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Guide to the Lafayette- Bonaventure Collection



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.LAFAYETTEBONAVENTURE
Title	Lafayette-Bonaventure. Collection
Date	1774-1849
Size	13 volumes
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	The principal part of the Bonaventure Lafayette Collection is a set of 217 letters and documents to and from the Marquis de Lafayette, the French nobleman and revolutionary. This collection is also described as Codex Manuscript 304.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Lafayette-Bonaventure. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Historical Note

Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Montier, Marquis de Lafayette, was born on 6 Sep 1757 in Auvergne, France. By the age of 16 Lafayette had inherited a great fortune and after finishing the Military Academy in Versailles and he became a captain in the French cavalry.

Lafayette sympathized with the American Revolutionaries desire for independence from the British and in 1777 he arrived with a ship and a crew on the American shore. He joined George Washington as a major general. Serving with distinction, Lafayette lead America forces to several victories. Once he returned to France he convinced the French government to assist the revolutionaries through his relationship with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson

By 1791 Lafayette had alienated himself from both the French nobility, because he advocated a constitutional monarchy, and with the populace, because he used military force to squash a crowd rebellion. In 1792 he lost favor with the King and Queen and his own troops. He fled the country after he was denounced as a traitor. In 1800, Lafayette returned to France only to

find that his fortune had been confiscated. In 1830 Lafayette led the revolution that dethroned the Bourbons. He promoted a constitutional monarchy and helped place Louis Philippe on the throne. By 1834 he regretted this decision and began to promote the idea that France should be a republic.

Scope Note

The principal part of the Lafayette manuscripts in the University of Chicago Library is a collection of 221 letters and documents which had previously been in the possession of the Marquis Rene de Girardin (1735-1808) and his son Stanislaus. They were acquired, apparently, by the son, as a personal hobby. Both the Marquis and his son had been correspondents of Lafayette long before the Revolution and remained on very close and intimate terms with him until they died.

The letters are contained in thirteen bound volumes which can be divided into distinct groups. The first (Volume I) contains twenty-one letters, dating from 1774 to 1780, and throws considerable light on the management of Lafayette's estate during his minority and on his expenditures for the American Revolutionary causes. The expense incurred in his trip to America and the very material help he gave in fitting out some of the troops form in large measure the theme of the letters in the group, and explain the cause of his heavy debts and the trouble with creditors in France which so harassed his lawyers.

There are two groups (Volumes 2 to 6) of twenty-three and ninety-three letters and documents relating to Lafayette's career between 1791 and 1798, most of which time he spent in Prussian and Austrian prisons.

A regular campaign was carried on by his political and personal friends, including General Richard Fitz-Patrick, James Monroe, Rufus King, William Pinkney, and others, to have him freed. Many of the manuscripts seem to have been written by Joseph Masplet, a French émigré in London, who, though not a personal friend of Lafayette, was incensed over the treatment of the General and directed the campaign through newspaper and magazine articles in London, Holland and Germany to effect his release. Included among these letters is a copy of the famous letter written by Lafayette's fellow prisoner, Latour-Maubourg, from Olmutz in which he describes the terrible state of their imprisonment. This letter was published in England under the title "A Letter of an Austrian Officer to his Brother." Cf. Jules Cloquet, *Souvenirs sur la vie Privée du Général Lafayette*, (Paris: Calegnoni et Co., 1836).

A third group (Volume 7) of eight manuscripts deals with letters written to or by Lafayette by prominent persons, or about him. Included are letters of Joseph Bonaparte, in exile in America after the fall of the Napoleonic regime; Bushrod Washington, concerning a bequest of his famous uncle, George, to Lafayette; Pierre S. Dupont de Nemours, celebrated French economist

and father of the famous Dupont brothers of Delaware; and Louis Alexandre Berthier, friend of Lafayette during the American Revolution, Marshal of France, and Napoleon's chief of staff.

A fourth group (Volume 8) of seven manuscripts and letters relates to the land grants in New Orleans made by the U.S. Congress to Lafayette, in recognition and in gratitude for his services during the American Revolution. Included is a letter from Albert Gallatin describing the steps to be taken for obtaining the warrants to the land grants.

Fifteen letters interchanged between Fanny Wright and Lafayette and ten letters written to or by Fanny Wright to her various friends, comprise the fifth group (Volumes 9 and 10). Miss Wright was the author of *Views of Society and Manners in American* and was deeply interested in the liberal movements in Europe as was Lafayette. Among the letters written to Fanny Wright are those by Benjamin Constant, Dupont de Nemours, and Robert Owen, all of whom shared her radical opinions and sympathized with and were interested in her social propositions.

A sixth group (Volume 11) is composed of seventeen letters interchanged between Lafayette and Maria Malibran, the great European singer and actress. The letters clearly reveal the unselfish interest which Lafayette took in those about him. There is also frequent mention of his political influence in the French government.

A group entitled "George Washington Lafayette" (Volume 12) is composed of twelve letters relating to various members of the Lafayette family, among them a letter written by Louise Noailles, Lafayette's sister-in-law, written from her prison only ten days before she was beheaded by order of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

The last group is entitled "Anastasia Lafayette" (Volume 13) and is composed of fifteen letters and documents, including copies of contemporary newspaper and magazine articles relating to her father, General Lafayette. Among them are included a copy of a letter to Napoleon Bonaparte, a note by Charles Fox on the Bourbon Restoration, and a note by James Madison.

The entire collection was purchased in 1931 from E.F. Bonaventure, Inc., antiquarian dealers in New York City, who had previously secured it from the last survivors of the Girardin family in France. Each manuscript in this collection has been cataloged individually in the University of Chicago Library online catalog.

Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

Lafayette Manuscripts (Ms 303)

Lafayette Crawford Correspondence (Ms 319)

Subject Headings

- Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834
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INVENTORY

Volume 1

Volume 2

Volume 3

Volume 4

Volume 5

Volume 6

Volume 7

Volume 8

Volume 9

Volume 10

Volume 11

Volume 12

Volume 13