The collections of the Clements Library encompass many aspects of American life, from the colonial era through the nineteenth century and, in a few areas, well into the twentieth. The books, manuscripts, maps, and images can be mined as primary sources on political, social, military, religious, educational, commercial, culinary, leisure, visual, and cartographic history, to name only a few subjects. For this issue of the Quarto, the members of our staff who contribute to the publication thought that the topic of urban history might be of interest.

Today, more than eighty percent of Americans live in cities, and that number continues to grow. The Clements Library collection documents earlier periods of time, when the percentage was much smaller and many more Americans had a rural or small-town existence and supported themselves by agriculture, local commerce, or manufacturing. Nonetheless, the country’s early and growing cities are well documented in our collections, and there is much to illuminate important urban centers at different stages of their development.

Rather than scatter our efforts, however, we have focused on New York, the quintessential American metropolis. Not the largest city in colonial days, New York’s fine harbor and transportation links from abroad and to documentation of some of the nuts and bolts of building and maintaining infrastructure in the rapidly growing town. The nineteenth-century equivalents of orange barrels were a part of city life then as now, and municipal works and workers of 1799-1840 are revealed in the bills and receipts of the Corporation of the City of New York. Bethany Anderson writes about the economic and political impact of a cataclysmic urban disaster, the fire of 1835, as reflected in the papers of Gideon Lee. Jan Longone tells of a remarkable butcher, turned historian, who preserved much about the city’s marketplaces. And Clayton Lewis focuses on the development of New York’s vital water communications, particularly the impact of the Erie Canal.

We hope you enjoy these brief glimpses of early nineteenth-century New York as reflected in the holdings of the Clements Library.

— Brian Leigh Dunnigan
Interim Director
PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

A series of Dutch and British charters, dating back to the 1650s, incorporated New York City and established its municipal government. By the charter granted by Governor John Montgomerie in 1730, New York operated both as a local government and as a corporate entity, meaning that the city itself could hold property in the same fashion as individuals, could sue and be sued, and, legislatively, was the public authority that governed its private citizens and itself.

Until around the turn of the nineteenth century, the corporation relied on individual residents to serve the structural needs of the city. Property owners, renters, and citizen volunteers, for example, were responsible for maintaining roads, slips, and public spaces, and the functioning of almshouses relied on the work of unpaid commissioners. However, as New York City’s population increased toward the end of the eighteenth century, it also began to pay workers for services that benefited the city as a whole. In the years following the Revolution, the New York City government became a public bureaucracy.

In 1991 the William L. Clements Library acquired a collection of 1,346 bills, receipts, requests for payments, and miscellaneous administrative paperwork related to the Corporation of the City of New York from 1799 to 1903 (the majority of items date between 1799 and the mid-1840s). In general, the importance of bills, receipts, and accounts to the historical record is quite significant. The stories of everyday persons are often gleaned from manuscript diaries and correspondence, while the histories of business and government tend to be found in meeting minutes, official documentation, and newspaper reports. However, payments or requests for payment (in the form of bills and receipts) provide transactional evidence for the sale or barter of goods, the transfer of money, and sometimes a record of work performed. In this last case, when an employer is also a governmental body, receipts provide insight into both the administrative responsibilities of a city government and the history of labor and wages.

This particular collection of financial manuscripts illuminates the active administrative role of the Corporation of the City of New York in public works and community infrastructure in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The city allocated funds to workers, from blue collar laborers to clerks and accountants—all of them engaged in important public projects such as street planning, paving, and repair; constructing and mending piers, slips, and wharfs; lighting and refurbishing street lamps; supplying water; and hiring night watchmen. A great many of the documents are appeals to and approvals by the comptroller, the chief financial officer of the city.

Street construction and repair: A prominent feature of Manhattan is its simple, grid-like street layout. Prior to 1810, New York City had no formal plan to regulate the layout of roads as its quickly increasing population expanded the city northward. From 1808 to 1810, surveyor John Randel, Jr., made a complete survey of the island, which resulted in the Common Council’s 1811 “Commissioners’ Plan” to project new streets with fixed lot and block sizes. Scattered bills and receipts in the Corporation of the City of New York Collection reflect this important policy change, mostly in the form of receipts related to the assessment, regulation,
and opening of new roads. Examples include a payment of $12.50 to Ann Bogart for a January 1811 assessment for the opening of Bancker Street (now Madison Street), a September 1811 receipt to Richard Tarnsey for the regulation of the Hester-Second Street intersection for $7.12, and many others dating into the 1830s.

