

James L. Cathcart Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2024

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm79015388>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms009015>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2009
Revised 2024 June

Collection Summary

Title: James L. Cathcart Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1785-1817

ID No.: MSS15388

Creator: Cathcart, James L. (James Leander), 1767-1843

Extent: 300 items

Extent: 3 containers

Extent: 1.2 linear feet

Extent: 1 microfilm reel

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm79015388>

Summary: Diplomat. Journals and letterbooks relating chiefly to Cathcart's capture (1785) by Algerians off Cape Saint Vincent, Portugal, while he served on the schooner *Maria* of Boston, his eleven-year captivity, and the successive offices he held while a prisoner, becoming chief Christian secretary to the Dey of Algiers (1792). The letterbooks relate to his later service as United States consul (1797-1817).

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Appleton, Thomas, 1763-1840--Correspondence.

Cathcart, James L. (James Leander), 1767-1843.

Eaton, William, 1764-1811--Correspondence.

Erving, George William, 1769-1850--Correspondence.

Madison, James, 1751-1836--Correspondence.

Marshall, John, 1755-1835--Correspondence.

Monroe, James, 1758-1831--Correspondence.

O'Brien, Richard, approximately 1758-1824--Correspondence.

Oms, Francisco Javier de, 1767-1842--Correspondence.

Pickering, Timothy, 1745-1829--Correspondence.

Smith, William Loughton, 1758-1812--Correspondence.

Organizations

Maria of Boston (Schooner)

Subjects

Americans--Algeria.

Christians--Algeria.

Diplomatic and consular service, American--Libya--Tripoli.

Diplomatic and consular service, American--Spain--Cádiz.

Diplomatic and consular service, American--Tunisia--Tunis.

Prisoners, foreign--Algeria.

Ramadan.

Slavery--Algeria.

Places

Algeria--Foreign relations--United States.

Algiers (Algeria)--History.

Algiers (Algeria)--Social life and customs.

France--Foreign relations--United States.

Libya--Foreign relations--United States.

Saint Vincent, Cape (Portugal)
Spain--Foreign relations--United States.
Tunisia--Foreign relations--United States.
United States--Foreign relations--1789-1809.
United States--Foreign relations--Algeria.
United States--Foreign relations--France.
United States--Foreign relations--Libya.
United States--Foreign relations--Spain.
United States--Foreign relations--Tunisia.

Titles

James Leander Cathcart papers

Occupations

Diplomats.

Acquisition Information

The papers of James L. Cathcart were given to the Library of Congress by Simon Gratz in 1919 and by Charles F. Cochran in 1921. An addition was purchased in 2022 by the Library's Science, Technology, and Business Division and subsequently transferred to the Manuscript Division.

Processing History

The papers of James L. Cathcart were processed in 1986 by Audrey Walker. The finding aid was revised in 2003 by Patrick Kerwin and Marianne Riley. An addition was processed and the finding aid revised in 2024 by Katherine S. Madison.

Other Repositories

Additional collections of James L. Cathcart material may be found at the New York Public Library and in Record Groups 49 and 59 at the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of James L. Cathcart is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of James L. Cathcart are open to research. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on one reel. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, James L. Cathcart Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1767, June 1	Born, Mount Murragh, County Westmeath, Ireland
1775	Immigrated to America
1779	Midshipman, Continental frigate <i>Confederacy</i>
1780-1782	Captured and imprisoned on the prison ships <i>Good Hope</i> and <i>Old Jersey</i> by British forces in New York
1782	Escaped from the British forces
1785, July 25	Captured with the schooner <i>Maria</i> of Boston by an Algerian xebec off Cape Saint Vincent, Portugal; sold into slavery
1787-1792	While enslaved, served as clerk of the marine, clerk of the bagnio gallera (prison of the galley slaves), keeper of the prison tavern, and clerk to the prime minister
1792	Named chief Christian secretary to the Dey and Regency of Algiers
1795-1796	Assisted in the negotiations of the Barbary Treaties
1796	Released from slavery; returned to the United States
1797-1801	United States consul, Tripoli, Libya
1798	Married Jane Bancker Woodside of Philadelphia, Pa.
1798	Special diplomatic agent to assist William Eaton, Tunis, Tunisia
1802	United States consul general, Algiers, Algeria
1803	United States consul, Tunis, Tunisia
1807-1815	United States consul, Madeira, Portugal
1815-1817	United States consul, Cádiz, Spain
1818-1820	Naval agent for the protection of live oak timber in Florida
1820-1840?	Employed in the United States Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.
1843, October 6	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of James Leander Cathcart (1767-1843) span the years 1785-1817 and consist of a three-volume narrative account of his years in captivity, a journal, three letterbooks, a letter dated 7 December 1798 from Cathcart to the firm of Willings and Francis, and a letter dated 14 July 1799 from Cathcart to William Eaton.

