



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Lauri Cielo
215-732-6200 ext. 233
lcielo@hsp.org

Chew Family Papers Project Completed at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Finding Aid Now Available Online at www.hsp.org

Philadelphia, PA (September 1, 2009) — The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has completed a two-year project to process and preserve the Chew Family Papers, an extensive collection that documents the lives of the Maryland and Pennsylvania branches of the Chew family through seven generations. The project was funded through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and individual donations. The 650-page finding aid is now available on the Historical Society's Web site at www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=35.

Project Archivist Cathleen Miller will discuss the highlights of the collection at a free event at 6 p.m. October 14 at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Original documents from the Chew Family Papers will be on display. For more information about the event, visit www.hsp.org.

The focus of the Chew Family Papers collection is Benjamin Chew, who served as chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court from 1775 to 1777, his son Benjamin Jr., and his offspring. Both father and son were influential lawyers, and together they amassed large quantities of land in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. The Chew family was influential in the early republic, with extensive political connections to prominent judicial and political figures including the Penn family, presidents, members of Congress, diplomats, and others. Nearly every significant national and international event during the 18th and 19th centuries is documented in the Chews' correspondence with their friends and acquaintances.

In addition to the collection's emphasis on the Chew family and Philadelphia's elite, the papers provide a perspective on the lives of many of the Chews' slaves and servants and offer insights into family relationships, the treatment of enslaved people, women's history, health, religion, legal history, the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, politics, trade, land management and settlement, surveying, the industrialization of western New Jersey, and the growth and development of the city of Philadelphia.

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The collection is nearly 300 linear feet and is divided into 29 series. These series include the family's land holdings, legal work, the family's genealogical research, their substantial map collection, and the construction and maintenance of Cliveden, the family's summer estate and the site of the Battle of Germantown. The materials range in date from the 17th through the 20th century, but the richest documentation is on 19th-century life in the mid-Atlantic region. The collection contains business and financial records, cartographic material, correspondence, ephemera, estate inventories, legal documents, personal papers, and other materials created and collected by the Chews during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.

There are many significant records in the collection, but of special note are papers that document the settlement and westward development of Pennsylvania, containing materials for nearly every county in the Commonwealth, including surveys, deeds, correspondence, and financial records. There are comprehensive records for the Chews' plantations in Maryland and Delaware, which contain a wealth of information about the enslaved people who worked for the Chews. These materials offer a means to track family groups over time due to the meticulous inventories and correspondence that the Chews maintained.

The Chews' archives were stored at their family home, Cliveden, in Germantown until the home was donated to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1972. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania received the bulk of the Chew Papers in the 1980s, when a rough finding guide to the collection was produced; several more accessions were acquired in the 1990s and 2005. This processing project incorporated all of the earlier accessions.

For further information about this collection or about conducting research at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, visit the society's Web site at www.hsp.org.

About the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Founded in 1824 in Philadelphia, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania collects and shares the stories of Pennsylvania. It is home to some 600,000 printed items and more than 21 million manuscript and graphic items. Its unparalleled collections encompass more than 300 years of America's history—from its 17th-century origins to the contributions of its most recent immigrants. The society's remarkable holdings together with its educational programming make it one of the nation's most important special collections libraries: a center of historical documentation and study, education, and engagement.

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