

John Richardson Latimer Papers
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Prepared by Manuscript Division Staff
Revised by Pamela Watson

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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The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of John Richardson Latimer is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).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
BOX I:1-I:5	<p><u>Part I: Correspondence, 1821-1834</u></p> <p>Letterbooks of outgoing businesses, outgoing personal letters, and correspondence of incoming businesses.</p> <p>Arranged by volume or type of correspondence and therein chronologically.</p>
BOX I:5-I:7	<p><u>Part I: Account Books, 1815-1834</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX I:8-I:11	<p><u>Part I: Business Instruments, 1823-1850</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX I:12	<p><u>Part I: Insurance Records, 1828-1833</u></p> <p>Register of insurance policies of Gopaldos Nagurdos Moody Constituents, Bombay, India; other policies of insurance and memoranda.</p> <p>Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX I:12	<p><u>Part I: Statistics, 1816-1833</u></p> <p>Trade statistics and tabulations of American and Britain trade with Canton, China.</p> <p>Arranged as compiled.</p>
BOX I:12-I:14	<p><u>Part I: Special Files, 1822-1835</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>Arranged by type of material or name of creator.</p>
BOX I:14	<p><u>Part I: Miscellany, 1826-1844</u></p> <p>Invitations and notes to Mary Latimer, translations of native protest against foreign traders, and other material.</p> <p>Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX I:OV 1-I:OV 15	<p><u>Part I: Oversize, 1815-1834</u></p> <p>Letterbooks, ledgers, daybook, invoices, sales accounts, and account books.</p> <p>Organized and described according to the series, folders, and containers from which they were was removed.</p>

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.

BOX II:OV 1-II:OV 3

Part II: Oversize, 1829-1939

Letterbooks.

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

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX I:1-I: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:1	Letterbooks of outgoing business
BOX I:1	From Canton, China, to Philadelphia, Pa., and New York, N.Y., 1828-1829 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:1	India, 1825-1831
BOX I:1	Indian letters, 1831-1834 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:1	Personal letters outgoing, 1821-1834
BOX I:1	Incoming business
BOX I:1	1825-1829 (7 folders)
BOX I:2	1829-1830 (8 folders)
BOX I:3	1830-1831 (11 folders)
BOX I:4	1831-1833 (14 folders)
BOX I:5	1833 (5 folders)
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.
BOX I:5	Ledger
BOX I:5	1824-1825
BOX I:5	1831-1834 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:5	1832-1834, Canton, China
BOX I:5	Daybook <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:5	1825-1831
BOX I:5	1831-1834
BOX I:5	Invoice books <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:5	1815-1825
BOX I:5	1827-1833
BOX I:5	Invoices, 1833-1834 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:5	Cash book, 1829-1832
BOX I:6	Order books

Part I: Account Books, 1815-1834

Container	Contents
BOX I:6	1829-1833
BOX I:6	1833-1834
BOX I:6	Sales accounts and records of accounts current with Latimer, 1825-1830
BOX I:6	Sales accounts
BOX I:6	1829-1833
BOX I:6	1828-1834 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:6	Account book
BOX I:6	Undated
BOX I:6	1827-1832 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:6	1828-1833
BOX I:6	1833
BOX I:6	Current accounts, 1824-1834 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:6	Account book, 1833-1834 <i>See Part I Oversize</i>
BOX I:7	Shipment records, 1829-1833
BOX I:7	Teas, records of transactions in tea, 1825-1826
BOX I:7	Demurrage accounts, 1829-1831
BOX I:7	Household accounts, 1830-1834
BOX I:7	Notes, 1816-1819
BOX I:7	Memoranda, 1825-1828
BOX I:7	Memorandum book, 1829-1830
BOX I:7	Memoranda, 1833-1834
BOX I:7	Note book of sum book, 1833-1834
BOX I:8-I: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:8	Bills of parcels and receipts, 1825-1826
BOX I:8	Account sales, 1825-1826
BOX I:8	Outward invoices and bills of lading, 1824-1827
BOX I:8	Account sales and accounts current, 1827-1828
BOX I:8	Bills, receipts, and memoranda of agreements, 1823-1828
BOX I:8	Inward invoices and bills of lading, 1826-1828
BOX I:8	Bills of lading outward, 1827-1828
BOX I:8	Account sales and accounts current orders, 1828-1829
BOX I:8	Invoice and bills lading, 1828-1829
BOX I:8	Bills of lading and invoices, 1828-1834
BOX I:9	Letters, bills, receipts and memoranda, 1827-1833
BOX I:9	Bills of lading, invoices, and accounts, 1827-1832
BOX I:9	Orders, letters, bills, receipts, and memoranda, 1824-1850
BOX I:9	Account sales-accounts currents, 1829-1830
BOX I:9	Bills and receipts, 1829-1830
BOX I:9	Orders for investments, 1829-1830
BOX I:9	Invoices and bills of lading, 1829-1830
BOX I:9	Invoices, bills of lading, bills, receipts, and related matter, 1824-1833

