



Historical Society
of Pennsylvania

Bank of North America records (collection 1543)

1694-1939

DRAFT FINDING AID AND PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE INVENTORY

Note: About half of the collection is still receiving conservation treatment and is not yet available to researchers.

This inventory will be superseded by a finished finding aid in 2015.

March 4, 2014

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Abstract

The Bank of North America was the first chartered bank in the United States, created by the Second Continental Congress in 1781. It was established primarily to aid Congress in providing supplies and money for the continuation of the Revolutionary War. In 1916 the bank bought the assets of the National Bank of the Northern Liberties; in 1923 it merged with the Commercial Trust Company to form the Bank of North America and Trust Company; six years later the merged institution was itself absorbed by the Pennsylvania Company.

The minute books are a complete run from the very beginning of the bank until its merger with the Commercial Trust Company in 1923, with brief records of meetings of the Board of Directors and some of meetings of stockholders.

The loose documents (housed in boxes, as opposed to bound in volumes) include formal bank communications, memoranda, announcements, and copies of letters, financial statements, and the like. One of the most interesting documents is a long report from the Joint Committee of the Philadelphia banks dated April 13, 1816, recommending that specie payments be resumed as soon as the Bank of the United States commenced giving discounts, that each bank pay out its own notes only (except those for less than \$10), and that the banks refrain from an immediate reduction of discounts. The boxed materials also include many portraits of bank presidents and other officials, as well as portraits of American political and war heroes. These include Robert Morris and the first seven presidents of the bank: Thomas Willing, John Nixon, John Morton, Henry Nixon, John Richardson, James Dixon, and Thomas Smith.

Miscellaneous items include: deeds of sundry lands contracted for in 1793 and 1794 by Robert Morris, John Nicholson, and James Greenleaf, totaling over 3.5 million acres in Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky, at an average price of over a shilling an acre; the letter book of John Nixon, Philadelphia merchant; checkbooks and bank books of individuals who had accounts at BNA; a scrapbook, 1904-1920; unclassified books and pamphlets on finance; and an extra-illustrated, three-volume folio edition of Lawrence Lewis' *History of the Bank of North America*.

[Some of the above information was taken from McClurkin, A.J. "The Bank of North America and the Financial History of Philadelphia," *P.M.H.B.*, 64 (1940).]

Historical Note

The Bank of North America was founded in late 1781 by the United States Congress and Robert Morris, who had recently been elected by Congress to the newly created post of Superintendent of Finance of the United States. Founded to fund the Revolutionary War, the bank received a charter from both

Congress and the State of Pennsylvania. It began operations in January 1782 on Chestnut Street, as the first bank with a national charter, and superseded the Pennsylvania Bank, which was founded in 1780.

By April 1783, the bank had become a private institution after Robert Morris gave it the last of the government owned shares. The following year, the bank participated in the first bank merger in United States history when it merged shareholder bases with the proposed Bank of Pennsylvania (and the Bank of Pennsylvania ceased to operate as a separate institution).

In 1785 Pennsylvania revoked its state charter in a political fight that pitted farmers from the western portion of the state against wealthier merchants and businessmen from the east. After the Pennsylvania charter was revoked the bank asked for and received a state charter from Delaware, but from 1785 to 1787 it operated in Pennsylvania without a charter from that state. In March 1787, the Pennsylvania state charter was finally revived for another fourteen years, and from this point on, charter renewals were more easily acquired.

The Bank of North America continued to operate through the 19th century. In 1863 the National Bank Act restarted the national charter system, and the First National Bank of Pennsylvania received charter #1. In 1864, the Bank of North America received a new national charter under this system, retaining its original name, and thus becoming one of the few national banks without the word "national" in its name.

In 1923, the Bank of North America merged with the Commercial Trust Company. Seven years later, in 1929, it merged with the Pennsylvania Company for Insurances on Lives and Granting Annuities and changed its name to the Bank of North America and Trust Company. This new institution then became the First Pennsylvania Banking and Trust Company when it merged with the First National Bank of Philadelphia in 1955. This institution grew into Corestates, which was acquired by First Union in 1998. First Union acquired Wachovia Bank and began operating under the Wachovia name in 2001, and Wachovia was taken over by Wells Fargo in 2008.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains the records of the Bank of North America, spanning 1694-1939, although the bulk of the materials are from 1782-1929, when the bank was in operation under its original name.

