



The Historical  
Society of  
Pennsylvania

Collection 1691

**John W. Rulon (1799-1872)**  
**Papers**

**1807-1861 (bulk 1834-1839)**  
**12 boxes, 4 vols., 5 lin. feet**

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**Processing Completed:** August 2003

**Sponsor:** Processing made possible by a grant from the  
National Endowment for the Humanities.

**Restrictions:** None

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**Abstract**

John W. Rulon was a merchant based in Philadelphia from the late 1820s through the 1860s. He began his career as a storekeeper, then became a merchant and was later a supercargo (an officer who traveled on merchant ships overseeing the cargo). After several years of traveling between Philadelphia and Calcutta as a supercargo and importer-exporter and residing in Calcutta for periods of time, Rulon returned to Philadelphia and was later joined by his sons in the mercantile business as the John W. Rulon and Sons Company.

This collection primarily documents Rulon's business affairs as an importer-exporter between 1834 and 1839. The collection includes correspondence, bills and receipts, shipping records, private accounts, and miscellaneous materials.

**Background note**

John W. Rulon was a Philadelphia-based merchant and importer-exporter from the 1820s through the 1860s. He was born on April 4, 1799, the second of two children of Benjamin and Sarah (West) Rulon. John W. Rulon began his career as a storekeeper in 1822 at 1 South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Philadelphia and by 1829 was a supercargo (an officer who traveled on merchant ships overseeing the cargo). Around that time, Rulon and his cousin Samuel W. Archer began an import-export enterprise based in Philadelphia and Calcutta. Archer was the son of merchant Samuel Archer and brother of Joseph Archer, who spent considerable time importing and exporting goods from Canton. After the partnership between Rulon and Archer ended, Rulon and his uncle continued to correspond about business matters.

Shortly after this first partnership ended, Rulon continued as an importer-exporter with Thomas Richards as his new partner. This partnership lasted until approximately 1840. After this time, Rulon remained in Philadelphia as a merchant and eventually went into business with his sons. The John W. Rulon & Sons Company operated from 1851 to 1909. It is unclear when or if Rulon retired from the company. John Rulon died of pneumonia December 16, 1872.

## Scope & content

This collection contains John W. Rulon's correspondence and financial records, as well as those of several individuals associated with his business ventures. The collection relates almost entirely to business. The bulk of the collection concerns the businesses of Rulon & Archer and Rulon & Richards, as well as the individual business affairs of John W. Rulon, Thomas Richards, Samuel Archer, and Joseph Archer. The correspondence and financial transactions illustrate the business affairs that transpired between Rulon and his partners. Furthermore, these papers show the dynamic between these men and their associates and agents, such as George Wildes, William Wetmore, Morrison Cryder, Charles Huffnagle, and Richard Oakford. In one such transaction, Rulon purchased a quantity of goods in Calcutta that Wildes signed for in London and then proceeded to send to Philadelphia.

Rulon and his associates were involved in the trade of silk, indigo, hides, books, and various other sundry goods. In addition to these items, Rulon and his partners were also involved in the trade and exhibition of wild animals. Both the *Correspondence* and *Financial* series contain papers relevant to these subjects.

The collection also provides insight into the shipping industry in general. The *Financial* series contains information on the goods shipped as well as shipping expenses, and also contains the inventories and expenses involved with running a ship on an overseas voyage. *Correspondence* provides examples of some preparations and concerns that could arise before or after a ship set sail. One such problem was addressed in an exchange between a ship's captain and Rulon over who should shoulder the responsibility of securing provisions for newly added passengers.

The *Miscellaneous* series contains a variety of papers, including an anonymous travel journal and excerpts and receipts for books from Germany.

## Overview of arrangement

Series I	Correspondence, 1815-1861, n.d.	5 boxes, 1 vol.
Series II	Financial, 1807-1842	6 boxes + 10 folders, 3 vols.
	a. Sales, 1831-1840, n.d.	1 box
	b. Invoices, 1815-1839, n.d.	1 box, 1 vol.
	c. Accounts current, 1820-1842, n.d.	1 box, 1 vol.
	d. Bills and receipts, 1807-1842, n.d.	2 boxes
	e. Ships and shipping, 1816-1841, n.d.	1 box + 3 folders, 1 vol.
	f. Private accounts, 1828-1841	7 folders
	g. Miscellaneous financial, 1811-1841	6 folders
Series III	Miscellaneous, 1826-1861, n.d.	4 folders

## Series description

### Series 1. Correspondence, 1815-1861 (Boxes 1-5)

This series primarily consists of letters written to and from John Rulon and his business associates. The majority of the material dates from 1834 to 1839 and is almost exclusively business-related, with several letters containing items such as prices current, invoices, and accounts.

