

Finding Aid to the O'Donnell family papers
Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County
The Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery
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O'Donnell family papers, 1831-1935
Collection 100
Size of Collection: 1 box, .5 linear feet
Accession number: MSS 2012-04
Records collected by: Elliott O'Donnell (1872-1965)

Short Description of Collection

Papers of the descendants of John O'Donnell, the founder of Canton in southeastern Baltimore, Md., and his wife, Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell. Primary creators are son Columbus O'Donnell; Columbus O'Donnell's son Charles Oliver O'Donnell; Sarah Vize O'Donnell, wife of son Elliott; Sarah Vize O'Donnell's son Henry; and Henry's wife Elizabeth "Sarah" Mousley O'Donnell. Materials include correspondence, journals, and family histories. Portrait photographs of Sarah Chew Elliott, her mother Mary Chew, and her daughter Mary O'Donnell are also included. The collection was originally organized by O'Donnell descendant Elliott O'Donnell (1872-1965).

Select Search Terms

O'Donnell, John, 1749-1805
O'Donnell, Sarah Chew Elliot , 1768-
O'Donnell, Columbus, 1792-1873
O'Donnell, Elliott, 1798-1836
O'Donnell, Sarah Vize, -1870
O'Donnell, John Vize, -1919
O'Donnell, Henry, circa 1828-1873
O'Donnell, Charles Oliver, 1822-1877
O'Donnell, Elliott, 1872-1965
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives.
Baltimore (Md.) -- History -- 19th century.

Languages

English

Biographical Note

John O'Donnell (1749-1805), son of John and Deborah O'Donnell of Ireland, was a merchant and ship captain for the British East India Company.¹²³ When O'Donnell arrived in Baltimore's harbor in 1785, he named his land along the harbor "Canton" after the Chinese port city now called Guangzhou.⁴ Canton remains an active harbor industrial and residential neighborhood in Baltimore, with O'Donnell Square and O'Donnell Street running through its center.

John O'Donnell married Sarah Chew Elliott (1768-1855), daughter of Captain Thomas Elliott of Fell's Point, in 1785.⁵⁶ Before John's death in 1805, he and Sarah had 7 children: Mary (b. 1790), Columbus (1792-1873), Deborah (b. 1794), John (b. 1796), Elliott (1798-1836), Eliza White (b. 1800), and Henry (b. 1791).⁷ General Columbus O'Donnell, the eldest son, fought in the Battle of North Point during the War of 1812.⁸ He served several prominent positions throughout Baltimore, including with the B&O Railroad, Union Bank of Maryland, First National Bank of Maryland, the Baltimore Water Company, and the Baltimore Gas Light company; he was also an original partner of the Canton Company of Baltimore.⁹¹⁰

John O'Donnell's fifth child, son Elliott, was the only descendent to return to his father's homeland of Ireland, to study at Trinity College. Prior to his mysterious death in 1836, Elliott married Sarah Vize (d. 1870).¹¹ Sarah Vize had 8 children, at least one of which was with her second husband: John Vize (d. 1919), Elliott, Henry (d. 1873), Sarah Marie, Harriet (d. 1874), Elizabeth, Eleanora, and Robert Edmund (1842-1897).¹²¹³ Son Henry also attended Trinity College, and it is his son Elliott (1872-1965) that compiled this manuscript collection.

¹ Thornton-Cook, Elsie Prentys. *John O'Donnell of Baltimore, his forbears & descendants*. London: Favil Press, 1934.

² Memo book: Columbus O'Donnell, MSS, Maryland Historical Society. In letter dated May 18 [1818], Columbus O'Donnell writes, "John O'Donnell my dear father died 18th of May 1810." Both Thornton-Cook and Schlerf provide the death year of 1805.

³ Schlerf, Gary W. *The history of the Canton Railroad Company: artery of Baltimore's industrial heartland*. Baltimore: The Company, 1996.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Arps, Walter E., Jr., comp. *Departed this life: death notices from the (Baltimore) Sun*. Silver Spring, Md.: Family Line Pub., 1985. Death date listed as 1855, 87 years of age. Birth year confirmed in Ancestry.com.

⁶ O'Donnell, Elliott. *Death of Glory: John O'Donnell of Baltimore*. Unpublished, circa 1959. Elliott O'Donnell, Papers, 1870-1965, MS 727, Maryland Historical Society.

