign relations--Spain.

CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack</u>			
<u>Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents</u>
Vault: 61	1	1	John Sibley letters and depositions, 1805
		2	Edward Turner letters, 1805
		3	Claiborne Family correspondence, 1807, 1828
		4	Notable correspondents, 1805-1812
		5	Other Claiborne items, 1805-1811
		6	Miscellaneous items, 1799, 1846
	OS		
	Folder	1	Sibley letter to Claiborne, 1812
Misc: C		1	User photocopies of collection