The materials in this collection are divided into fifteen series based on subject. This arrangement is based on a published inventory of the collection: "Summary of the Bank of North America Records," by

A. J. McClurkin, in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Jan., 1940), pp. 89-96. Two series were added to McClurkin's arrangement: **Series XII: Merged banks and other institutions** and **Series XIII: Correspondence**. His series of "documents" was removed in favor of placing unbound materials intellectually with related bound volumes, so most series contain both bound and unbound items. Items that document the administration of the bank can be found throughout the collection, but mostly in **Series I: Meeting minutes**, **Series VII: Legal matters**, **Series XIII: Correspondence**, and **Series XIV: Miscellaneous**. See individual series descriptions below for more information about the administrative materials in each series.

The original titles of the volumes have been kept when they do not obscure understanding of the content.

Much of the information in this scope and contents note is taken from A. J. McClurkin's "Summary of the Bank of North America Records" (cited above). For a more detailed description of collection content, see that article, although please be aware that it contains information not also found in this finding aid and may no longer be accurate.

Series I: Meeting minutes

This series contains both bound and unbound meeting minutes and drafts from the Board of Directors and the stockholders of the bank. It is arranged chronologically. The series spans from 1781-1923 and thus covers the development of the bank from its founding until its merger with the Commercial Trust Company. From 1782 until 1792 Board of Directors meetings were held irregularly, but beginning in 1792 they met twice a week. After 1904 the meeting frequency dropped to once a week. Meeting minutes often contain only the date of the meeting and a list of attendees, and when decisions are recorded they usually lack any description of conversation or debate. The minute books do contain, however, information about loans to government agencies, real estate holdings (including those of James Wilson and Robert Morris), charter renewals and extensions (also see **Series VII: Legal matters** for more about the bank's charter), and the board's reaction to various economic panics. Minutes from a meeting in the second week of January every year document the annual organization meeting and include a list of the newly elected directors and officers. Researchers may also find the minutes from the semi-annual declaration of dividends to be useful. These minutes typically include a statement of profits and losses for the past six months and sometimes include an analysis of the general condition of the bank's loans and investments.

Stockholders meeting minutes after 1786 contain little other than the election of directors and dividend meetings, and dividend meetings stop being recorded in 1800. Unbound stockholders meeting minutes are mostly concerned with issues surrounding the bank's charter.

Series II: Journals and memorandum books

This series is arranged alphabetically and then chronologically. It contains a single cashier's memorandum book and seven journals, which together span 1784-1923. The memorandum book contains handwritten notes about bank transactions and information about overdue debts. After 1804, however, the notes drop off and the memorandum book becomes mostly correspondence with the bank's solicitor. Please note that this cashier's memorandum book has different content from the cashier's notebooks in **Series VI: Daily records of the clerks**; the latter contain only arithmetic, while the memorandum book contains text notes about transactions. The journals contain information about debits and credits to sundry accounts, including dividend payments, real estate values, and debts. The quantity and quality of information in the journals declines after 1873.

Series III: Ledgers

The ledgers in this series are arranged chronologically and cover account transactions from the founding of the bank in 1782 through 1850. The accounts in these volumes are arranged alphabetically, although due to the format of these records, accounts added later in the year were added wherever there was room, not necessarily under the correct letter of the alphabet. Researchers looking for a specific account should check all volumes from the appropriate year. Before May 11, 1824, ledgers included not only personal and business accounts, but also the accounts of "banks with which the Bank of North America maintained correspondent relationships" (McClurkin, 92). After that date, these accounts were recorded in the General Ledgers.

Series IV: General ledgers

The general ledgers are arranged chronologically and span from 1791 to 1870, although some ledgers are missing and so not all years within that span are represented. These volumes provide an overview of the bank's activities, including discounted bills and notes, bills of exchange, loans, surpluses, profit and loss, and the totals from individual depositors. After May 1824 they also include accounts with other banks. The appendix volume (1841-1914) contains primarily information about real estate, but does include other records of the bank's activities, like stocks, suspended debts, and post notes from the Bank of North America's claim against the second Bank of the United States.

Series V: State of the bank

These volumes are arranged chronologically and date from the bank's founding in 1782 through July 1849, although there is only one volume from 1782 and then the series picks back up with records from 1792. Statements were compiled twice a week. This series is an excellent resource for researchers interested in general statistical information about the bank during the time period covered.

