



Independence
Seaport Museum

Exploring America's Maritime Heritage

Penn's Landing at
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Samuel Archer Letters

Creator: Samuel W. Archer

Dates: 1826 - 1838

Quantity: 1 box (18 letters)

Call Phrase: Samuel Archer Letters

Provenance: Donated by Mrs. Asa Potts. ISM number: 2006.7

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Biographical Note: Samuel Archer was born in Burlington County, New Jersey in 1771. In 1800, he opened a retail dry goods business in Philadelphia, eventually becoming one of the largest importers and shipping merchants in the city. His firm, Samuel Archer & Co., and later Archer & Bispham, imported extensively from China and India, dealing notably in the trade of fabrics. Archer died in 1839 at the age of sixty-eight.

Scope and Content: This collection consists of eighteen letters written by Samuel Archer of Philadelphia to his nephew Franklin Jones, also of Philadelphia, between 1826 and 1838. The letters were written while Archer served as a supercargo on board ships sailing out of Philadelphia, bound for ports in Asia or South America, such as Canton, Calcutta, or Valparaiso.

Most letters are written as journal entries, detailing day-by-day Archer's experiences and thoughts while aboard ship or in ports of call.

They had an idea on shore there that I was a MISSIONARY going to the Sandwich Islands to convert the benighted Pagans! I have been taken for a doctor repeatedly, but this I believe is the first time they have put me down as a divine; the profession of the latter is as far above my merits as it is from my ambition.

Archer's writing style is colorful and expressive, and he has a tendency to compose rather poetic passages, such as this excerpt written to congratulate Jones on his upcoming marriage:

May that same sun shine on your jubilee and auspicious be the breeze for those about embarking in the good ship called the "Matrimony." The ship sails long voyages, but has the character of being a good vessel, and tho' the sea she navigates be not always without storms, yet with you discreet pilot on board, and your sails at starting filled with the winds of Prosperity, there is reason to expect a pleasant passage over a pleasant ocean.

Occasionally Archer includes in his letters information such as latitude and longitude or distance traveled. His final letter from 1838 lists the names of all the vessels on which he had sailed since 1826, as well as his destinations and the number of days spent sailing.

Container List:

Folder 1. 1 Letter, May 26, 1826

Folder 2. 6 Letters, November 28, 1826 to October 23, 1829

Folder 3. 6 Letters, August 1, 1830 to June 12, 1831

Folder 4. 5 Letters, May 13, 1832 to January 14, 1838