⁷ Thornton-Cook, Elsie Prentys. *John O'Donnell of Baltimore, his forbears & descendants*. London: Favil Press, 1934. Some sources, including the Maryland Historical Society and "Baltimore: Past and Present," (1871), list Columbus's birth year as 1797. Elliott O'Donnell's manuscript and the 1860 census confirm his birth year as 1792.

⁸ O'Donnell, Elliott. *Death of Glory: John O'Donnell of Baltimore*. Unpublished, circa 1959. Elliott O'Donnell, Papers, 1870-1965, MS 727, Maryland Historical Society.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Schlerf, Gary W. *The history of the Canton Railroad Company: artery of Baltimore's industrial heartland*. Baltimore: The Company, 1996.

¹¹ O'Donnell, Elliott. *Death of Glory: John O'Donnell of Baltimore*. Unpublished, circa 1959. Elliott O'Donnell, Papers, 1870-1965, MS 727, Maryland Historical Society.

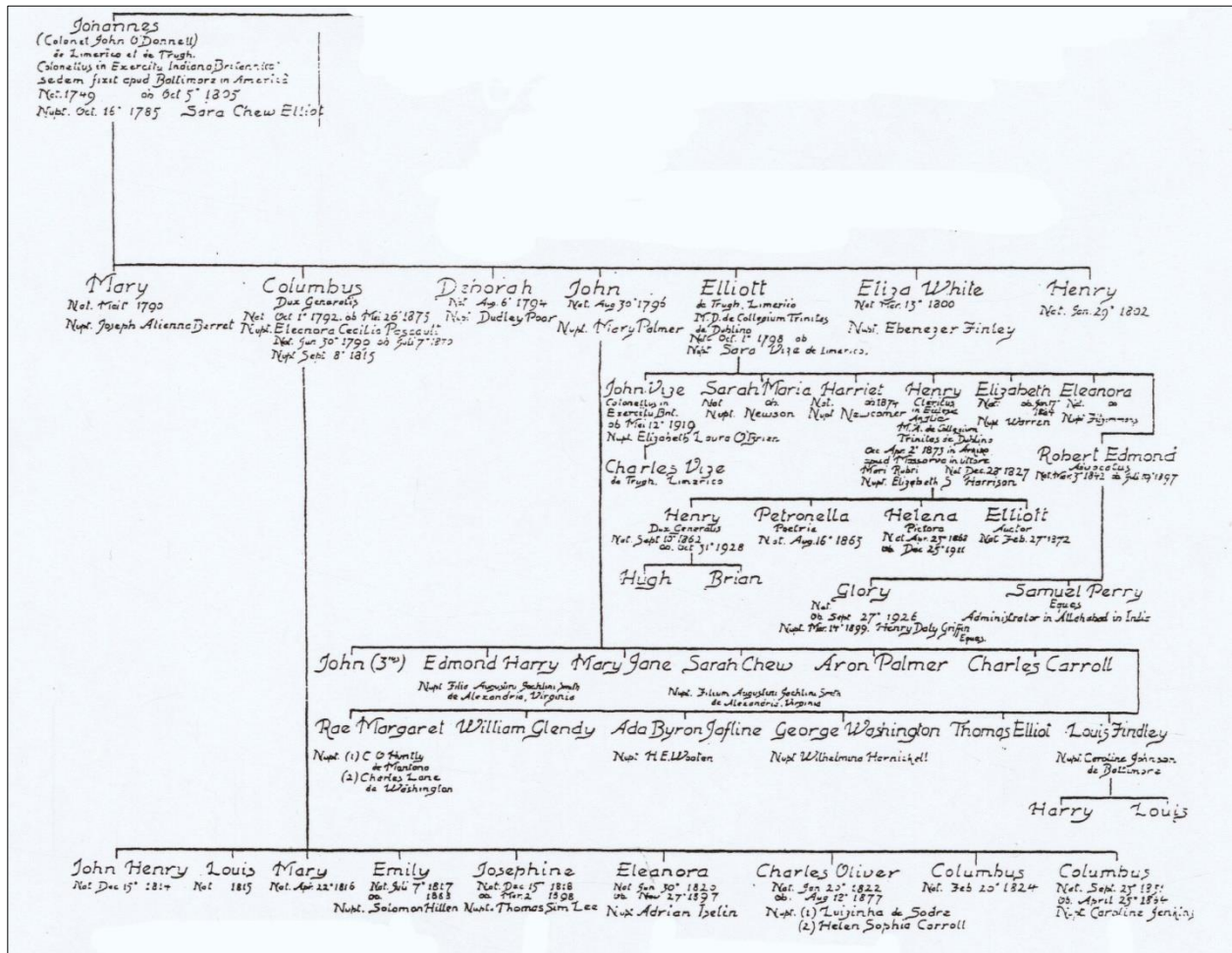
¹² Thornton-Cook, Elsie Prentys. *John O'Donnell of Baltimore, his forbears & descendants*. London: Favil Press, 1934. Does not list Elliott O'Donnell (grandson of John O'Donnell, son of Elliott O'Donnell).