Part I: Business Instruments, 1823-1850

Container	Contents
BOX I:9	Bills and receipts, 1830-1831
BOX I:10	Account sales-accounts current and outward bills of lading, 1830-1831
BOX I:10	Invoices and bills of lading outward, 1830-1831
BOX I:10	Bills of lading, invoices, order, accounts, and letters, 1827-1833
BOX I:10	Bills, receipts, and memoranda, 1824-1831
BOX I:10	Bills and receipts, 1831-1832
BOX I:10	Invoices, bills of lading, account sales, and accounts current, 1831-1832
BOX I:10	Price current, prices in Bombay and Calcutta, India; Gibraltar; and Manila, Philippines, 1831-1832
BOX I:10	Bills of lading, invoices, accounts, insurance policies, and letters, 1826-1833
BOX I:11	Bills, receipts, and memoranda, 1824-1832
BOX I:11	Outward bills of lading, price current, and prices in Bombay, India; Lima, Peru; and Sydney, Australia, 1832-1833
BOX I:11	Bills of lading and invoices, 1827-1834
BOX I:11	Letters, inventories, orders, insurance policy, statement of American trade with Canton, China, bills, receipts, and memoranda, 1827-1833
BOX I:11	Letters of Rebecca Parkinson, circulars, invoices, bills of lading, and receipts, 1827-1833
BOX I:11	Invoice, account sales, and account current, 1833-1834
BOX I:11	Orders for investment, 1833-1834
BOX I:11	Outward bills for lading, 1833-1834
BOX I:11	Bills of lading, invoices, account, order bills, receipts, memoranda, and sales, 1824-1834
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	Register of insurance policies
BOX I:12	Gopaldoss Nagurdos Moody's Constituents, Bombay, India
BOX I:12	Rates of premiums of the ninth Canton insurance company, 1831-1833
BOX I:12	Policies insurance and memoranda, 1828-1829
BOX I:12	Policies of insurance, 1830-1833 (3 folders)
BOX I:12	Part I: Statistics, 1816-1833 Trade statistics and tabulations of American and Britain trade with Canton, China. Arranged as compiled.
BOX I:12	Trade statistics and tabulations, American and Britain trade with Canton, China, 1816-1833
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:12	Smith & Nicoll Co. letters, 1823-1827 (3 folders)

Part I: Special Files, 1822-1835

Container	Contents
BOX I:12	Smith & Nicoll's account of ship <i>China</i> voyage, 1822-1825
BOX I:12	Smith & Nicoll's account of ship <i>China</i> and <i>Superior</i> voyage, 1825-1826
BOX I:13	Wilcocks, Benjamin C.
BOX I:13	Correspondence, Wilcock to Latimer, 1828-1831 (2 folders)
BOX I:13	Letters and "promiscuous papers," invoices and accounts current with Ferguson and others, Australian tobacco trade, 1834
BOX I:13	Wilcocks's "promiscuous papers," accounts, invoices, letters, and Australian trade, 1828-1829
BOX I:13	Letters to Wilcocks, 1822-1828 (2 folders)
BOX I:13	Copies of Wilcocks's accounts and miscellaneous papers and letters, 1828-1835
BOX I:13	Opium transactions with W. H. Smith, 1826
BOX I:14	Rebecca Parkinson claims to the estate of Captain J. Davidson, 1830
BOX I:14	Dowdale, George R., papers relating to his affairs, 1830
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:14	Latimer, Mary A., invitations and note to her, Philadelphia, Pa., 1835-1844
BOX I:14	Sampling of Latimer papers
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)
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.
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
BOX I:OV 9	1828-1834 (Container I:6)