Series VI: Daily records of the clerks

This series is the largest in the collection and spans from 1782 to 1866. Volumes are arranged alphabetically by subject or title and then chronologically. The daily records of the clerks include any volume in which bank employees recorded transactions which occurred on a daily and/or recurring basis, which covers a wide variety of material. All groups of volumes are incomplete and no one set of records documents the entire history of the bank. Within the sets of volumes, however, researchers can find detailed information about bank transactions and accounts and items from this series can provide a complete picture of bank transactions when used in conjunction with other volumes, especially the ledgers. The date coverage of these volumes may overlap, due to the same kinds of volumes being kept by different clerks during the same period of time.

Series VII: Dividends and stocks

This series is arranged alphabetically by title and then chronologically. Dividend records span from 1783 through 1918, and the stock records cover 1782 through 1923. Dividend books record dividends paid to shareholders, usually twice a year in January and July. Stock records include stock certificates, ledgers, receipts, sales, and transfers. Ledgers, receipts, and sales contain the same kind of information about stock purchases, but with slight variations. To reflect those variations, the original names of the volumes have been kept. Transfer volumes document the movement of stocks between people and are usually printed forms filled in by hand, although the information contained may vary slightly from year to year.

Series VIII: Legal matters

This series contains legal materials relating to the bank's charter, incorporation, protests, and legal suits. These materials are arranged alphabetically by subject or title and span from 1784 to 1922. The earliest materials in this series document the incorporation of the bank and the attempts to revoke its state charter in 1786. This series also includes protested bank notes, reports and correspondence on matters under the care of bank solicitors, and charter renewals and extensions.

Series IX: Real estate

The real estate series is arranged alphabetically by subject or document type. This series dates from 1694 to 1921. A good portion of this material documents the early development of Philadelphia, specifically land on Chestnut Street which frequently changed hands but belonged to the Bank of North America by the mid-1800s. Also of note from this early material is a 1766 survey warrant from John Penn to Henry Williams (box 2, folder 37), a copy of a request for a survey of land in Philadelphia by William Penn for Richard Wall (box 2, folder 38), and a 1694 deed for property in Philadelphia for John Goodson (oversize 1). In general, the materials in this series relate mostly to Philadelphia property, but

the land books contain records of lands held by the bank elsewhere in Pennsylvania and in other states, including Georgia and Virginia. "Contracts" (volume 652) contains deeds for lands contracted for in Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky, by Robert Morris, John Nicholson, and James Greenleaf in 1793 and 1794.

Series X: Firm books

The firm books in this collection span from 1782 to 1920 and are arranged chronologically. They contain specimen signatures from account holders.

Series XI: Vault deposit ledgers

The vault deposit ledgers in this collection date from 1792 through 1881. The entries in the ledgers are chronological and include a description of the items deposited in the vault, along with the date and time, and the signature of the depositor. Many volumes also contain related loose documents, like letters from the vault owners vouching for the person depositing items in their vault or allowing a third party to remove an item.

Series XII: Merged banks and other institutions

This series contains a variety of records from institutions that the Bank of North America had a financial interest in or that merged into it at some point. This series is arranged alphabetically by institution name and dates from 1811 to 1920. There is a good deal of material from banks in Kentucky, into which the Bank of North America had invested a considerable amount of money. This series also documents the problems surrounding the Everett Iron Company and its property. John H. Watt, a cashier at the Bank of North America, was also a trustee of the Everett Iron Company and as such was involved in many of the attempts to resolve back payments owed on the property. There are also 19th century records from the Pennsylvania Company for Insurances on Lives and Granting Annuities, which merged with the Bank of North America in 1929.

Series XIII: Correspondence

The correspondence series is a mix of letter books and unbound materials. The original arrangement of the unbound materials was kept, and this series is arranged alphabetically by subject (keeping original folder titles) or by name of correspondent. Whenever possible, large groups of material all relating to the same correspondent or subject were placed in their own folder. This series dates from 1785 to 1925. Researchers may be especially interested in the letter book covering the early days of the bank (volume 642), a letter book kept by John Nixon and representing his career as a merchant (volume 643) and the

letters to and from E. Pusey Passmore, president of the bank beginning in 1920 (box 6, folders 7-10). Correspondence folders are mostly letters, but they do also include other items found with the letters, such as wills, legal judgments, checks, notes, and other financial information.