In addition to the construction of new streets, the city allocated funds to individuals and businesses for surveying roads in need of paving or repair, such as Stephen Ludlum and John M. Cooper’s bill for the assessment of Mulbury, Delaney, Third, Pearl, Crosby, and Broom Streets in October 1810 (they received $244.21). The same month, the city paid several individuals for paving, curbing, and gutter-repair work on several of those roads. A later example is James Meghens’s application for $300.00 for the paving of Broadway from Canal to Prince Streets, dated November 3, 1817. The document bears the signature of Rosewell Graves, street superintendent (whose own wage of $2.00 per hour is noted in an earlier receipt).

Wharves, piers, slips, and docks: Without bridges to connect New York to the mainland, wharves, piers, slips, and docks were essential to the city’s commerce and trade. In the eighteenth century, the responsibility of constructing and maintaining these establishments fell on the citizens who rented riverside land from the city. In the early nineteenth century, the corporation began to fund the construction and maintenance of these economically vital facilities. A typical request to the comptroller for fixing docks is one filed by Jacob P. Roome, superintendent of repairs, for $2,372.83 in October 1817.

An interesting aspect to the river-based transport of goods was the use of “mud machines,” which were constructed primarily for raising mud and dredging or deepening harbors. In the first few months of 1811, a series of receipts documents the maintenance, storage, and transportation of one such machine by Luke Persiary. His bills to “Mr. W. Furman Superintendent” for “Workeng the Machene” at various slips include itemized lists of charges for his own labor, the labor of at least four other workers, the care of horses and supplies needed for the work, the repair of equipment, and liquor. The use of mud machines appears throughout the better part of this collection. In 1820, Abraham Dally required payment for the cost of nails, oil, turpentine, cordage, hooks, and thimbles for a machine. Abraham Leggett, “Superintendent of Mud Machine,” was provided with funds to pay for lumber, transportation, and carpenters on multiple occasions in 1830.

Water supply: Despite the abundance of water surrounding Manhattan, the supply of potable water to New York City’s inhabitants was a problem in the eighteenth century. Prior to the construction of the Croton Aqueduct in the 1840s, two major sources of water for the city included the Collect, a spring-fed pond (located around what is now Foley Square), and pump-operated wells. However, by the 1780s the Collect pond had become so polluted by waste from industry and private dumping that its use was discontinued, and just after the turn of the nineteenth century the city began to fill it in. The cost of the labor required for this effort is reflected in applications to the comptroller for funds. One bill, signed by Sam Stilwell, street commissioner, requested $234.35 in August 1810. The canal

An 1808 receipt approves the disbursement of funds to the captain, assistant, and fifty-three night watchmen of the First District of the City of New York.
in the middle of Canal Street was constructed around 1809 to help drain the pond and swampland north of the street into the Hudson River. According to an 1810 document, Commissioners Samuel Russell, William H. Ireland, and Daniel J. Ebbets held an account with the city of $2,152.35 for laying out Canal Street.

By the time Canal Street was laid out, pump-operated wells were providing much of the water used in New York. The city itself built and maintained public wells throughout the entire time period covered by the Corporation of the City of New York Collection. O’Neil & Lee charged $26.00 for sinking a well at Spring and McDougal Streets in the Eighth Ward on April 14, 1810. A November 15, 1807, bill for pump repairs made by Matthew Dickeman explicitly lists the locations of wells and the work he performed on them. He secured $154.68 for his efforts.

Attempts to bring water from outside the city are also reflected in the collection. The earliest materials about water supply are six documents relating to the chartering of the Manhattan Company in 1799. This corporation, whose major stakeholders included former Senator Aaron Burr and Major General Alexander Hamilton, sought to bring fresh water from north of the city. The company did not achieve its goals, however, and the best it could do was supply a small fraction of the promised water from a well near the Collect pond.