¹³ O'Donnell, Elliott. *Death of Glory: John O'Donnell of Baltimore*. Unpublished, circa 1959. Elliott O'Donnell, Papers, 1870-1965, MS 727, Maryland Historical Society.

Family Tree

An excerpt from the O'Donnell family tree published in Elsie Prentys Thornton-Cook's, *John O'Donnell of Baltimore, his forbears & descendants*. London: Faval Press, 1934. Referenced May 2012, Maryland Historical Society, H. Furlong Baldwin Library.

*please note that Elliott O'Donnell's son Elliott (born circa 1830) is not listed on this tree.



Scope and Content Note

The O'Donnell family papers, 1831-1932, are primarily composed of correspondence written to or from the descendants of John O'Donnell (1749-1805) and his wife Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell (b. 1768). The O'Donnells were a prominent and wealthy family in Baltimore, beginning with John O'Donnell's founding of the neighborhood and industrial area of Canton in 1785. Original materials created by John and Sarah O'Donnell are not available in this collection.

The O'Donnell family frequently named descendants after relatives; care should be taken to determine the correct person referenced within this collection, especially when referencing people by the name of John, Sarah, Mary, Columbus, Elliott, and Henry.

Series I, Columbus O'Donnell correspondence, 1831-1868, contains correspondence written by John O'Donnell's oldest son, Columbus (1792-1873). Columbus writes of his life, his health, and the finances of the O'Donnell family. As the bulk of the correspondence was written during the Civil War, passing references to the events of Baltimore and area troops are often included. Columbus's main correspondent is Henry O'Donnell, son of his brother Elliott, and his sister-in-law Sarah Vize O'Donnell, mother of Henry. During processing, a letter written by Sarah Vize O'Donnell to her son Henry O'Donnell was located interfiled with Columbus's correspondence and moved to Series III, Henry O'Donnell papers.

Series II is composed of three letters written by Charles Oliver O'Donnell, son of Columbus. His correspondents are also Henry O'Donnell – his cousin – and Henry's mother Sarah, who is Charles Oliver's aunt. Topics covered include finances and the Civil War. Charles Oliver appears to have been a supporter of the Confederate Army, in contrast to his father Columbus, an ardent supporter of the Union.

The third series, Henry O'Donnell papers, contains correspondence and journals written by Henry O'Donnell (d. 1873). Four journals detail Henry's trip to America in 1870; the entries include his thoughts, sketches, drawn maps, and some descriptions of his time travelling by sea, in Baltimore, and in Washington, D.C. The journals date from July 12 to September 3, 1870. Four letters to his "darling wife," Elizabeth Sarah Mousley O'Donnell, detail his time in Baltimore and his efforts to negotiate his inheritance, or "legacy", from his uncle Columbus. Finally, a letter to his mother Sarah further details his financial negotiations with his uncle, although this letter appears to be from much earlier and during the Civil War. Columbus O'Donnell's will, available at the Maryland Historical Society, indicates that Henry and his brother John Vize received their inheritance prior to January 1872.

Series IV, John O'Donnell and Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell collection, 1932-1935 and undated, contains biographical information relating directly to John and Sarah but does not contain materials created by their hand. Several biographical essays and family trees are included, as well as three photographs of portraits (painted by Charles Willson Peale, and exhibited in the National Gallery of Art in 1925): one of Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell, one of her mother Mary Chew, and one of Sarah's daughter, Mary O'Donnell (b. 1790).