The narrative account describes the capture of the schooner *Maria* of Boston by Algerians off Cape Saint Vincent, Portugal, 25 July 1785, and Cathcart's subsequent eleven-year enslavement in Algiers during which he became chief Christian secretary to the Dey of Algiers. The manuscript, based on journals which Cathcart kept, also describes living conditions for enslaved Christians, the culture and customs in Algiers, arrivals of ships, relations between the Regency and other countries, and negotiations for the release of Christian prisoners. The second volume begins with page 129, although the narration in volume one ends with page 187. Entitled, "Negotiations in Barbary," it deals with negotiations between the United States and Hassan Bashaw, Dey of Algiers, from the arrival of Joseph Donaldson in September 1795 to the arrival of Joel Barlow in March 1796, and includes a sketch of United States relations with France, 1793-1796, and a note on Ramadan. The volume was planned to conclude with Cathcart's arrival in Philadelphia on the *Independent*, 13 September 1796, but ends with a summary of events occurring between 28 March and 1 April 1796 because of a lack of time and means for publication. The third volume consists of a few pages covering events from 25 October 1795 to 2 November 1795. The manuscript was edited by Cathcart's daughter, Jane Bancker (Cathcart) Newkirk, and published as *The Captives* (La Porte, Ind.: Herald Print, 1899).

The "Journal of Remarkable Occurrences in the City of Algiers Anno Domine 1792" is a record of Cathcart's observations for that year except for the months of April and May. It also contains several lists of enslaved people and ships captured by the Algerians, including Americans captured between 1785 and 1795, indicating what became of them and any pay which they received.

The earliest letterbook relates to Cathcart's appointment as special diplomatic agent accompanying William Eaton to Tunis and covers the period 5 April 1799 to 17 April 1801, with notes indicating that Cathcart left Tripoli 24 May 1801 following Bashaw's declaration of war on the United States and arrived at Leghorn, Italy, on 2 June 1801. The volume contains letters and papers relating to negotiations with Tripoli and includes correspondence with Thomas Appleton, William Eaton, John Marshall, Richard O'Brien, Timothy Pickering, and William Loughton Smith. The second letterbook continues the account of the negotiations from 1 June 1801 to 11 May 1803 and consists primarily of diplomatic correspondence between Eaton, then United States consul at Tunis, and Secretary of State James Madison through 18 August 1802. Other items in the volume are letters of 1803 regarding Cathcart's appointment as Eaton's successor and a copy of the treaty between the United States and Tunis concluded in August 1797 acknowledging the alterations in Articles 11, 12, and 14 negotiated by Cathcart and Eaton in March 1799. The third letterbook spans the period 29 January 1816 to 7 March 1817 while Cathcart was United States consul at Cádiz and mainly contains his diplomatic correspondence with Francisco Javier de Oms (Marques de Castellorius), George William Erving, and James Monroe. Receipts and accounts of funds dispersed by Cathcart on behalf of American sailors are also included.

The first letterbook and letters in the second volume through 28 March 1802 were compiled and published by Cathcart's daughter, Jane Bancker (Cathcart) Newkirk, as *Tripoli: First War with the United States* (La Porte, Ind.: Herald Print, 1901). Material from this collection has also been published in the *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, v. 64 (1955).

Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material or topic.

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 19,571

Container	Contents
BOX 1 REEL 1	Account of captivity
BOX 1 REEL 1	1785-1793
BOX 3 REEL 1	1795, Aug.-1796
BOX 1 REEL 1	1795, Oct. - Nov.
BOX 1 REEL 1	Journal, 1792
BOX 1 REEL 1	Letterbooks
BOX 1 REEL 1	1799-1801
BOX 1 REEL 1	pp. 1-214 (2 folders)
BOX 2 REEL 1	pp. 215-354
BOX 2 REEL 1	1801-1803
BOX 2 REEL 1	1816-1817
BOX 2 REEL 1	Letter to Willings & Francis, 1798
BOX 2 not filmed	2024 Addition
BOX 2 not filmed	Letter to William Eaton, 1799