**The Night Watch:** Before the establishment of an official police department in the mid-nineteenth century, public safety primarily consisted of night watchmen, who often moonlighted from their regular jobs. In 1800, two captains, two deputies, and seventy-two others served as night watchmen for New York City. In addition to looking out for criminal activity, fires, and grave robbers, these men were sometimes responsible for light-

Night watchmen were intended to discourage criminal activity in pre-police-department American cities. Their presence on the street also allowed them to be alert for fires or other public hazards. This detail from a sheet music cover depicts a watchman discovering a freezing orphan. Note the gas streetlight.

Light and power: Financial documentation in the Corporation of the City of New York Collection also illustrates an important developmental change: the shift, in the early 1820s, from oil-burning streetlights to those fueled by coal-manufactured gas. Costs incurred from the city for the purchase of whale oil from I. Auld in 1810 to light the almshouse and debtors’ prison gave way to G. Smethen’s May 1, 1830, bill of $1,333.99 for lighting 4,933 gas lamps over a period of 21 nights. In addition to lighting costs, the lamps themselves required maintenance. In January 1830, Robert Provost painted and numbered 591 lamps, soldered 263, and fixed the glass of 1,500 for the “Lamp Department,” at a cost to the city of $243.14.

The Corporation of the City of New York Collection is an extensive, though incomplete, documentation of the public works projects described above as well as many other city-funded jobs such as the regulation and maintenance of the public clocks, the removal of “Nuisances and animals;” the efforts of the 1810 census-takers, and the work of William P. Roome, who was employed as the keeper of potter’s field (a cemetery for convicts, indigents, and unidentified persons). The final costs paid annually to workers for all of these jobs and many others are listed in the Common Council’s published minutes. However, for historians’ ever increasing interest in the lives of everyday persons, this collection provides information not only about the city’s financial “bottom line” but also offers details about the precise nature of workers’ labor, what materials they used, and what payments they requested (though not necessarily what they received) for various aspects of their work.

— Cheney Schopieray
Coordinator, Women in History Project
round 9:00 p.m. on December 16, 1835, a catastrophic fire engulfed southeastern Manhattan, what was known as the First Ward. Within hours, approximately 674 buildings were razed to the ground, including prominent structures such as the Merchants’ Exchange and the Post Office. The entire financial district was practically destroyed. By the time the flames had been extinguished, the people of New York looked upon their city and were both stunned and devastated. Although it was not the first time the city had dealt with large-scale fires, the destruction was nevertheless crippling.

Manuscript collections in the Clements Library bring to life a number of eras and historical events through the experiences of those whose voices are heard in the letters and journals they wrote. Although these writings are instrumental in revealing the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and other themes comprising individual histories, the writers are ultimately cast as witnesses of the time in which they lived. The issue of how politicians and citizens respond to catastrophes has always been a significant topic of research, and recent events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina have made us particularly aware of the impact of disasters of this scale. By utilizing a combination of manuscripts, maps, prints, and other collections housed in the Clements Library, researchers are able to reconstruct the aforementioned inferno—the Great Fire of New York in 1835—and understand how it affected urban life.

One of the most salient items in the Clements Library concerning this event is a recently acquired print titled, View of the Great Fire in New York, Decr. 16th & 17th 1835. Engraved by William Bennett (1784–1844), and taken from an original painting by Italian artist Nicolino Calyo (1799–1884), it is one of twenty-two views the latter painted as he witnessed the blaze. The papers of Gideon Lee (1788–1841), however, are especially vital for researchers who wish to understand the political repercussions of this event. Consisting of 166 documents spanning the years 1807 to 1839, letters from the collection provide eyewitness accounts of the fire and its aftermath, while also lending insight into the relationship between politicians and constituents in the midst of a catastrophe.

Gideon Lee was a prominent politician in New York City during the 1820s.
and 1830s. A native of Amherst, Massachusetts, Lee moved to New York City in 1807 and managed a successful leather-tanning operation. His business endeavors brought him wealth, and he became one of the more prominent residents in the city. Lee's elevated status eventually drew him into the political arena, and he was elected to the New York State Legislature in 1822. He was elected mayor of New York City in 1833. Lee declined to run for re-election in 1834, but he served as a U.S. Representative for the State of New York from 1835 to 1837, elected as a Jackson Democrat.

