Collection Summary
Title: John Richardson Latimer Papers
Span Dates: 1679-1906
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1824-1833)
ID No.: MSS29520
Creator: Latimer, John Richardson, 1793-1855
Extent: 6,000 items
Extent: 22 containers plus 15 oversize
Extent: 10.8 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm78029520
Summary: Merchant and business agent, trading in opium and other commodities while residing in Canton, China; native of Wilmington, Del. Correspondence, account books, orders, bills of lading, ledgers, daybooks, cashbooks, invoices, bills, receipts, and similar business papers on the China trade and related dealings in India, England, Turkey, and elsewhere, chiefly 1824-1833, when Latimer resided in Canton and traded in opium and other products.

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
Cushing, John Perkins, 1787-1862.
De Silva, William Thomas.
Dorabjee, Hormuzjee.
Dunn, Nathan, 1782-1844.
Latimer family.
Latimer, John Richardson, 1793-1855.
Matheson, Hugh.
Ralston, Matthew C.
Stanton, F.
Tibbets, Elisha.
Townsend, Solomon.
Wilcocks, Benjamin C.

Organizations
Russell & Sturgis.
Smith & Nicoll.

Subjects
Opium trade--East Asia.

Places
China--Commerce.
Great Britain--Commerce.
Guangzhou (China)--Commerce.
India--Commerce.
Pacific Area--Commerce.
United States--Commerce--History--19th century.
United States--Commerce.

Occupations
Businessmen.
Merchants.
Provenance

The papers of John Richardson Latimer, merchant and business agent trading in opium and other commodities while residing in Canton, China, native of Wilmington, Del., were given to the Library of Congress by Mrs. Walter S. Franklin in 1948-1957.

Processing History

The collection was organized between 1951 and 1956 and revised in 2008 and 2013.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of John Richardson Latimer is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

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

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, John Richardson Latimer Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of John Richardson Latimer (1793-1855) span the years 1679-1906, with the bulk from 1824 to 1833. The collection includes personal and family letters, but consists mainly of business correspondence, account books, orders, bills of lading, ledgers, daybooks, cashbooks, invoices, bills, receipts, and other records from when Latimer resided in Canton, China, and traded in opium and other products. The business records evidence a complex and active trade between merchants of the United States, England, India, and the Pacific area, with the focal point Canton, dealing in tea, silk, ginseng, specie, spices, tobacco, general merchandise, and other commodities. Of primary interest are files relating to the opium trade between India and China as conducted by foreign merchants in Canton during the decades immediately preceding the First Opium War of 1840. The collection is organized into two parts. Part I is arranged in eight series: Correspondence, Account Books, Business Instruments, Insurance Records, Statistics, Special Files, Miscellany, and Oversize. Part II is arranged in a General File and Oversize.

A native of Wilmington, Delaware, Latimer left home to enter a business apprenticeship in Philadelphia about the time his brother James, with whom he was also associated in business, entered Princeton University. Possibly as early as 1815, John went to China and by 1822 he spoke of five voyages to Canton, each passage requiring eight months. He may have been in Philadelphia in the summer of 1823, but he was certainly back in Canton in 1824. Practically all of the papers of this collection are concerned with his business activities in Canton between 1824 and his final return home in 1833, although a few date earlier and others later than this period. He anticipated his return to the United States for some time before business arrangements permitted his departure, and he repeatedly in letters home expressed his resolution to end his mercantile pursuits. Latimer’s business in China was highly profitable; his cousin (?) James estimated that he must have accumulated $100,000. In one year Latimer was said to have made a profit of $25,000 on opium alone. He advised members of his family on financial matters, at one time pointing out to his sister the wisdom of investing in real estate as well as in stocks. Apparently Latimer enjoyed a long period of retirement in leisure and wealth. He served as president of the Pennsylvania State Cincinnati Society and was chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Board of
Commissioners on the Gettysburg Cemetery. He died in Wilmington and was interred in Philadelphia. An obituary was published in the *Delaware State Journal* and *Statesman*, Wilmington, January 20, 1865.

While in Canton, Latimer acted as a general merchant and commission agent receiving goods and filling orders from major American ports such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Wilmington; from London and Liverpool in England; Bombay and Calcutta in India; Sydney, Manila, Macao, Singapore, and Oahu in the Pacific area; and from Mexico. In addition to the importation of opium into China from India, a matter which is documented in the collection, other major items of trade included tea, silk, Indian cotton, ginseng, furs (fox and otter), tobacco, specie (Spanish dollars), spices, cochineal, wine, bamboo, iron, quicksilver, hardware, general merchandise (books, clothing, paper, shoes, plate, combs, jewelry, etc.), and Chinaware. Besides being a merchant, Latimer also acted as a maritime insurance agent and as an attorney.

James Latimer of Philadelphia, thought to be John Latimer’s cousin and about twenty years his senior, acted as one of Latimer’s agents in the United States throughout the period 1824-1833. John’s brother, also named James, was less prominent in the business affairs. More closely associated than James in partnerships or other dealings were Benjamin C. Wilcocks of Philadelphia and New York, Mathew C. Ralston of Philadelphia, and Smith & Nicoll of New York. Other persons or firms prominently mentioned are Russell & Sturgis (Manila), F. Stanton (Boston), Elisha Tibbets (New York), Solomon Townsend (New York), Hormuzjee Dorabjee (Bombay), Hugh Matheson (Calcutta), Nathan Dunn, John P. Cushing, and William Thomas De Silva.

Among the ships mentioned frequently as engaged in trade are the following Ajax, Water Witch, China, Panama, Superior, Falcon, Cornwallis, Sun, Arethusa, Ephemina, Caledonia, Citizen, Asia, Lady East, Rebecca Sims, New Jersey, Pacific, Delight, Hannah, Jane, Aurelia, Linten, Globe, Pearl, Carron, India, Isabella, Sumatra, Julia, Dorothea, Lady of the Lake, Pioneer, and Franklin.