Series XIV: Miscellaneous

The miscellaneous series is arranged alphabetically by subject or title and dates from 1733 to 1939. The materials in this series are varied and include some financial documentation, artifacts, depositors' checks, reports on various subjects, newspapers, and other ephemera. Of special note are the personal account books, kept by individuals who held accounts with the Bank of North America. These people include Maria Josefa Espinosa de Cuesta (a Mexican woman married to a Peruvian husband who lived in Philadelphia and whose brothers-in-law ran a shipping business), Robert and Jesse Waln (merchants), and Samuel George Morton (physician and natural scientist). One anonymous account book (box 11, folder 5) contains payments to and from individuals and businesses in the Philadelphia printing industry. There are also a few items that document important moments in early Pennsylvania history, like the 1733 report from a meeting of a committee appointed by the sons of William Penn to determine the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania (box 9, folder 18). Also of note is a list of seed specimens sent by botanist Adriaan van Royen (1704-1779) to the Earl of Derby. Researchers may also be interested in items that document or relate to the bank's history, like the 1785 "Address to the Assembly of Pennsylvania on the Abolition of the Bank of North America" (volume 649) and a three volume, extra-illustrated edition of Lawrence Lewis' *History of the Bank of North America* published in 1888. Financial materials include the "black book" (volume 652) and "alphabetical account book" (volume 650), both of which are financial records of indeterminate purpose.

Series XV: Graphic materials

The graphic materials in this collection are divided into images of people and places. The series dates from 1804 to 1916, although many items are undated. Most of the images are engraved portraits of presidents and other individuals associated with the Bank of North America, including Thomas Willing, Robert Morris, and Henry and John Nixon. This series also contains portraits of Revolutionary War figures and other important people from American history. The images of places include photographs and other depictions of the Bank of North America's building on Chestnut Street.

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Personal account book: de Cuesta, Maria Josefa Espinosa	1830-1848	661

Available boxed and foldered materials:

box #	Contents
1	Documents: Series I, II, V, VI, VII, IX
2	Documents: Series IX
3	Documents: Series XII
4	Documents: Series XII, XIII
5	Documents: Series XIII
6	Documents: Series XIII
7	Documents: Series XIII, XIV
8	Documents: Series XIV
9	Documents: Series XIV
10	Pamphlets: Series VIII, XII, XIV
11	Pamphlets: Series XIV
12	Pamphlets: Series XIV
13	Merged banks and other institutions: Everett Iron Co: Bonds belonging to Frederick Prime Jr., receiver
14	Graphic materials: Series XV
15	Graphic materials: Series XV
16	Graphic materials: Series V, XII, XIV, XV Real estate: Chestnut St: Deed: Penn brothers to
17	Samuel Carpenter (1733)
18	Framed checks (1792-1794)
19	Plates: Bank Documents: Bank of Northern Liberties Certificate of Stock, Bank of Northern Liberties Certificate of Deposit, Bank of North America Check

- 20 Plates: Bank Notes: Franklin Bank of Cincinnati, Bank of North America
- 21 Plates: Bank Notes: Northwestern Bank of Virginia
- 22 Plates: Letterhead: Bank of North America
- 23 Plates: Portraits: Robert Morris, Thomas Willing, John Nixon, John Wharton (c.1880)
- 24 Plates: Portraits: Henry Nixon, John Richardson, James Dickson, Thomas Smith (c.1880)
- 25 Plates: Wall plate: Bank of North America (undated)

Available oversized materials (flat files)

Folder #	Title
1	Deeds: Goodson, John 1694
2	Counterfeit bank notes circulation notice undated
3	Debts collected undated
4	<i>New Jersey Gazette</i> 1779 November 24
5	<i>Pennsylvania Gazette</i> : Containing proceedings of state legislature including Morris' efforts to prevent repeal of the bank's charter. Also contains an advertisement for Willing, Morris, and Stanwick. 1786 August 2
6	Graphic materials: People: Dickinson, James W. 1880
7	Graphic materials: People: Morris, Robert 1877
8	Graphic materials: People: Morton, Jonathan 1879
9	Graphic materials: People: Nixon, Henry 1878
10	Graphic materials: People: Nixon, John 1877
11	Graphic materials: People: Richardson, John 1881

12	Graphic materials: People: Smith, Thomas 1881
13	Graphic materials: People: Willing, Thomas 1877
14	Notice of public sale of Nicholas Biddle's estate, "Andalusia" on the Delaware River 1865 October 19
15	<i>Daily Advertiser</i> (Philadelphia): "Contains notice of a dividend declared and of a meeting to elect a Board of Directors of the Bank [of North America]" 1794 January 14
16	Blueprint of Bank of North America Building, longitudinal section, looking East undated
17	<i>Evening Post</i> (New York) 1833
18	"Report of the Auditor General, Accompanied with a Statement of Certain Banks and Savings Institutions:" "General Statement of the Bank of the United States, its Agencies, & etc." (removed from report) 1839