The fire of 1835 was an event that surprised everyone. Thought to have started in the store of Comstock & Andrews, located at 25 Merchant Street, the fire destroyed the majority of buildings from Wall Street in the northeast part of the First Ward to Coenties Slip in the southwest, and between Broad Street in the northwest and South Street in the southeast. The fire, which was considered to be one of the worst disasters of the time, did not subside until early the next morning. Although the location of its inception is known, its exact cause is not. A gas line explosion is the most commonly cited reason.

Being located in the affluent mercantile district of the city, the businesses destroyed in the fire left the vast majority of the merchants in financial ruin. Before the blaze became uncontrollable, large quantities of dry goods were moved to the Merchants’ Exchange and the Reformed Dutch Church for safekeeping, few realizing that these buildings would also succumb to the flames. To the dismay of the merchants, everything was incinerated. Strong northwest winds and bitterly cold temperatures (it is reported to have been -17°) critically hindered any attempts to extinguish the blaze. Fire hydrants yielded only ice, and what water could be extracted immediately froze in the firefighters’ hoses. Most accounts, including those represented in the Gideon Lee Papers, paint a picture of New York’s streets filled with pandemonium. Both merchants and firefighters were rendered helpless as flames and looters devastated the city.

Despite the aid of fire departments from Newark and Brooklyn, it would not be firefighters who saved the city. Around 2:00 a.m. on December 17, U.S. Marines under the command of Captain Charles G. Ridgeley (1784–1848) arrived on the scene. Using gunpowder from Brooklyn Navy Yard, they stopped the fire by imploding several buildings in its path.

At the time of the fire Gideon Lee was a congressman, and he began receiving letters from his constituents even while the ruins were still smoldering. Though the toil of human life had not been great, the financial loss was catastrophic. One observer estimated that at least $50,000,000 of property was destroyed, while another related: “Every body is in the Street all is consternation and Distress in consequence of the fire which broke out at Nine O’Clock last evening in the most dense wealthy part of our City...the loss is immense not less than twenty Millions of dollars not less than four hundred buildings are burnt to the ground...”

Lee received many requests to lobby for government relief, including from the New York Board of Trade. In addition to arguing over where to situate a temporary post office and other government buildings destroyed in the fire, letter after letter remarked on the dire situation of the merchants and insurance companies, which in turn were unable to alleviate the financial losses of the merchants. Indeed, the majority of the city’s insurance companies were destroyed in the fire and bankrupted. Thus, an overwhelming number of merchants and bankers pleaded with Lee to persuade Congress for a temporary transfer of public funds from the Treasury Department or from deposit banks.

Congressman Lee also received a report from a committee chaired by Cornelius W. Lawrence (1791–1861), who was mayor of New York City at the time, notifying him that they had two bills to be submitted to Congress. Both requested relief for creditors and insolvent insurance companies. In January of 1836, Lee did successfully present and pass a Relief Bill through the House of Representatives, for which he was heartily commended. The Legislature of the State of New York also passed a loan bill, awarding six million dollars to the victims of the fire.
We are inevitably led to wonder how such a fire became so uncontrollable in a matter of minutes. It is quite possible that the fire companies were not adequately equipped to deal with a major inferno in such a rapidly growing city, and undoubtedly the weather was a factor. Yet, many in New York at the time believed other forces were to blame. Sermons delivered after the fire described it as a demonstration of God’s wrath. The unsavory reputations of the firefighters brought them under scrutiny as well. On February 25, 1834, almost two years before the fire, Lee had received an anonymous letter complaining of the “demoralizing effects” of the firefighters’ behavior. The writer charged, “let them take a glimpse at the inside of one of these houses and what scene there meets the eye; drinking, card or dice playing, swearing, etc...these lads sit waiting for an alarm which too often they find means to raise for no other purpose than a pretext to race their engines before some church and thus disturb their congregations by the uproar...” Advocating the introduction of temperance associations into the fire companies, the diatribe continues: “when in these midnight conclaves inspired by the devotion to Bacchus, obscene conversations become familiar which naturally in young men begets licentious desires and it too often happens that their adjournment is from the engine house to the brothel and thus at an early age they become initiated into the lascivious mysteries of Cyprian Idolatry...”