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The fifth and final series contains single items relating to several O'Donnell descendants. A letter to Elliott O'Donnell (1872-1965) from his cousin Columbus O'Donnell Iselin, grandson of Columbus O'Donnell, includes discussion of the O'Donnell family and John O'Donnell. Also included is a statement of personal property for Elliott O'Donnell (b. 1798), son of John O'Donnell and grandfather of Elliott O'Donnell. And finally, there is a letter to Henry O'Donnell from cousin Lizzie Poor; the letter is undated and it is unclear which Henry is the recipient. Columbus O'Donnell's sister Deborah (b. 1794) married Dudley Poor, but no descendants are listed on available family trees.

Organization of Provenance Information

Organization

The O'Donnell family papers have been divided into five series: I. Columbus O'Donnell correspondence. II. Charles Oliver O'Donnell correspondence. III. Henry O'Donnell papers. IV. John O'Donnell and Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell collection. V. Miscellaneous. There are no sub-series.

Provenance and Acquisitions Information

This collection was purchased from Richard M. Ford, Ltd (London) with funds provided by the Friends of the Library in 2012. The collection was originally property of Elliott O'Donnell (1872-1965), great-grandson of John and Sarah O'Donnell. Related materials from Elliott O'Donnell were donated to the Maryland Historical Society prior to his death in 1965.

Processing Note

The papers had previously been separated into 5 divisions and those divisions were maintained during processing. The five series in the processed collection reflect this prior arrangement. The collection was processed and a finding aid written in 2012 by Archivist Lindsey Loeper with research and rehousing assistance provided by student assistant Steve Ammidown.

During processing, a letter not listed on the dealer prospectus sheet was located in an envelope within the Columbus O'Donnell correspondence (Series I). It was determined that this letter was written by Sarah Vize O'Donnell (d. 1870) to her son Henry O'Donnell (d. 1875); Sarah was the widow of Columbus O'Donnell's brother Elliott. This letter was moved to Series III, Henry O'Donnell papers.

Series Description and Container List

Series I. Columbus O'Donnell correspondence

Dates: 1831-1868

Size: 12 folders

Correspondence written by Columbus O'Donnell (1792-1873) to his nephew Henry O'Donnell, the son of his brother Elliott; his sister-in-law Sarah O'Donnell, wife of his brother Elliott; and a letter published in the *Baltimore American* in 1831. This series is arranged by the recipient's name.

Box 1	Folder 1	To Henry O'Donnell, June 19, 1857	1857
Box 1	Folder 2	To Henry O'Donnell, May 23, 1861	1861
Box 1	Folder 3	To Henry O'Donnell, January 15, 1862	1862
Box 1	Folder 4	To Henry O'Donnell, April 22, 1862	1862
Box 1	Folder 5	To Henry O'Donnell, July 15, 1864	1864
Box 1	Folder 6	To Henry O'Donnell, February 20, 1865	1865
Box 1	Folder 7	To Henry O'Donnell, November 21, 1865	1865
Box 1	Folder 8	To Henry O'Donnell, November 9, 1866	1866
Box 1	Folder 9	To Henry O'Donnell, June 19, 1868	1868
Box 1	Folder 10	To "Sister", May 13, 1864	1864
Box 1	Folder 11	To Sarah O'Donnell, October 2, 1866	1866
Box 1	Folder 12	Letter published in the <i>Baltimore American</i> , December 28, 1831	1831

Series II. Charles Oliver O'Donnell correspondence

Dates: 1862, undated

Size: 3 folders

Correspondence written by Charles Oliver O'Donnell, son of Columbus O'Donnell, to his cousin Henry O'Donnell and Henry's mother Sarah O'Donnell. Letters are arranged chronologically.

Box 1	Folder 14	To Sarah O'Donnell, October 30, 1862	1862
Box 1	Folder 15	To Henry O'Donnell, undated	undated
Box 1	Folder 16	To Henry O'Donnell, before 1865	undated

Series III. Henry O'Donnell papers

Dates: circa 1961, 1870-1872

Size: 9 folders

Correspondence and travel journal belonging to Henry O'Donnell, grandson of John O'Donnell and son of Elliott O'Donnell. His main correspondent is his wife, Elizabeth Sarah

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Mousley O'Donnell. One letter is from his mother, Sarah O'Donnell. This series is arranged chronologically. Letters written to Henry are also available in Series I and II.

