10-1-1979

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II. Resources on East Asia in Philadelphia's Stephen Girard Collection and Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Jonathan Goldstein  
Author: Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1682-1846

Scholars have shown an increasing awareness in recent years of the importance of early Chinese-American relations to subsequent American history and international relations. Until about fifty years ago, the sub-field of Sino-American relations up to the first treaty of 1844 was largely the domain of the antiquarian and nautical history buff. Major informants on the topic included Sydney and Marjorie Greenbie, who published their romanticized Gold of Ophir in 1925.¹ Subsequent researchers,
basing their conclusions on assiduous work in archives, stripped the China trade of much of its glamour and revealed ugly imperialistic aspects, such as the opium trade. But certain basic truths have been underscored by contemporary scholarship. Van Alstyne's *Rising American Empire*, published in 1960, documented the commonly-held belief that it was the lure of the Canton market which provided incentive for the first American voyages to the West Coast and Pacific Islands. Such voyages laid the foundation for U.S. acquisition of those places. Research by Downs, Hao, K.C. Liu, Johnson, Supple, and Albion revealed how capital generated in the China trade was rechanneled into stateside and China coast factories, transportation companies, and philanthropies. Native Chinese merchants invested in American railroads as well as in China coast steamship lines. Managerial expertise perfected in the early China trade was utilized in the administration of the Michigan Central and the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroads.

Although historians have made great strides in the last decades, there are still significant questions on the period before 1844 which remain to be answered and for which Philadelphia's Stephen Girard Collection and Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) may provide clues. Two examples of such questions may be cited. First, we are only in the beginning stages of understanding the entire legal basis of American trade with China. Native Chinese merchants brought suits and were sued in American courts. Apparently the bulk of this litigation took place in Pennsylvania, although some material on this exists in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York. Since Tyler Dennett's inaccurate reporting of a Pennsylvania Supreme Court case involving the Cantonese merchant Houqua, only one scholar, Frederic Grant, has begun to investigate the topic. There is room in this field for many more researchers.

Another topic awaiting thorough investigation is the use and appraisal of Chinese material culture in early America. I began to explore this subject in a preliminary way in my book, *Philadelphia and the China Trade 1682-1846. Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978). I was intrigued by the question of how early Americans viewed a culture on the other side of the globe, at a time when our countrymen wore Chinese cotton cloth, drank tea out of Cantonese ceramics, and adorned their homes with Chinese architectural ornamentation. Both the Girard and HSP collections store, in addition to documents, varied artifacts of the China trade which can be used concurrently with documents to answer such questions of social history.

The Stephen Girard Collection. The major repository of China trade materials in Pennsylvania is the Girard Collection. The entire archive and many of the effects of Philadelphia China trader Stephen Girard (1750-1831) are preserved intact at Girard College, the school he endowed in North Philadelphia. There are approximately one million items among the papers alone. The basis of the Girard fortune, estimated at his death in 1831 at $7,500,000 was made in foreign trade, including commerce to Canton in opium and other commodities.

The richness of this historical resource has only begun to be tapped. About sixty years ago a small portion of the collection, the incoming and outgoing correspondence,
was indexed. This arrangement served as the basis for the first full-length, scholarly biography of Girard, which the Girard Estate sponsored. In the 1930's, Luther Evans' Historical Records Survey, a Works Progress Administration project, produced a brief survey of the papers. In 1960, the National Park Service, under Independence National Park Historian David Kimball, attempted another overview of the vast archive. K. C. Liu's 1963 bibliography on Sino-American relations noted the existence of both the Girard and HSP collections, but has elicited little response from East Asianists. In 1964, the American Philosophical Society (APS) reached an agreement with Girard College to microfilm the papers and offer the reels for scholarly use at the Society's downtown Philadelphia library. The vault of Girard College is hardly conducive to research, whereas the Society library is specifically designed for that purpose.

The end result of the APS effort was 663 reels of microfilm, which are available for use in the APS library today. 146 of the reels contain the incoming and outgoing Girard correspondence which had been indexed at Girard College. Researchers at APS can use a Xerox copy of the Girard College card catalogue. Also helpful is an in-house finding guide entitled, Papers of Stephen Girard. Listing of Reels, by APS Associate Librarian Murphy Smith. Microprinting facilities are available at APS, but any substantial duplication must be authorized by Girard College. APS has made about 100 duplicates of their reels of Girard Papers. These may be borrowed on interlibrary loan, again with the approval of Girard College.