At this point in New York’s history, fire companies were volunteer organizations largely composed of young men between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, and sometimes even younger. The writer argued for a paid fire department regulated by the city, hoping this would yield more competent and reliable firefighters. Unfortunately, it wouldn’t be until 1865 that they became paid professionals. Lee, who was mayor at the time he received the letter, wrote a note on the back: “Firemen - a new plan.”

Although it is unclear whether or not the firefighters were indeed ineffectual on the night of December 16, the event forced politicians in the city, including Lee, to rethink their attitudes toward the fire companies. Nevertheless, it is difficult to estimate how Lee responded. Since his Congressional obligations required that he be in Washington, he was not even present for the fire. The question becomes then, had he taken the anonymous writer’s complaint seriously and implemented reforms for the fire companies? Did he indeed employ a “new plan”? Were the firefighters prepared for the massive conflagration that night? His papers unfortunately remain silent on the matter.

The Gideon Lee Papers and other items in the Clements Library present a startling and tragic glimpse into an event that is discussed little today. What was considered the heart of the city at the time was destroyed, but not beyond repair. As one observer aptly noted, “the enterprising Merchants of this great Commercial City will rise like the Phoenix from its ashes”—with or without the help of New York’s politicians.

— Bethany Anderson
Information Resources Assistant

A detail of lower Manhattan, from William Hooker’s 1833 New Pocket Plan of the City of New York, includes, at lower right, the area of the 1835 fire.
OF MEN AND MARKETS

Ometime in the mid-nineteenth century Thomas De Voe, a butcher, began doing research in the reading rooms of the New-York Historical Society on two subjects of interest to him: military matters and the food markets of New York City. He was encouraged in his research by the “attentive, obliging and gentlemanly Librarian, Mr. George H. Moore,” who, after an agreeable acquaintance, unexpectedly invited him to become a member. This unusual circumstance, according to De Voe, opened to him all the rich treasures of the Society. He became addicted to research (“this dreadful disease”) and found that it had so “completed his knowledge of the introduction, time, place, name and the final exit of the numerous public market-places in the City of New York” that he was often sought out for interviews and opinions on market-related questions. This was the beginning of a very long and fruitful relationship with the New York press.

At this point, Librarian Moore “gently hinted” that a paper on the subject would be acceptable to the Society, and that since De Voe had drawn heavily upon the treasures of the Society, it was due them. De Voe, however, felt he was not intellectually up to writing the paper and certainly not to reading it before the members of the Society. With the encouragement of Moore, other members of the Society, and the Hon. Charles King, President of Columbia College, he finally agreed to do both.

On the evening of May 4, 1858, De Voe presented the results of his research to the assembled New-York Historical Society and was overwhelmed by the response. Within a few days, he was asked to repeat his performance at the Cooper Institute. Again, the reaction was most gratifying, and De Voe informs us that the press “generally and favorably noticed my efforts, for which many thanks are due.” Obviously, Thomas De Voe was no ordinary butcher.

De Voe was born in Lower Yonkers, New York, in 1811. As a boy he was apprenticed to Joseph Hill, a butcher at Washington Market, until 1827. At age eighteen he began serving in the local militia, eventually rising to the rank of colonel. His long military service led to his first book, By-Laws, Standing Orders, and Bill of Dress of the Eighth Regiment, New York State Militia, Washington Greys (1851). This work was probably also responsible for establishing his long friendship with General Winfield Scott, of which more below.

