

Library Company of Philadelphia

McA MSS 021

WILLIAM WHELAN PAPERS

1811-1841

.21 linear feet, 1 box

- Series I. Correspondence (1811-1841)
- Series II. Documents (1824-1836)
- Series III. Association of the Friends of Ireland (1829)
- Series IV. St. John's Orphan Asylum (1835-1840)

February 2006

Descriptive Summary**Repository**

Library Company of Philadelphia
1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-5698

Call Number

McA MSS 021

Creator

Whelan, William, d. 1863

Title

William Whelan Papers

Inclusive Dates

1811-1841

Quantity

.21 linear feet (1 box)

Language of Materials

Materials are in English.

Abstract

The William Whelan Papers hold correspondence and documents showing the involvement of a Philadelphia merchant in his business, Irish-American society, and local charitable organizations.

Administrative Information**Restrictions to Access**

The collection is open to researchers. It is on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and should be accessed through the Society's reading room at 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA. Visit their website, <http://www.hsp.org/>, for reading room hours.

Acquisition Information

Gift of John A. McAllister; forms part of the McAllister Collection.

Processing Information

The William Whelan Papers were formerly interfiled within the large and chronologically arranged McAllister Manuscript Collection. The papers were reunited, arranged, and described as a single collection in 2005, under grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the William Penn Foundation. The collection was processed by Sandra Markham. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Preferred Citation

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Online Catalog Headings

Subject Names

Hughes, John, 1797-1864
 Doran, Joseph Michael, 1800-1859
 Desmond, Daniel J., d. 1849
 Nancrede, Joseph G. (Joseph Guerard), 1793-1857
 Neagle, John, 1796-1865
 St. John's Orphan Asylum (Philadelphia, Pa.)
 Association of the "Friends of Ireland" and Irishmen in the City and County of Philadelphia

Subject Topics

Orphanages--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia
 Irish Americans--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia--Societies, etc.
 Ireland--Politics and government--1800-1837
 Irish Americans--Correspondence
 Merchants--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia--19th century--Archives
 Irish question

Document Types

Letters

Biographical/Historical Notes

A respected Philadelphia merchant, William Whelan (d. 1863) was born in Ireland and came to America as a boy. He was employed in the United States Marshal's Office during his first few years in the city, after which he left to embark in the trade. According to his obituary in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (published December 15, 1863), "Mr. Edward Thompson, the well known shipping merchant of that day, made him a tempting offer to join him in an adventure in China, which on consideration he declined, and established himself without capital and purely on character and credit, as a grocer, at the corner of Fourth and Chestnut Sts. By industry and integrity he soon found himself at the head of a prosperous business." Whelan appeared in the Philadelphia directories from 1809 through 1842, listed as a grocer at the northwest corner of that intersection; his store is the most prominent building portrayed in John Lewis Krimmel's painting (and resulting prints) *Procession of the Victuallers in May 1821*. The compendium *Memoirs and Auto-biography of some of the Wealthy Citizens of Philadelphia* (1846) described Whelan as "A retired grocer, in which business he made his money" with a net worth of \$50,000. He was also one of the original stockholders in the Farmers and Mechanics Bank, which was one of the most prominent in the city at mid-century.

Whelan was involved with a number of charitable organizations, including those with ties to his home country. He served on the board of St. John's Orphan Asylum and as treasurer of the Association of the "Friends of Ireland." Whelan's obituary declared that "he was a man of quick perception and of great kindness of heart, always ready to assist the young and deserving with his advice and means, prominent in charities, both public and private, managing many trusts for widows and orphans and generally declining compensation...In Mr. Whelan's death we have lost one of our best citizens. In him has passed away one of the monuments of our city."

A devout Catholic, Whelan was a member of St. Joseph's Church (founded in 1732) where, in 1807, he married his wife Catherine; she died in 1858. Among their children was Dr. William Whelan (1808-1865), a surgeon and chief of the United States Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery during the Civil War.

Collection Overview

The William Whelan Papers are not a complete record of Whelan's lifespan, interests, or activities, but do provide a glimpse of his stature within the city. They are arranged in four series: Series I, Correspondence (1811-1841); Series II, Documents (1824-1836); Series III, Association of the Friends of Ireland (1829); Series IV, St. John's Orphan Asylum (1835-1840).

Series I, Correspondence (1811-1841) mostly contains letters that concern routine business arrangements, such as that from Stephen Holt Jr. regarding the possibility of receiving a shipment of cloves on a schooner from Cayenne arriving in Salem, MA. There are, however, a few letters that focus more on connections within the Irish community in the United States, on both a personal and organizational level. In the latter case, the collection holds a single circular letter from the Philadelphia Repeal Society inviting Whelan and all Irishmen to a meeting at Ryan's Hotel. In the personal realm, the Colebert, Fortune, Leahy, O'Brien, Powers', Ryan, and Wallace folders all show some reliance on Whelan for assistance or favors. In addition, the collection holds nine letters from William Roche, a dry goods merchant in Missouri. The first is addressed to Michael Skeehan in Manayunk (now part of Philadelphia), and describes Roche's trip from Philadelphia to St. Louis as well as the state of the markets there; at the end of the letter he asks Skeehan to show the letter to Whelan. The next was written to Roche's parents in County Waterford and explained where he had established himself "after all my perambulation." The letter is also signed by his siblings John, Bridget, and Ellen, who were living and working with him; Roche asks that any response be sent to William Whelan who will forward it on. The remainder of their letters concern shipments of merchandise from Whelan to St. Louis, and mention the many transportation challenges faced by settlers in the Midwest.

