

Archives and Special Collections

Dickinson College

Carlisle, PA

COLLECTION REGISTER

Name: **Dickinson, John (1732-1808)** **MC 2001.13**

Material: Papers (1762-1807)

Volume: 0.25 linear feet (1 Document Box)

Donation: Gift of Boyd Lee Spahr

Usage: These materials have been donated without restrictions on usage.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Dickinson was born on November 8, 1732 to Samuel and Mary Cadwalader Dickinson. The family moved to an estate near Dover, Delaware, where John and his brothers and sisters were educated by a private tutor. John Dickinson continued his education by studying law, first in Philadelphia and then in the Middle Temple, London. In 1757, he returned to Philadelphia and began to practice law.

Dickinson's skill as a lawyer prompted his election to the Assembly of the Lower Counties (Delaware) in October 1760. Two years later he represented Philadelphia in the Pennsylvania Legislature. However, the conservative Dickinson lost his seat in 1764, due in large part to his supporting the less popular side in a debate on the proprietary system.

Although absent from the political arena, Dickinson continued his efforts to forward American interests in a peaceful manner during the years immediately preceding the Revolutionary War. Dickinson published pamphlets and articles including *The Late Regulations Respecting the British Colonies... Considered* (1765) and *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* (1768). In addition to the honors awarded to Dickinson for his popular *Letters*, he was reelected to the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1770. In July of that same year, he married Mary Norris, daughter of a former Speaker of the Assembly, Isaac Norris.

Until the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Dickinson worked toward reconciliation with Britain. During a brief membership in the First Continental Congress in October 1774, Dickinson authored the first *Petition to the King* and the *Address to the People of Canada*. On July 23, 1775 Dickinson was elected chairman of the Committee of Safety and Defense. He also was commissioned as a colonel in the first battalion raised in Philadelphia. In 1775, he served as a representative to the Second Continental Congress. Dickinson penned a second *Petition to the King*, and the *Declaration of the Causes of Taking Up Arms*. When Congress reconvened in the summer of 1776, Dickinson chaired the committee which drafted the *Articles of Confederation*. However, Dickinson then refused to support the *Declaration of Independence*, as he still hoped for reconciliation with Britain. Rather than sign, Dickinson rejoined his regiment near

Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. When he was not reelected to Congress the following year, he resigned his commission.

In 1779, Dickinson represented Delaware in Congress, but he resigned the post in the fall of that year. He was then named president of the Supreme Executive Council of Delaware in 1781; when he returned to Philadelphia, Dickinson was elected to that same office in Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of the American Revolutionary War, he retired from the legal profession to pursue other interests. Dickinson represented Delaware in the 1787 Convention that wrote the United States Constitution, a document that he actively supported.

During the remaining years of his life, Dickinson held no public office, although he remained interested in public affairs. He died in Wilmington, Delaware on February 14, 1808.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The John Dickinson Papers contain correspondence and legal papers reflecting Dickinson's legal and political careers. The collection is contained in one document box and is divided into two series: Correspondence, and Legal and Financial Materials. This collection of papers was acquired and donated to Dickinson College by Boyd Lee Spahr.

The Correspondence series is comprised mainly of letters sent by John Dickinson to such prominent individuals in Delaware and Pennsylvania politics as James Wilson, Caesar Rodney, and Benjamin Rush. These letters, dated 1762 to 1807, range in topic from military matters to the issues facing the newly-established Dickinson College. Also included in the series are two letters received by Dickinson, and a letter written by William Bingham to Benjamin Rush. The letters are arranged accordingly as Letters Sent and Letters Received by Dickinson, and then arranged chronologically; the Bingham letter to Rush is housed at the end of the series.

The Legal and Financial series contains both personal financial papers and papers related to Dickinson's public duties, particularly to his duties as president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. The items within this series are arranged chronologically.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

BOX 1 - MC 2001.13

CORRESPONDENCE

Dickinson, John – Letters Sent

- Folder 01) To George Reed – June 4, 1762
- To Baynton and Wharton – May 6, 1769
- To Cadwalader and Samuel Cadwalader Morris – Nov. 30, 1771
- To Samuel Cadwalader Morris – May 4, 1774
- To General Charles Lee – July 25, 1776
- To James Wilson – July 26, 1776
- Folder 02) To Caesar Rodney – May 21, 1779
- To General Nathanael Greene – Aug. 20, 1779
- To General Nathanael Greene – Nov. 24, 1781
- To the Speaker of the General Assembly – Nov. 8, 1784
- To John Lukens – May 17, 1785
- To George Read – Dec. 16, 1785

BOX 01 - MC 2001.13 (cont.)

CORRESPONDENCE (cont.)

Dickinson, John - Letters Sent (cont.)

- Folder 03) To Benjamin Rush – Feb. 27, 1786
To Jasper Yates – June 27, 1787
To Benjamin Rush – Aug. 9, 1787
To Benjamin Rush – Oct. 21, 1790
To Benjamin Rush – Oct. 4, 1792
To Benjamin Rush – Dec. 29, 1796
- Folder 04) To Benjamin Rush – Apr. 15, 1797
To Benjamin Rush – Sep. 30, 1797
To Benjamin Rush – Oct. 17, 1797
To Benjamin Rush – Nov. 6, 1797
To Benjamin Rush – Aug. 10, 1803
To Caesar Augustus Rodney – Nov. 16, 1807

Dickinson, John – Letters Received

- Folder 05) From Charles Nisbet – Dec. 18, 1784
From John Erskine – Mar. 31, 1785

William Bingham – Letters Sent

- Folder 06) To Benjamin Rush – Jan. 1, 1784

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL

- Folder 07) Receipt issued by John Dickinson to Cadwalader and Samuel Cadwalader Morris – July 28, 1772
- Folder 08) Order on David Rittenhouse, Treasurer of the Assembly, for payment for construction of Triumphal Arch – Mar. 8, 1784
- Folder 09) Order on David Rittenhouse, Treasurer of the Assembly, for grant to the American Philosophical Society – Mar. 21, 1784
- Folder 10) Order for the salary of Francis Hopkinson – Mar. 23, 1785
- Folder 11) Resolution of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania – May 5, 1785