In my own research, I have found the Girard materials especially useful for questions of commercial, social, and diplomatic history. The documents can be used first and foremost as a means of reconstructing patterns of early Sino-American commerce, such as ship routes and fluctuations in prices of goods. One can find, for example, what price Americans paid for tea in Canton and sold it for in the States. This can be done with the assistance of the APS and Girard College finding aids used in conjunction with Customs House entries. The collection is also useful as a source of information on businessmen's social attitudes, particularly racial ideas. Girard considered Houqua both a "correct and intelligent merchant" and "my respectable friend." Esching was "of good repute, very polite, and a good judge of teas." These Chinese merchants bestowed upon Girard such gifts as life-size paintings of themselves and lacquered tea chests. Girard prominently displayed the gifts in his Philadelphia counting house and also instructed that they be permanently exhibited in Founder's Hall, Girard College, under the terms of his will. This and other evidence from the Girard Collection indicates that this merchant did not take a highly prejudiced view of his Chinese colleagues.

Girard College is currently evaluating various options concerning the disposition of the uncatalogued and unmicrofilmed papers in its vault. These papers may become available for general scholarly use sometime in the future. Several University of Delaware and Winterthur historians who have been granted special access to the original papers have produced valuable monographs on Stephen Girard's artifacts. However, it is not the policy of Girard College at the present time to allow researchers into the vault.
China Trade Papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The HSP, centrally located in downtown Philadelphia, houses several collections of China trade materials which cover approximately the same topics and time span as the Girard archive. HSP stores its own papers, as well as those of its distinguished neighbor, the Library Company of Philadelphia, which currently specializes in collecting early American printed books. Although HSP China trade documents are not nearly as numerous as those in Girard College, six HSP/Library Company collections hold moderate amounts of information on early Sino-American relations:

1. WILLINGS AND FRANCIS RECORDS, ca. 1794-1825. One hundred and forty items of the business records of the Philadelphia firm of Willings and Francis. Most of the papers pertain to the China trade, and specifically to the opening of an American opium trade to China. There is much correspondence from William Read, the Philadelphian who represented the firm at Canton in 1805-06 and who supervised the first American shipment of opium to China in 1805. Some papers concern a lawsuit brought in the Pennsylvania courts by Consequa, a Cantonese merchant who sought recovery of debts allegedly owed him by Willings and Francis. Other documents pertain to the ship Mount Vernon, which in 1796 apparently was the first United States vessel to trade with Japan under the Dutch flag. There is no index to the Willings and Francis records. Most documents are dated and clearly written, so that there is little danger of confusion.

2. WALN FAMILY PAPERS, ca. 1695-1891. Thirty-eight boxes and fifteen volumes of a Philadelphia Quaker family archive. The papers span several distinct collections and deal mainly with stateside and overseas commerce. Of special interest are the business records of Robert Waln, Sr. (1765-1836), one of Philadelphia's wealthiest China traders, and the notebooks of his son Robert Waln, Jr. (1794-1825), written in China. Robert Waln, Jr. seemed more interested in Chinese culture than in adding to the already formidable family fortune. Upon his return to America, he used copious notes of what he had observed in Canton as the basis for a 475-page book entitled China; Comprehending a View of the Origin of that Empire (Philadelphia: J. Maxwell, 1823). Clifton Phillips, in his study of early American attitudes towards non-Western cultures, described Waln Jr. as "America's first Sinologist", because of the Quaker scholar's China research and stateside publication. Waln Jr.'s manuscripts are in HSP.

3. SWORD FAMILY PAPERS, ca. 1819-50. One meter of letterbooks and papers of a Philadelphia and New Castle, Delaware, family prominent in the China trade. Letters from Canton and Macao from John Dorsey Sword, Mary Sword, and William Sword Ash, describe the voyage to Canton, attitudes toward the Chinese, business practices at Canton, the Opium War, and the social life of Westeners at Macao. The collection has a typescript of every item. Original and typescript are filed together in chronological order.
4. THOMAS PYM COPE PAPERS, ca. 1817-55. One hundred and fifty cubic feet of unsorted material of a contemporary of Girard and Waln, Sr., who was their rival in Philadelphia's overseas commerce. As with the unindexed portion of the Girard archive, there may be valuable historical information in this collection, but no one will know until the documents have been combed through.

5. SPICER-LEAMING PAPERS, ca. 1706-1861. This assemblage of about 5,000 items includes an 1819 China trade invoice book of J. Fischer Learning, son-in-law of Robert Waln, Sr.; an 1819 memorandum book of the China trade ship, Thomas Scattergood; and a memorandum book of Canton trade, 1819-22.

6. COMMODORE JAMES S. BIDDLE PAPERS, ca. 1833-59. One hundred and fifty items by and about this U.S. Naval figure who was prominent in early Sino-American relations.

There are two comprehensive card catalogues for HSP manuscripts. One covers HSP-owned material; the other, the papers of the Library Company. These catalogues are indexed by subject heading and by name of correspondent (writer and recipient of document). There is substantial cross-referencing on subjects related to East Asia. In addition to the card catalogue, HSP published a Guide to its manuscript collection in 1949, and is currently updating it. While revisions are going on, researchers can use an unpublished in-house finding guide entitled, Supplementary (Summarized) Guide to Manuscripts. These guides reveal bits and pieces of information on East Asia interspersed in collections other than the aforementioned ones. HSP has xeroxing and microprinting facilities available, plus its own highly professional Photographic Service. HSP offers a distinct convenience to researchers by being open Monday nights until 9 P.M.

