



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection 426

John Mitchell
Papers

1812-1814, n.d.

1 box (6 folders), 0.33 lin. feet

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Restrictions: None

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Abstract

John Mitchell was an agent for American Prisoners of War held at Melville Island near Halifax in Nova Scotia during the War of 1812. Over the course of the war more than 8000 American prisoners were held there. Approximately 100 American prisoners died there and were buried near the prison. While many of the prisoners were from naval vessels, prisoners from American land troops were also held at the prison. It appears that Mitchell acted as the agent for all prisoners held there and there was no distinction between naval prisoners and the prisoners from the army. Mitchell previously served as the Consul of the United States to St. Jago (Santiago), Cuba.

This collection contains correspondence and information about goods purchased for the use of the American prisoners of war; it covers the years 1812 to 1814. Most of the letters in the collection are related to the naval prisoners held at Melville Island.

Scope & content

This collection of papers contains a variety of documents, including letters bills and receipts, and inventories of items purchased for the use of the prisoners at Melville Island. One letter gives an account of the provisions that the prison has run out of, and includes the ration of soap for the week, $\frac{1}{4}$ pound per man. There are also a few accounts of the capture of prisoners. This collection contains incoming correspondence; with only one of Mitchell's letters in the collection dated August 25, 1813.

There are a few letters from prisoners either requesting help with food and clothing or detailing their capture by British ships. Some of the prisoners wrote to Mitchell more than once with their requests. Abraham Simmons wrote to Mitchell three times with his requests for help. Simmons wrote about his need for clothing, which Mitchell was apparently able to help Simmons with. Simmons wrote to Mitchell a third time writing that he had received the clothing but the clothes did not fit properly and he needed \$5 or \$10 to have them altered. Many of the letters from the prisoners ask for help because of the hardship that their families were dealing with at home. There are two letters of exchange, allowing prisoners to return home included in the collection.

There are a few receipts for board for officers from the Chesapeake. There is a list of soldiers dated August 31, 1813 that were captured in Upper Canada who 'delivered themselves up as British subjects', it also includes regimental information. There are a number of reports, from March to November 1814, detailing the number of prisoners including those that are hospitalized. There is also an oath in the collection sworn by Howard and Mary Underwood attesting that their son David was born in Massachusetts. A baptismal certificate for Thomas Melzand from Marblehead Massachusetts is also included. Letters can also be found in the collection that give the name of the prisoner and the ship they were on when they were captured.

A number of American ships are mentioned in the collection including the Buckskin, the Cossack, the Robert, and the Chesapeake. One letter of interest is from Captain James Holly of the Robert. Captain Holly gives a detailed account of the capture of his ship by a British privateer. The ship was flying 'English Colours' and as it drew near the American ship an American flag was hoisted up the mast. Captain Holly's guns could not bear upon the other ship and they were boarded and captured. Some of the sailors that were captured were on American Privateers.

Subjects

United States – History – War of 1812 – Prisoners and prisons
United States – History – War of 1812 – Equipment and supplies
United States – History – War of 1812 – Naval operations
Nova Scotia – History – 1763-1867

United States. Navy – Procurement

Administrative Information

Restrictions

None.

Acquisition information

Gift of Ida C. Wilcox.

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], John Mitchell Papers (Collection 426), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Box and folder listing

Folder title	Date	Box	Folder(s)
Correspondence	1812-1814, n.d.	1	1-3
Reports concerning American prisoners of war at Melville Island prison	22 Feb-11 Nov 1814, n.d.	1	4
Bill and receipts for supplies	Nov. 1813-Dec. 1814	1	5
Miscellaneous papers concerning prisoners at Melville Island	1812-1814	1	6