Julia Power, writing from Ireland, addressed Whelan as "Mr. Phelan," but her envelope carried the description "Merchant at the corner of fourth and Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, America," which allowed for its delivery.

Series II, Documents (1824-1836) contains just a few financial papers from his work and home lives, among which are an invoice for the education of his daughter Susanna, receipts for newspaper subscriptions including the *National Gazette* and the *Catholic Herald*, receipts for his licenses to retail foreign merchandise including alcoholic beverages, and an invoice from the Irish-American artist John Neagle (1796-1865) for a painted portrait [unlocated] with a request to Whelan for an invoice for groceries.

Series III, Association of the Friends of Ireland (1829) holds material related to the Philadelphia chapter of an organization that had more than twenty branches around the United States. The group provided moral and financial support for Catholic Emancipation, the passage of a law that allowed Catholics to hold seats in the British Parliament, and for home rule in Ireland. The Philadelphia chapter celebrated the Catholic Emancipation, by organizing a large "Emancipation Festival" dinner at Independence Hall on July 14, 1829. The association's treasurer, Whelan kept the minutes of the festival's arrangements committee and records of ticket sales for the event. The files hold just a few invoices for the dinner, such as a payment to C. W. Myers for music, and another to the keeper of Independence Hall for "his attention and services." A final folder in the series holds treasurer's records signed by two other officers of the association, Joseph M. Doran (1800-59) and Daniel J. Desmond (d. 1849).

Series IV, St. John's Orphan Asylum (1835-1840) holds papers related to Whelan's service as a member of the board of managers of the orphanage which was founded by Father John Joseph Hughes (1797-1864), the pastor of St. John's Church, in 1829. The papers, all of which are docketed and/or annotated by Whelan, are arranged in two subseries: Administrative Material; and Applications. The administrative section contains four documents: the resignation letter given to the orphanage board by Father Hughes when he left Philadelphia in 1837 to become the bishop, and later the first archbishop, of New York; a proposal submitted by Rev. Francis Guth of the city's Holy Trinity Church for merging the St. John's and St. Joseph's orphanages, both in Philadelphia; a letter from Rev. John McElroy of Frederick, MD, regarding a proposed merger and estate settlement; and an agreement to exchange female and male orphans between the two orphanages signed by Dr. Joseph Nancrede. The remainder of the papers is applications from parents and sponsors, largely Irish, on behalf of the children they wished to be placed at the orphanage; most are also endorsed by character witnesses, and some are addressed directly to Whelan at his store.

Box Folder

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE

1811-1841

Arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

1	1	Barber Brothers, New York	1841 Oct 30
		Bryan, Simon O., see: O'Brien, Simon	
	2	Cadwalader, John, Philadelphia	1840 Apr 29
	3	Carey, H.	undated
	4	Colebert, Michael, Ireland	1818 Apr 9
	5	Deangli, Giacinto, Philadelphia	1829 Mar 18
	6	Duffy, Moses, New Orleans	1811 Feb 9, undated
	7	Fortune, Walter, Pittsburgh	1818 Nov 25
	8	Holt, Stephen, Jr., New York	1817
	9	Leahy, John	1818 Apr 6
	10	Melish, John, Philadelphia	1819
	11	O'Brien, Simon and Catherine, Richmond	1820, 1821
	12	Philadelphia Repeal Society	1840 Dec 19
	13	Power, John, Easton	1818 Jul 20
	14	Power, Julia, Ireland	1818 Apr 10
	15	Roche, William, St. Louis	1835-1838
	16	Ryan, Catherine, Richmond	1821 May 2
	17	Tyler, John, Boston	1818 Mar 10
	18	Wallace, William, Richmond	1819 Nov 13
	19	Whelan, Thomas, Baltimore	1823
	20	Whelan, William, to others	1817, 1823

Box Folder

SERIES II. DOCUMENTS

1824-1836

Invoices and receipts

[1]	21	Ladies Academy	1828 May 10
	22	Neagle, John	1830 Dec 17
	23	Periodical subscriptions	1824-1836
	24	Retail license fees	1825, 1836
	25	Miscellaneous merchandise	1828-1838, undated

Box Folder

		SERIES III. ASSOCIATION OF THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND	1829
		Emancipation Festival	
[1]	26	Invoices	1829
	27	Minutes of local arrangement committee	1829
	28	Ticket sales records	1829
	29	Treasurer's records	1829

Box Folder

SERIES IV. ST. JOHN'S ORPHAN ASYLUM

1835-1840

Arranged in two subseries: Administrative Material; and Applications.

Administrative Material

[1]	30	Guth, Francis	1835 Jun 19
	31	Hughes, John	1837 Dec 27
	32	McElroy, John	1839 May 21
	33	Nacrede, Joseph & Joseph Blany	undated

Applications

	34	Brown, David Paul	1835 Feb 9
	35	Cain, Margaret	1840 Apr 18
	36	Dayton, Thomas	1837 Apr
	37	Decross, William & Mary	1835 Jun 9
	38	Kallender, Ann	1836 Jun 4
	39	Lamberti, Joseph	1839 Apr 29
	40	McCutcheon, Mrs.	1840 Sep 14
	41	Mulligan, Catherine	1837 Oct 21
	42	Shields, Patrick	1838 Aug 17