The HSP and Girard collections have special significance for East Asianists when one realizes that, outside of Pennsylvania, more and more archives of China trade papers are being destroyed. Recent losses include almost all the papers of Joseph Barrel, one of the sponsors of the voyage of the first American ship to China in 1784. Virtually all of the papers of the dynamic China coast firm of Wetmore and Company were discarded after the auction of that family's Newport, Rhode Island, estate. The nineteenth century files of the New York Chamber of Commerce have also apparently been burned. Coupled with the outright disposal of material has been the misuse of extant collections, especially commercial documents. In the Perkins Collection at Massachusetts Historical Society, for example, account books have been used as scrapbooks. Children have pasted newspaper clippings over the joint opium accounts of J. and T. H. Perkins and Houqua. The collection has not been repaired. Although portions of these papers are important enough to be included in the National Archives, they are rapidly being lost. The two assemblages of China trade papers in Philadelphia, on the other hand, are well-preserved by skilled archivists. Up to now, these documents have been underutilized by East Asianists. These precious resources should receive more of the scholarly attention they deserve.
Portions of the Stephen Girard Papers, microfilmed and indexed:

American Philosophical Society Library
105 South Fifth Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106
TEL: (215) 627-0706
Contacts: Murphy Smith, Associate Librarian
Stephen Catlett, Assistant Manuscript Librarian

East Asianists may also be interested in APS’s resources on Chinese linguistics (Peter S. Duponceau Collection) and on the Philippines (Harley Bartlett Collection).

China trade artifacts of Stephen Girard:

Stephen Girard Collection
Founder’s Hall
Girard College
Girard and Corinthian Avenues
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19121
Contacts: Phyllis Abrams, Girard College Librarian, TEL: (215) 236-6500
Robert Schwarz, Curator, Stephen Girard Collection, TEL: (215) 563-4887

The originals of the Stephen Girard Papers are stored at Girard College. However, they are not available to the general public.

China trade documents and artifacts:

Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Manuscript Department
1300 Locust Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107
TEL: (215) 732-6200
Contact: Peter Parker, Chief of the Manuscript Department

The manuscript collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia, located next door to the Historical Society, is housed in the Historical Society’s Manuscript Department and is accessible via that department.

Notes:

1. Sydney and Marjorie Greenbie, Gold of Ophir or the Lure That Made America (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1925).

2. Richard Van Alstyne, The Rising American Empire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960). Van Alstyne elaborated on earlier pioneering scholarship which included: K. S. Latourette, The History of Early Relations Between the United States and China (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917); Tyler Dennett,
Americans in Eastern Asia (New York: Macmillan, 1922); and Foster Rhea Dulles, 
The Old China Trade (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1930).


John McMaster, The Life and Times of Stephen Girard 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1918). Mr. Marvin McFarland, Chief of the Division of Science and Technology of the Library of Congress, very kindly furnished background information on the Girard Collection. Scholars interested in using the collection should contact Mr. McFarland, who is well informed about the papers. Because of the size and lack of organization of the archive, it has proven to be a maze for many researchers.


For overall surveys of the Girard papers, see: Webster Christman, "The Papers of Stephen Girard: Their Preparation and Historical Interest," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 110, no. 6 (December, 1966), 383-85; and Smith, "Stephen Girard Papers."

Customs House entries contain the names of Girard's China trade ships and the dates of their voyages. These names and dates can be checked in Smith's Listing of Reels and in the Girard College card catalogue in order to find out the corresponding numbers of the microfilm reels pertaining to each ship and voyage. Each reel begins with a descriptive "target" frame, which may be followed by additional frames warning of any peculiarities on the reel, or
noting other places in the collection where related material may be found. Additional "target" frames mark the beginning of the material for each year. Between "target" frames, documents are organized chronologically. Knowing the date a ship left Canton, or docked in Philadelphia, one should be able to locate copies of cargo manifests and other communications which would reveal the price paid for a homeward cargo, such as tea.


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III. The Promise of Social History via the Gazetteers: A Survey of Feng-su Sections of Republican Gazetteers at the East Asian Library, University of Pittsburgh

Donald S. Sutton Carnegie-Mellon University

The Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh, has purchased some 900 of the local gazetteers reprinted in Taiwan. About 260 of these date from the Republican period; most of the rest are from the Ch'ing period. While Pittsburgh's is obviously only one of many East Asian collections holding such reprints, attention needs to be drawn to the gazetteers in general, and to the ones at Pittsburgh in particular,