Box 1	Folder 16	Letter from Sarah O'Donnell, January 24	circa 1861-1865
Box 1	Folder 17	Journal, July 12-22, 1870	1870
Box 1	Folder 18	Journal, July 23-30, 1870	1870
Box 1	Folder 19	Journal, circa August 1-7, 1870	1870
Box 1	Folder 20	Journal, August 12 - September 3, 1870	1870
Box 1	Folder 21	Letter to Elizabeth Sarah O'Donnell, June 19, 1871	1871
Box 1	Folder 22	Letter to Elizabeth Sarah O'Donnell, June 22, 1871	1871
Box 1	Folder 23	Letter to Elizabeth Sarah O'Donnell, June 27, 1871	1871
Box 1	Folder 24	Letter to Elizabeth Sarah O'Donnell, June 29, 1871	1871
Box 1	Folder 25	Letter from unsigned, July 25, 1872	1872

Series IV. John O'Donnell and Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell collection

Dates: 1932-1935, undated

Size: 9 folders

Biographical materials relating to the lives of John O'Donnell, Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell, and their lineage and descendants. Also included are three photographs of portraits painted by Charles Willson Peale), one of Sarah Chew Elliott O'Donnell, one of her mother Mary Chew, and one of her daughter, also named Mary. These items were not created by John and Sarah O'Donnell.

Box 1	Folder 26	Letter to Louis H. Dielman of the Peabody Institute from Elliott O'Donnell, October 17, 1932 [includes family history narrative]	1932
Box 1	Folder 27	"Day by Day' by Carroll Dulaney, with postscript by Elliott O'Donnell dated October 17, 1932	1932
Box 1	Folder 28	Francis B. Culver, "Chew Family." Maryland Historical Magazine (June 1935): 157-1976. [Letter from Mrs. William F. Bevan enclosed]	1935
Box 1	Folder 29	Photographs (3): Mary Chew, Sarah Chew Elliott [wife of John O'Donnell], Mary O'Donnell [daughter of John and Sarah O'Donnell]	undated
Box 1	Folder 30	"Sarah Chew Elliott's Ancestry" [family tree]	undated
Box 1	Folder 31	Family tree, starting with John O'Donnell and his wife Sarah Chew Elliott	undated

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Box 1	Folder 32	Account of John O'Donnell's life, "As told by Uncle Columbus"	undated
Box 1	Folder 33	"John O'Donnell of Baltimore," biography written by Josephine Lee	undated
Box 1	Folder 34	"John O'Donnell - His Will and Codicil, Sarah Chew O'Donnell - Her Renunciation, October 2, 1805" [typescript copy]	undated

Series V. Miscellaneous

Dates: 1927, undated

Size: 3 folders

Box 1	Folder 35	Letter from Columbus O'Donnell Iselin to Elliott O'Donnell, January 29, 1927	1927
Box 1	Folder 36	Statement of the Personal Property of the late Elliott O'Donnell (b. 1798)	undated
Box 1	Folder 37	Letter from Lizzie Poor to Henry O'Donnell, July 15, year unknown	undated

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Resources

Arps, Walter E., Jr., comp. *Departed this life: death notices from the (Baltimore) Sun*. Silver Spring, Md.: Family Line Pub., 1985.

Baltimore: Past and Present. With Biographical Sketches of its Representative Men. Baltimore: Richardson and Bennett, 1871.

Columbus O'Donnell, will dated April 20, 1871, proved May 31, 1871, updated January 19, 1872, Baltimore, MD. Maryland Historical Society.

Memo book: Columbus O'Donnell, MSS, Maryland Historical Society

O'Donnell, Elliott. *Death of Glory: John O'Donnell of Baltimore*. Unpublished, circa 1959. Elliott O'Donnell, Papers, 1870-1965, MS 727, Maryland Historical Society.

Schlerf, Gary W. *The history of the Canton Railroad Company: artery of Baltimore's industrial heartland*. Baltimore: The Company, 1996.

Thornton-Cook, Elsie Prentys. *John O'Donnell of Baltimore, his forbears & descendants*. London: Favis Press, 1934.