

ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

A Guide to the Charles Alexander Clinton Papers

Summary Information

Repository

Albany Institute of History & Art Library

Creator

Charles Alexander Clinton

Title

Charles Alexander Clinton Papers

Identifier

MG 193

Date

1819-1855

Physical Description

3 boxes

Physical Location

The materials are located onsite in the Museum.

Language of the Material

English

Abstract

The collection is composed of seven bound volumes compiled and written by Charles Alexander Clinton, the son of former New York Governor, DeWitt Clinton. Included in the collection is a copybook of letters drafted soon after his father's death, a commonplace book, a volume of notes from a law class and four volumes called Flim Flams that contain newspaper clippings mostly dealing with his father's political career.

Preferred Citation

Preferred citation for this material is as follows:

Charles Alexander Clinton Papers, 1819-1855, MG 193. Albany Institute of History & Art Library, Albany, New York.

Conditions Governing Access and Use

Restrictions on Access

None

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

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Processed by D. Doughan, July 2009; finding aid updated by H. Cox, June 2021.

Biographical/Historical

Charles Alexander Clinton (1798 - November 21, 1861). Charles, born in New York City, was the second son of Dewitt and Maria Franklin Clinton. DeWitt Clinton (March 2, 1769 Little Britain, New York – February 11, 1828 Albany, New York) was an early American politician who served as United States Senator, Mayor of New York City and Governor of New York. DeWitt is primarily remembered as an active promoter of the Erie Canal. In total, DeWitt and Maria had ten children.

Biographic information about Charles Clinton is limited. He grew up in New York City and graduated from Union College in 1820. In 1823, he served on a committee to further the interest of the Albany Lyceum of Natural History. In 1827, Charles married Catherine Hone. Ms. Hone was the daughter of Philip Hone, the Mayor of New York from 1826 to 1827. Charles was elected to serve as the Notary of the Fulton Bank in 1827. He also served as the Judge Advocate for the 1st Division Cavalry until July 1st, 1828.

Charles served as his father's personal secretary until DeWitt's death in February of 1828. Charles continued serving as the personal secretary for Nathaniel Pitcher, Governor Pro Tem until December of 1828. Afterwards, Charles moved to New York to practice law. In 1829, Charles was admitted into the Society of the Cincinnati, the oldest hereditary military society in the United States.

Charles wrote two books: *A Winter from Home*, in 1852, and *Biographical Sketch of the Clinton Family*, in 1859. A complete copy of *A Winter from Home* is included in the 7th manuscript and is an account of a journey through the Southern States and up the Mississippi River to St. Paul.

Scope and Contents

Seven bound manuscripts are included in the collection.

The first volume is a copybook with drafts of correspondence prepared by Charles after the death of his father, DeWitt Clinton, in February of 1828. Most letters notify friends and family of his family's loss. Other letters deal with the settling of his father's estate. General Lafayette, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, Nathaniel Pitcher and Stephen Van Rensselaer III are just a few of Charles' correspondents. Several letters in the book mention an elaborate silver vase that New York City presented to DeWitt Clinton for his political support and promotion of the Erie Canal while governor of the state. The vase, one of a pair made by Philadelphia silversmiths Thomas Fletcher and Sidney Gardiner, was presented to Clinton in Albany on March 19, 1825, and was part of the estate that Charles was settling. The draft letters date from October 1827 to June 1835.

The second volume is a notebook from a law class that Charles presumably attended in 1820. Both civil and criminal law is covered. The book provides some insight into the teaching of law in the early 19th century. The book has numbered pages and an index in the back of the book. The last entry is on page 281.

The third volume is a commonplace book. This book was presumably created in 1825. There is no discernable order or theme to the book. Topics include but are not limited to: ethics, zoology, biology, love of country, and discord. The book has numbered pages and an index in the back of the book. The last numbered page is 451. However, numerous numbered pages remain blank.

The last four manuscripts in the collection are titled Flim Flams. Among other printed material, the manuscripts are made up of newspaper clippings which are outrageous, deceptive, funny, unusual, scandalous, shady or otherwise strange material. Most of the clippings are editorials covering his father's political career. Some of the clippings were written by DeWitt Clinton. However, there are some outliers covering such topics as natural history, book reviews, poetry, and numerous articles from a series run in the Albany Daily Advertiser titled 'Rural Sports.' There is a limited marginalia presumably penned by Charles in most of the volumes which provides additional context.

Newspapers clippings are from a variety of newspapers including but not limited to: *Albany Daily Advertiser*, *Farmer's Register*, *Schenectady Cabinet*, *Commercial Advertiser*, *Columbian*, *Albany Argus*, *Morning Chronicle*, *American Citizen* and the *Evening Post*. The pages within the four volumes are numbered consecutively from 1 to 956. Pages 613 to 749 are missing which indicates that one volume is missing.

The first volume of Flim Flams was created between early 1819 and December of 1822. The volume includes clippings from 1818 to 1822. This volume covers DeWitt's involvement in the Erie Canal and the strong opposition from Martin Van Buren and the Bucktails. Towards the end of this volume a controversy over the salaries of the State Printers is covered.

The second volume of Flim Flams was created in late 1822 through 1823. This volume continues with the controversy over the salary given to the State Printer, Isaac Q. Leake and Moses L. Cantine. Leake and Cantine were joint editors of the *Albany Argus*, a Republican newspaper. Most of the articles ran in papers that supported the Federalist at the time. This volume also includes a series of nine letters to the editors that ran in the *Columbian* from December of 1809 to 1810 penned by an individual that went by "Rattle in the Tail." A subsequent series of communication titled The Diarrhodon is included as well. This communication ran in the *Columbian* from December 1810 to March of 1811. The first twenty articles are included but the twenty-first article that ran in the March 15, 1811 edition is not included. The author of these two series is unknown.

The third volume of Flim Flams was created in 1823. It begins with clippings from 1807. The clippings are letters to the editors penned by John Lansing, DeWitt Clinton and then VicePresident of the United States and DeWitt's uncle, George Clinton. In question is the appearance of improprieties concerning DeWitt's possible appointment as the Chancellor of the State, the highest judicial officer in the state. Also included is a controversy over the appointment of the Sheriff of the County of Westchester in the same year and a series of letters to the editor of the *Columbian* titled the Martling-man that ran in 1812. Marginalia attributes it to 1810. (One letter in this series appears at the end of the previous volume.) Numerous articles on George and DeWitt Clinton follow, dated from 1804 to 1823. The volume also includes numerous articles on Natural History.

The last volume of Flim Flams was created over two spans of time. The first section is from 1824 to 1827. It starts mid-way through a series of letters to the editor that ran in the summer of 1824 in the *Schenectady Cabinet* and a series titled "Political

Correspondence” that ran in *Albany Daily Advertiser*. Covered in this material is the removal of DeWitt Clinton from the Erie Canal Commission, the Democratic Party nomination of Samuel Young for Governor, the 1824 and 1826 election for Governor. From page 862 on the articles are from 1843 to 1855. Also included is a copy of Mr. Clintons’ 1852 book *A Winter from Home*.

Contents List

The following section contains a listing of the materials in the collection.

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