The papers begin with letters addressed “Dear Cousin” written in an unknown hand. It is unclear to whom the letters are addressed. Letters from 1816 to 1828 are mostly addressed to Joseph Archer and are from his father, Samuel. Nathan Dunn, a prominent figure in the Philadelphia-China trade, is mentioned in a letter that addresses matters of trade in Canton, where Joseph later resided as an importer-exporter. Dunn’s name periodically appears throughout the collection.

John Rulon’s name first appears in a will written by his mother Sarah in 1822, but remains absent from the letters until a letter of agreement signed by Rulon, his cousins Joseph and Samuel W Archer, and George Wildes on December 12, 1828. Beginning in April 1829, Rulon and Samuel W. Archer received mail in Calcutta, where they were residing, and thus began Rulon’s business ventures overseas. From 1829 to 1833 the letters indicate that Rulon traveled back and forth between Calcutta and Philadelphia. In late 1833, for reasons unknown, the partnership with Samuel W. Archer ended. Archer’s name does not appear again until 1837 when he was in Canton, where his brother Joseph ran his enterprise.

In January 1834, Rulon continued his business with Thomas Richards as his new partner. For the next few years, until 1838, there was much correspondence between Rulon and Richards and their business associates, including Joseph and Samuel Archer, Charles Huffnagle, Morrison Cryder, William Wetmore, and Richard Oakford. In addition, there is correspondence between Rulon, Samuel Archer, and their agent in Calcutta, Baboo Ram Ruten. These men did not all correspond directly with one another, but formed a web of correspondence between Calcutta, Philadelphia, Canton, and London.

Rulon’s enterprises with Archer and Richards centered on the trade of goods between Calcutta and Philadelphia, including silk, hides, indigo, and books. In addition to dealing with sundry goods, Rulon was also involved the trade of exotic animals. Several letters mention the purchase, importation, care, and exhibition of rhinoceroses, tigers, elephants, and snakes. In a letter of March 20, 1835, from Charles Huffnagle to Rulon & Richards, Huffnagle mentioned the “very fine tiger” left in his care to be shipped for Rulon & Richards. He also provided details on the prices of rhinoceroses and the bargain he procured for shipping one of them. Following the account of the animals, Huffnagle continued by mentioning indigo accounts that he described as “shocking” and told of an opium clipper lost on Britany Island.

Also from this period are letters to and from the captains of various vessels used by Rulon & Richards, including the *Margaret*, *Liberty*, *Washington*, and *Gardiner*. Although the majority of these letters deal with business matters relating to Rulon & Richards, they also provide insight into the shipping business in general and complement the shipping documents included in subseries 2e. Of interest is a January 1835 exchange between Captain Andrew Davis and Rulon & Richards concerning the provisions for passengers on an upcoming voyage to Philadelphia. Also included in this exchange are references to the shipping of animals.

The correspondence begins to taper off in 1839 and ends in 1861. Included in this section is John Rulon's Letterbook of 1844. Only one piece is dated beyond 1844; a letter from 1861 to a German bookseller in Philadelphia. The relationship between Rulon and the bookseller is not evident. The *Miscellaneous* series also includes a number of papers from a German bookseller during this period.

Although the correspondence is primarily related to the businesses of Rulon, Richards, and the Archers, some of the letters provide insight into the daily lives of the individuals. In a letter dated July 16, 1822, Joseph Archer's friend George Greene wrote about jokes he exchanged with a pair of ladies whose names, as he stated, he chose not to mention. There is also a letter of 1838 in which Rulon provided instructions about giving away his dog Ginger if the dog had not yet found a new home.

## **Series 2. Financial, 1807-1840, n.d. (Boxes 6-12)**

### a. Sales, 1831-1840, n.d.

This subseries contains the records of the sales of goods for Rulon, Archer, and Richards as sold either by consignment overseas or through auction in Calcutta. Goods include cloth, silk, hides, indigo, and books. In the early 1830s George Wildes, whose name also appears in *Correspondence*, signed for the goods that were received in London. Other goods were often sent to Philadelphia.

