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

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County
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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 Elliott, 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.\(^1\)\(^2\) 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.\(^3\) 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.\(^4\) 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).\(^5\) General Columbus O'Donnell, the eldest son, fought in the Battle of North Point during the War of 1812.\(^6\) 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.\(^7\)\(^8\)

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).\(^9\) 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, Eleanor, and Robert Edmund (1842-1897).\(^10\) Son Henry also attended Trinity College, and it is his son Elliott (1872-1965) that compiled this manuscript collection.

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\(^2\) 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.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid.
Family Tree


*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).
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 *Baltimore American*, 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
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**  
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
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
Resources


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