**Arrangement of the Papers**

This collection is arranged in ten series in two parts:

**Part I:**
- Correspondence, 1821-1834
- Account books, 1815-1834
- Business Instruments, 1823-1850
- Insurance Records, 1828-1833
- Statistics, 1816-1833
- Special Files, 1822-1835
- Miscellany, 1826-1844
- Oversize, 1815-1834

**Part II:**
- General File, 1679-1906
- Oversize, 1829-1939
Description of Series

**Container**  | **Series**  | **Description**
--- | --- | ---
BOX I:1-1:5  | **Part I: Correspondence, 1821-1834**  | Letterbooks of outgoing businesses, outgoing personal letters, and correspondence of incoming businesses. Arranged by volume or type of correspondence and therein chronologically.


BOX I:8-1:11  | **Part I: Business Instruments, 1823-1850**  | Bills of parcels, receipts, accounts, invoices, bills of lading, memoranda of agreements, letters, orders for investments and bills, inventories, sales data, insurance policies, and statement of American trade with Canton, China. Arranged by type of material.

BOX I:12  | **Part I: Insurance Records, 1828-1833**  | Register of insurance policies of Gopaldos Nagurdos Moody Constituents, Bombay, India; other policies of insurance and memoranda. Arranged by type of material.


BOX I:12-I:14  | **Part I: Special Files, 1822-1835**  | Letters from Smith & Nicoll Co. and Benjamin Wilcocks, accounts of voyages, invoices, other financial records, miscellaneous papers, opium transactions with W. H. Smith, claims to the estate of Captain J. Davidson made by Rebecca Parkinson, and papers relating to G. R. Dowdale. Arranged by type of material or name of creator.

BOX I:14  | **Part I: Miscellany, 1826-1844**  | Invitations and notes to Mary Latimer, translations of native protest against foreign traders, and other material. Arranged by type of material.

BOX I:OV 1-I:OV 15  | **Part I: Oversize, 1815-1834**  | Letterbooks, ledgers, daybook, invoices, sales accounts, and account books. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and containers from which they were removed.
**Part II: General File, 1679-1906**

Correspondence, receipts, account books, bills, agreements, policies, bills of lading, invoices, expenditures, daybook, ledger, Chinese material, other financial records and newspaper clippings.

Arranged by type of material.

**Part II: Oversize, 1829-1939**

Letterbooks.

Organized and described according to the series, folders, and containers from which they were removed.
# Container List

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Arranged by volume or type of correspondence and therein chronologically. |
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| BOX I:5-I:7 | **Part I: Account Books, 1815-1834**  
Ledgers, daybooks, invoices and invoice books, cashbook, order book, sales accounts, records of accounts current, account books, shipment records, demurrage accounts, records of transactions in tea, current accounts, household accounts, notes, memoranda, and notes of sum book.  
Arranged by type of material. |
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#### Part I: Special Files, 1822-1835

- Letters from Smith & Nicoll Co. and Benjamin Wilcocks, accounts of voyages, invoices, other financial records, miscellaneous papers, opium transactions with W. H. Smith, claims to the estate of Captain J. Davidson made by Rebecca Parkinson, and papers relating to G. R. Dowdale.

#### Part I: Insurance Records, 1828-1833

Register of insurance policies of Gopaldoss Nagurdos Moody Constituents, Bombay, India; other policies of insurance and memoranda.

Arranged by type of material.

#### Part I: Statistics, 1816-1833

Trade statistics and tabulations of American and Britain trade with Canton, China.

Arranged as compiled.

#### Part I: Statistics, 1816-1833

Trade statistics and tabulations, American and Britain trade with Canton, China, 1816-1833

#### Part I: Special Files, 1822-1835

Smith & Nicoll Co. letters, 1823-1827

(3 folders)
### Part I: Special Files, 1822-1835

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#### Part I: Miscellany, 1826-1844

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Arranged by type of material.

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| BOX I:14  | Miscellaneous papers and translation of a native protest against foreign traders, 1826-1835 |
| BOX I:14  | Packet labels that were removed, 1826-1834 (3 folders) |

#### Part I: Oversize, 1815-1834

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Organized and described according to the series, folders, and containers from which they were removed.

<p>| BOX I:OV 1 | Correspondence |
| BOX I:OV 1 | Letterbooks of outgoing business |
| BOX I:OV 1 | From Canton, China, to Philadelphia, Pa., and New York, N.Y., 1828-1829 (Container I:1) |
| BOX I:OV 2 | Indian letters, 1831-1834 (Container I:1) |
| BOX I:OV 3 | Account Books |
| BOX I:OV 3 | Ledger |
| BOX I:OV 3 | 1831-1834 (Container I:1) |
| BOX I:OV 4 | Daybook |
| BOX I:OV 4 | 1825-1831 (Container I:5) |
| BOX I:OV 5 | 1831-1834 (Container I:5) |
| BOX I:OV 6 | Invoice book |
| BOX I:OV 6 | 1815-1825 (Container I:5) |
| BOX I:OV 7 | 1827-1833 (Container I:5) |
| BOX I:OV 8 | Invoices, 1833-1834 (Container I:5) |
| BOX I:OV 9 | Sales accounts |
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**BOX II:1-II:8**  
**Part II: General File, 1679-1906**  
Correspondence, receipts, account books, bills, agreements, policies, bills of lading, invoices, expenditures, daybook, ledger, Chinese material, other financial records and newspaper clippings.  
Arranged by type of material.

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| BOX II:1 | Receipt book, 1823-1824 |
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