### b. Invoices, 1815-1839, n.d.

These invoices are for goods shipped to and from various ports: mainly Calcutta, Philadelphia, Canton, Liverpool, and London. The invoices are for various items, including cloth and indigo. Included with these individual invoices are bound lists containing invoices and inventories of goods shipped. Several invoices and volumes are for transactions of Nathan Dunn. There are several papers and volumes that illustrate the movement of goods from Joseph Archer in Canton to Richard Oakford in Liverpool to Samuel Archer in Philadelphia. Also included is an invoice from 1839 for one "big" and one "little" rhinoceros. Included in this section is a General Invoice Book of John Rulon, dated 1833.

### c. Accounts current, 1820-1842, n.d.

The accounts current in this subseries are primarily for Rulon and Richards. They include their accounts with various individuals and firms. Included with the

individual papers are multi-paged accounts current and a one volume account ledger from 1823 to 1825.

d. Bills and receipts, 1807-1842.

This subseries contains papers concerning purchases or sales of various items and services, mostly for Rulon & Richards while in Calcutta, including receipts for rent, newspaper subscriptions, and medicinal products. Earlier items offer a look at the affairs of Benjamin Rulon and Isaac Archer. Benjamin was John Rulon's father, but the relationship between Isaac and Samuel Archer is unclear.

e. Ships and shipping, 1816-1841, n.d.

The papers in this subseries relate to the ships and captains placed under the employ of Rulon and Richards, in addition to papers on shipping in general. The ships include the *Washington*, *Liberty*, *Margaret*, *Treaty*, *Gardiner*, and *Hopewell*. Ships' captains include Davis, Taylor, and Thurber, as well as First Officer Thompson. The papers include disbursements, port charges, customs papers, cargo inventories, weights and measures, table expenses, bills of lading, insurance papers, and account sales. There is a volume that lists the cargo of a 1837 voyage of the *Washington*. Also included is a trade agreement from 1830 between the United States and the Island of Mauritius that outlines rules and regulations of exchange between the two governments.

f. Private accounts, 1829-1841.

This subseries concerns the private accounts of John Rulon and Thomas Richards and includes one item each for Samuel and Joseph Archer. The majority of the items are general accounts that include daily expenses incurred while residing in Calcutta. In addition to these daily accounts, Rulon's private accounts include a bankbook, a buggy and horse account, a postage book, and house expense books.

g. Miscellaneous financial, 1811-1840.

Papers in this subseries include a daybook of Rulon & Archer, 1830-1832, and various papers relating to trade, including rates of commission, comparative statements, linguists' reports, and prices current (some of which were sent from Canton by William Wetmore). Also found in this section beginning in 1840 are several orders for "matts," which were a type of floor covering. The orders, which include diagrams, do not specify whether Rulon manufactured, supplied, or installed them. Lastly, there is a folder containing a few legal papers. These include an estate settlement concerning the firm of Benjamin Rulon and Dobel Baker and a paper placing Job Rulon, son of Nathaniel Rulon, under the guardianship of Benjamin. There is also a fire insurance policy for warehouse space used by Rulon.

### Series 3. Miscellaneous (Box 12)

This subseries includes a journal of unknown authorship containing thoughts on religion and an account of a voyage that departed Philadelphia on October 8, 1826, and ended on September 7, 1827. Additional entries are made for 1830 and 1836. Other items include wrappers, an equation written out to determine interest accrued,

and papers used for practicing writing. This series also contains pages of books printed in German and accompanying receipts from Leipzig.

## Separation Report

None.

## Related materials

Nathan Dunn letterbook, Marine Historical Association, Mystic, Conn. [microfilm available at the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.]. Nathan Dunn was a Philadelphian who was involved in the China trade. He occasionally conducted business with John Rulon and Samuel and Joseph Archer.

## Bibliography

Goldstein, Jonathan. *Philadelphia and the China Trade: Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 1978.

Lee, Jean Gordon. *Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1784-1844*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1984.

