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Collection 3114

William Duane
Notebooks

ca. 1822-1835
5 volumes, 0.6 lin. feet

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William Duane (1760-1835)

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Abstract

William Duane (1760-1835) was a notable journalist of the Jeffersonian era. Born in Lake Champlain, New York, Duane was educated in Ireland in the business of printing and moved to Calcutta, India, in the 1780s where he worked as an editor. He returned to America in the 1790s, and settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he worked with Benjamin Franklin Bache on the *Aurora*, one of the leading newspapers of the time. Upon Bache's death, Duane, a strong supporter of Thomas Jefferson, became the paper's sole editor and made the *Aurora* a leading voice for the Democratic-Republican Party. (Jefferson credited the paper for helping him win the presidential election of 1800.) Duane's criticisms of the Federalist Party were so strong, however, that he was twice arrested under the Alien and Sedition Acts. Once Jefferson came into office, he acquitted Duane and in 1805 made Duane a lieutenant colonel. By the War of 1812, Duane had risen to adjutant general. Prior to retiring from the *Aurora* in 1822, Duane published several works, including *American Military Library, or Compendium of the modern tactics* (1809), *An Epitome of the Arts and Sciences* (1811), and *Explanation of the plates of the system of infantry discipline, for the United States Army* (1814). William Duane died in Philadelphia in 1835.

The William Duane notebooks consist of five volumes of Duane's handwritten notes that may have been bound together for his son, William John Duane. The spines of each volume are gilt with the initials, "W. D." and numbers 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7, respectively. The entries date from about 1822 to 1835, and consist of Duane's original commentary on everything from banking and politics to religion and philosophy, as well as writings he copied from outside sources. Duane also wrote responses to book he had read, various "Letters to the Editor," and proposals for new publications.

Volume 1 contains interpretations of Bible verses, notes on mythology, and a transcript of an essay called "On the Condition of Man in Society." There is also an apparently original essay entitled "The Age of Revolution," in which Duane discussed the idea of "revolution" both in America and abroad.

The novelty of the revolution in France forms a new epocha[sic] unprecedented in human annals – its prowess, its moderation, its success alarm the coteries of self enabled men, who in so many modes and in all countries, assume superiority above the million . . . (p. 1)

Volume 2 consists mostly of miscellaneous notes on the U.S. Congress, national debts and banking, and the impeachment of Judge Samuel Chase. Duane also wrote about the histories and religions of Greece, India, and Egypt. Interestingly, Duane included his thoughts on India's sacred texts, such as the *Vedas* and the *Ramayana*, which would not have been available in English at the time Duane resided in that country.

Volume 3 is entirely devoted to Duane's "Notes on political economy, etc." Here Duane synthesized several publications on the subject, Richard Whatley's *Elements of Logic* (n.d.), J. R. Edmonds's *Practical, Moral, and Political Economy* (1828), and Henry Parnell's *Observations on Paper Money and Banking* (1827), and then offered his own remarks on each author's work. For instance, on Whatley's explanation of "value" in terms of political economy, Duane offered the following commentary:

The author is . . . vague and incoherent . . . the capacity for exchange is so far as it goes for a definition; but the word Value is no other than Valor, which is virtue. The virtue of sufficiency and adequacy to fulfill the purposes of exchange, and this is no more than the abstract character of *relation* in exchange of necessary things. (p. 2)

Volume 4 (numbered "6") contains further notes on banking, although there are also Duane's notes on education, from and on John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and the history of the United States.

In the final book, Volume 5 (numbered "7"), are more notes on banking and money, only here Duane focused on Italian authors such as sixteenth-century Italian economists Antonio Serra, Gasparo Scaruffi, and Bernardo Davangati, as well as eighteenth-century Italian political economist Carlo Antonia Broggia. There are also additional notes on history, mythology, and reviews of works by authors such as lawyer Sir William Bentham and Sir William Jones, an English philologist.

Subjects

- Essays – Egypt – History
- Essays – Greece – History
- Essays – India – History and religion
- Essays – United States – Banking
- Essays – United States – Economics
- Essays – United States – History
- Essays – United States – Politics
- Journals (notebooks)

Duane, William, 1760-1835

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

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