Matthew Lyon (1775-1824)  
Books and Papers, 1777-1923  
MSA 31

Introduction

This collection contains papers written by and relating to the life of U.S. Congressman Matthew Lyon and his son James, as well as books about the Lyon family and books printed by James. These documents were donated in 1951 to the Vermont Historical Society by George Adams Ellis of Bennington, Vermont, a lawyer and friend to the Vermont Historical Society. One book contains the bookplate of John Spargo of Bennington, president of the Vermont Historical Society from 1927 until 1939 and founder of the Bennington Museum. The collection is stored in one archival flip-top box and consumes .5 linear foot of shelf space.

Biographical Notes

Matthew Lyon (1750-1822), a Jeffersonian-Democrat, was perhaps most famous for being elected to a second term in the U.S. Congress while still serving out a jail sentence for violating the Alien and Sedition Acts, in 1798. He is also known for fighting with Roger Griswold on the floor of the House in 1798 after being insulted by him. Prior to this notoriety, Lyon immigrated to the United States from Ireland and worked as a printer. He then fought in the Revolutionary War, including at the Battle of Hubbardton, served in the Vermont House of Representatives, and served as Vermont’s representative to the U.S. Congress twice. He moved to Kentucky in 1801 and served two more terms in Congress as Kentucky’s representative, 1803-1811.

James Lyon (1775-1824) was the son of Matthew Lyon and followed in his father’s footsteps professionally if not politically, apprenticing to a printer in Philadelphia and eventually opening his own press in Fair Haven, Vermont.

Scope and Content Note

This collection includes five books, three of which were printed by James Lyon and two of which are about Matthew Lyon, and five folders of documents related to the lives of Matthew and James Lyon.

*The Elements of Medicine* by John Brown, *Sketches of the Principles of Government* by Nathaniel Chipman, and *Works of the Late Benjamin Franklin* written by Benjamin Franklin were all printed by James Lyon. *The Lyon Family*, written by James B. Lyon, the grandson of Matthew Lyon, in 1923 provides detailed descriptions of three generations of the Lyon family (beginning with Matthew Lyon), and includes additional information about other members of the family.
The work that will likely be of most interest and utility to Matthew Lyon scholars is the copy of J. Fairfax McLaughlin’s *Life of Matthew Lyon*, which has rare documents inserted (inventoryed below).

This collection also includes five folders of papers. First, there is a bill of sale for a forge and related equipment signed by Matthew Lyon. This is followed by both the original and a typed copy of a letter from Matthew Lyon to Andrew Selden, Esq. of Bennington, Vermont, in which Matthew criticizes the Sedition Acts and enumerates the reasons that the approaching war with England is a mistake. Third is a photostat of Matthew Lyon’s Revolutionary War pension file, followed by a receipt for lottery tickets printed by James Lyon. The last item included in this collection is a copy of the Report of the Judiciary Committee of the 23rd U.S. Congress, in which the committee overturned Matthew Lyon’s conviction under the Alien and Sedition Acts as unconstitutional, and refunded the fine levied against him to his heirs.

**Related Collections**

For additional materials about Matthew Lyon see “Lyon, Matthew” in uncat. pam., the Brigham manuscript index, and the online library catalog.

**Inventory**

I. Books related to Matthew and James Lyon

| 03 | Franklin, Benjamin. *Works of the late Dr. Benjamin Franklin: : consisting of his Life, written by himself. : Together with Essays, humorous, moral, and literary. Chiefly in the manner of the Spectator*, 1798. (Another copy in library collection, call number: 920 F85w.) |
| 04 | Lyon, James B. *The Lyon Family*, 1923. |
| 05 | McLaughlin, J. Fairfax. *Matthew Lyon, the Hampden of Congress, a biography*, 1900. Contains the bookplate of John Spargo. (Another copy in library collection: call number: 920 L9891m.) |

*Original documents inserted into book:*

- Payroll receipt, 1777
- Affidavit of Asa Smith, calling M. Lyon as witness, 1805
- M. Lyon’s letter to Dr. Adams (Arlington Tory suspended in a chair from Fay’s Tavern signboard), 1782
- Promissory Note signed by J. Lyon, 1796
- Cartoon of M. Lyon’s Fight in Congress (excessively rare), 1798
Letter from Matthew Griswold, governor of Connecticut and father of Roger Griswold, legislator who fought with M. Lyon, addressed to the President of Congress at the time, 1785

II. Matthew Lyon Papers

06 Matthew Lyon, Bill of Sale, 1794
07 _____, Letter to Andrew Selden, 1810
08 Photostat of Revolutionary War Pension File of Matthew Lyon, 1818, 1820
09 James Lyon, Receipt for Printing of Lottery Tickets, n.d.
10 Congressional Report overturning M. Lyon's Conviction, 1834

Emma Moros
February 2013
MatthewLyon.doc