## Subjects

Captive wild animals  
China – Commerce – United States – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
India – Commerce – United States – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
International trade – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Merchants – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Merchants – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Shipping – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Ship captains  
Ships – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Trading companies – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
United States – Commerce – China – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
United States – Commerce – India – 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Wholesale trade – 19<sup>th</sup> century

Archer, Joseph  
Archer, Samuel  
Archer, Samuel W.  
Dunn, Nathan, 1782-1844  
Ram Rutten, Baboo  
Richards, Thomas  
Rulon, John W., 1799-1872

John W. Rulon and Sons Company  
Rulon & Archer  
Rulon & Richards



## **Administrative Information**

### **Restrictions**

The collection is open for research.

### **Acquisition information**

Gift of William Coles Jr., 1951.

### **Alternative format**

None.

### **Preferred citation**

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], John W. Rulon Papers (Collection 1691), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **Processing note**

Processing made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Much of the collection was affected by mold and has been cleaned and aspirated.

## Box and folder listing

### Series 1. Correspondence.

Folder title	Date	Box	Folder
Correspondence	1815-1819	1	1
Correspondence	1820	1	2
Correspondence	1822-1824, 1828	1	3
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	January-June 1829	1	4
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	July-December 1829	1	5
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	January-April 1830	1	6
Correspondence	May-December 1830	1	7
Correspondence	1831	1	8
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	1832	1	9
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	1833	1	10
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	1834	1	11
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	January 1835	1	12
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	February-March 1835	1	13
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	April-May 1835	1	14
Correspondence	June 1835	2	1
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	July 2-25, 1835	2	2
Correspondence	July 27-31, 1835	2	3
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	August 1835	2	4
Correspondence	September 1835	2	5
Correspondence	October 1835	2	6
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	November 1835	2	7
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	December 1835	2	8
Correspondence	January 1836	2	9

Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	February-April 1836	2	10
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	May-June 1836	2	11
Correspondence	July 1836	2	12
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	August 1836	2	13
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	September 1836	2	14
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	October 1836	3	1
Correspondence	November 1836	3	2
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	December 1836	3	3
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	January-February 1837	3	4
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	March 1837	3	5
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	April 1837	3	6
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	May 1837	3	7
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	June 1-20 1837	3	8
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	June 21-29, 1837	3	9
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	July 1-20, 1837	3	10
Correspondence	July 24-31, 1837	3	11
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	August 1837	3	12
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	September 1837	3	13
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	October 9-17, 1837	3	14
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	October 18-27, 1837	3	15
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	November 3-16, 1837	4	1
Correspondence	November 17, 1837	4	2
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	November 18-29, 1837	4	3
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	December 1837	4	4
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	January 4-13, 1838	4	5

Correspondence	January 17-24, 1838	4	6
Correspondence	February 1838	4	7
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	March 1-16, 1838	4	8
Correspondence	March 17-27, 1838	4	9
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	April-May 1838	4	10
Correspondence	June-July 1838	4	11
Correspondence	August-September 1838	4	12
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	October-December 1838	4	13
Correspondence	January-April 1839	4	14
Correspondence	May-June 1839	5	1
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	July-December 1839	5	2
Correspondence	1840	5	3
Correspondence	1841	5	4
Correspondence	1843	5	5
Letterbook [Items cleaned for mold]	1844	vol. 1	
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	1844, 1861	5	6
Correspondence [Items cleaned for mold]	n.d.	5	7

**Series 2. Financial. a. Sales**

Folder title	Date	Box	Folder
Sales [Items cleaned for mold]	1831-1832	6	1
Sales	1833	6	2
Sales	1834	6	3
Sales [Items cleaned for mold]	1835	6	4
Sales [Items cleaned for mold]	1836	6	5
Sales	1837	6	6
Sales	January 1837	6	7
Sales [Items cleaned for mold]	February-June 1837	6	8
Sales	July-September 1837	6	9
Sales	October-December 1837	6	10
Sales [Items cleaned for mold]	January-March 1838	6	11

Sales	April-December 1838	6	12
Sales	1839	6	13
Sales	1840	6	14
Sales [Items cleaned for mold]	n.d.	6	15