Part I: Oversize, 1815-1834

Container	Contents
BOX I:OV 10	Account book
BOX I:OV 10	1827-1832 (Container I:6)
BOX I:OV 11	Current accounts, 1824-1834 (Container I:6)
BOX I:OV 12	Account book, 1833-1834 (Container I:6)
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.
BOX II:1	Correspondence, 1824-1834
BOX II:1	Letterbooks, 1829-1839 <i>See Part II: Oversize</i> (3 vols.)
BOX II:1	Financial information, 1679-1823 (24 folders)
BOX II:1	Receipt book, 1823-1824
BOX II:1	Letters from James Latimer (brother), China trade, 1824
BOX II:2	General correspondence and bills of lading, 1824
BOX II:2	Miscellaneous correspondence, 1825
BOX II:2	Miscellany, 1825 (2 folders)
BOX II:2	Letters from James Latimer (brother)
BOX II:2	China trade, 1825 (2 folders)
BOX II:2	China trade, failure in business, 1826 (2 folders)
BOX II:2	Miscellaneous correspondence, 1826
BOX II:3	Account book, 1826-1832
BOX II:3	Miscellany, 1827
BOX II:3	Miscellany, M-W, 1827
BOX II:3	Letters from James Latimer, 1827
BOX II:3	Correspondence
BOX II:3	Ralston, A.G., 1827
BOX II:3	Smith, F. H., 1827
BOX II:3	Wahn and Morris, 1827
BOX II:3	Wilcocks, Benjamin C., 1828
BOX II:3	Wooten, John, 1828
BOX II:4	Financial information, 1828
BOX II:4	Miscellany, 1828
BOX II:4	Correspondence, 1828 (2 folders)
BOX II:4	Miscellany, 1829
BOX II:4	Bills, agreements, policies, and prices current, 1829
BOX II:4	Bills of lading, 1829
BOX II:4	Miscellany, 1829
BOX II:4	Bills, agreement and prices current, 1830

Part II: General File, 1679-1906

Container	Contents
BOX II:4	Miscellany, 1830-1831 (2 folders)
BOX II:4	Bills of lading, 1831
BOX II:4	Invoices, bills, and accounts, 1832
BOX II:4	Bills of lading, 1832
BOX II:4	Bills, accounts, and receipts, 1832
BOX II:4	Miscellany, 1832
BOX II:5	Correspondence, 1832
BOX II:5	Correspondence, A-F, 1832 (2 folders)
BOX II:5	Correspondence, 1833
BOX II:5	Miscellany, 1833
BOX II:5	Letters from James Latimer, China trade, 1833
BOX II:5	Bills, accounts, and receipts, 1833 (2 folders)
BOX II:6	Miscellany, 1834-1848 (7 folders)
BOX II:6	Receipts, 1849-1853 (4 folders)
BOX II:6	Miscellany, 1854-1878 (4 folders)
BOX II:6	Receipts, 1880
BOX II:6	Miscellany, 1882-1892, undated (2 folders)
BOX II:6	Letterbook, 1796-1809
BOX II:6	Daybook, 1817-1827
BOX II:6	Receipts and expenditures, 1816-1818, 1836-1851
BOX II:6	Receipt book, 1793-1838
BOX II:7	Letterbook, 1825-1828
BOX II:7	Account book, 1805-1807, 1817-1823
BOX II:7	Ledger, 1819-1821
BOX II:7	Daybook, 1819-1821
BOX II:8	Chinese material, 1823-1831, undated
BOX II:8	Samples and miscellaneous, 1819, 1831, undated
BOX II:8	Correspondence, 1828-1832
BOX II:8	Clippings, Duer, Lillie, trial for shooting Ella Hearn, 1879
BOX II:8	Franklin, Mr. and Mrs., undated
BOX II:8	Charles J. Guiteau's death, whole account from the shooting of James J. Garfield, 1882
BOX II:8	Latimer, Henry, 1862, undated
BOX II:8	Latimer, Mary, undated
BOX II:8	Miscellaneous, 1853-1906, undated (6 folders)
BOX II:8	Murder of Policeman Peterson, 1885
BOX II:8	Pieces for pasting in books, 1879, undated
BOX II:8	Prussia and France, 1870, undated (2 folders)

Part II: General File, 1679-1906

Container	Contents
BOX II:8	“Tilden vs. Hayes, Military Despot Grant,” 1876, undated
BOX II:OV 1-II:OV 3	Part II: Oversize, 1829-1939 Letterbooks. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and containers from which they were removed.
BOX II: OV 1	Letterbooks
BOX II: OV 1	1829-1831 (Container II:1)
BOX II: OV 2	1831-1834 (Container II:1)
BOX II OV 3	1833-1839 (Container II:1)