**Series 2. Financial. b. Invoices**

<b>Folder title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Invoices	1815-1832	7	1
Invoices [Items cleaned for mold]	January-June 10, 1833	7	2
Invoices	June 11, 1833	7	3
Invoices	July-August 1833	7	4
Invoices	September-December 1833	7	5
General invoice book	1833	vol. 2	
Invoices	1834	7	6
Invoices	January 8, 1834	7	7
Invoices	1835	7	8
Invoices	1836	7	9
Invoices	1837	7	10
Invoices	1838, 1839	7	11
Invoices	n.d.	7	12

**Series 2. Financial. c. Accounts current**

<b>Folder title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Accounts current	1820, 1830-1832	8	1
Accounts current [Items cleaned for mold]	1833	8	2
Accounts current [Items cleaned for mold]	1834	8	3
Accounts current	1835	8	4
Accounts current	1836	8	5
Accounts current	1837	8	6
Accounts current	1837	8	7
Accounts current	1838	8	8
Accounts current	1839	8	9
Accounts current	1839, 1840, 1842	8	10
Accounts current	n.d.	8	11
General account ledger [Items cleaned for mold]	1823-1825	vol. 3	

**Series 2. Financial. d. Bills and receipts**

<b>Folder title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Bills and receipts	1807-1832	9	1
Bills and receipts [Items cleaned for mold]	1833	9	2
Bills and receipts [Items cleaned for mold]	January-April 1834	9	3
Bills and receipts	May-August 1834	9	4
Bills and receipts [Items cleaned for mold]	September-December 1834; n.d.	9	5
Bills and receipts	January-July 1835	9	6
Bills and receipts	August-December 1835	9	7
Animal exhibition receipts	1835	9	8
Bills and receipts	1836	9	9
Bills and receipts [Items cleaned for mold]	February-July 1837	9	10
Bills and receipts	August-September 1837	9	11
Bills and receipts	October-December 1837	9	12
Bills and receipts	January-March 1838	10	1
Bills and receipts	April 1838	10	2
Bills and receipts	May 1838	10	3
Bills and receipts	June-July 1838	10	4
Bills and receipts	August-October 1838	10	5
Bills and receipts	November-December 1838	10	6
Subscriptions and rent	1838	10	7
Bills and receipts	January-February 1839	10	8
Bills and receipts	March-June 1839	10	9
Bills and receipts	July-October 1839	10	10
Bills and receipts	November-December 1839	10	11
Subscriptions and rent	1839	10	12
Bills and receipts	1840, 1841-1842	10	13
Bills and receipts [Items cleaned for mold]	n.d.	10	14

**Series 2. Financial. e. Ships and shipping**

<b>Folder title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Ships and shipping	1816, 1820, 1830	11	1
Ships and shipping	1831, 1833	11	2
Ships and shipping	1833	11	3
Ships and shipping [Items cleaned for mold]	1834	11	4

Ships and shipping	1834	11	5
Ships and shipping	1835	11	6
Ships and shipping	1836	11	7
Ships and shipping	1837	11	8
Ships and shipping	1837	11	9
Ships and shipping	1837	11	10
Export cargo of <i>Washington</i>	1837	vol. 4	
Ships and shipping	1838	11	11
Ships and shipping	1839	11	12
Ships and shipping	1839	11	13
Ships and shipping	1839	11	14
Ships and shipping	1839	11	15
Ships and shipping	1840	12	1
Ships and shipping	1841	12	2
Ships and shipping	n.d.	12	3

**Series 2. Financial. f. Private accounts**

Folder title	Date	Box	Folder
Private accounts [Items cleaned for mold]	1828-1829, 1833	12	4
Private accounts	1834-1835	12	5
Private accounts	1835-1836	12	6
Private accounts	1836-1838	12	7
Private accounts	1841	12	8
Private accounts	n.d.	12	9
Canton account book	1835-1838	12	10

**Series 2. Financial. g. Miscellaneous Financial**

Folder title	Date	Box	Folder
Rulon & Archer daybook [Items cleaned for mold]	1830-1832	12	11
Rulon memo book	1833-1834	12	12
Rates and prices	1833-1838	12	13
Legal	1811-1841	12	14
Matt orders	1840, n.d.	12	15
Miscellaneous [Items cleaned for mold]	n.d.	12	16

**Series 3. Miscellaneous.**

<b>Folder title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Journal	1826-1836	12	17
Excerpts and receipts for German books	1861, n.d.	12	18
Leather book cover	n.d.	12	19
Miscellaneous	n.d.	12	20