When a new market—Jefferson Market—opened in New York, De Voe

The sprawling Washington Market, where Thomas De Voe was apprenticed as a butcher. From Valentine's Manual for 1859.
took up a butcher's stand, and began his own business. In 1840, he was chosen by the butchers there to represent them in city matters relating to rules and regulations of their market. That position required him to learn more of the relevant historical background as well as to keep detailed records of ongoing market activities. Thus began his research at the New-York Historical Society, which eventually resulted in The Market Book. Published for the author in 1862, it was uniformly praised. The Christian Inquirer explained that De Voe had managed to comb through "the early records, the journals of courts, the city newspapers, the law reports, private letters and collections, public libraries and archives, histories, books, tracts, petitions and legislative proceedings" to draw a complete account of the old markets. Other papers and journals offered similar tribute.

And well they should have. The book begins with the early days of the Dutch and the West India Company's store in New York and continues with extraordinary details of the forty major New York City markets. No history of the city and its commercial life can be written without referring to this remarkable book.

De Voe had planned a second volume documenting the markets of Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn, but the Civil War interrupted his plans. "The dreadful Rebellion...commenced with the attack on Fort Sumter the day after I had arranged for the publishing of the first volume, and I concluded to wait for the suppression of the Rebellion before entering upon the second," he wrote. This second volume never appeared, a great loss for the study of market history.

De Voe turned, instead, to compiling a companion volume to The Market Book, titled The Market Assistant, an original source book about all the foods available in the markets. This is a splendid work, which indeed discusses, as its subtitle promises, "every item of human food sold in the Public Markets." It is, equally, an invaluable culinary resource. The number of food items noted is simply staggering, including a diversity of wild game—from elk and caribou to squirrel, opossum, and even skunk—that are not commonly associated with commercial markets. One is saddened to see that the wide variety of fowl, flesh, fish, seafood, and game available to mid-nineteenth century shoppers far exceeds what can be purchased today. De Voe drew the butchering diagrams in this volume, as well as the splendid frontispiece of himself standing in his shop.

The Clements Library is particularly fortunate to hold two unique copies of De Voe's primary work, The Market Book. The first includes a rare colored photograph of the author as butcher; the other has an inscription by the author to A. Oakley Hall, then Attorney General of the City and County of New York and later a Tammany Mayor of New York City.

A letter of presentation from De Voe is laid in the inscribed copy. Evidently, Hall had made a hasty and less than favorable comment about The Market Book without actually having seen it. De Voe rushed an autographed copy to the attorney general with a cleverly written letter using legal terminology (with each relevant term underlined) to point out that Hall had accepted "hear-say evidence" about his book. He requested a revised opinion once Hall had actually looked at it. Both copies will remain in the Clements Library; each is a unique record of American history.

In the Market Book chapter on the Jefferson Market, where De Voe maintained his butchery business until appointed superintendent of markets in 1872, he inserts wonderful details about the surroundings and a personal note concerning his relationship with the Mexican War hero, General Winfield Scott. De Voe quotes an article from an 1856 newspaper, which extols the market for its "gorgeous avenues of
flesh, all garnished with masses, and quarters, and ribs, and loins of the finest beef, in streaks of mellow meat imbedded in layers of golden fat.” The hyperbole continues: “All looking so invitingly entreating to be purchased, sent home, dressed and eaten, that any man must be a perfect monster or Graham-misanthrope that could resist such an appeal as here is made upon his senses and gustatory nerves by this Cornucopia of the meats, the fruits, and the granaries of this fructiferous land.”

The quoted article goes on: “In the recesses of one of the avenues we speak of is situated the excellent and abundantly supplied stand of Colonel De Voe—a noble specimen of an American citizen, military as well as civil—whose stall emphatically teams with the fat of the land.” Between his stand and that run by a Mrs. Mingay, the “Queen of the Market,” was “a cane bottomed stool, especially devoted to a distinguished American chieftain, upon which every morning seated may be seen the martial, giant figure of General Winfield Scott. By his side stands Colonel De Voe, respectfully conversing with his distinguished friend.” De Voe apologized for including this anecdote as he thought it might “appear somewhat egotistical in these pages,” but explained that he felt the citation relevant because Scott was such an important man to whom “the American people owe so much.” Among the many words of praise for The Market Book, incidentally, were those by General Scott himself: “It could not be better done.”

Thomas De Voe died at home at the age of eighty-one in 1892 after a long illness. He never abandoned his interest in the history of his city’s markets. When his library of historical books went to auction in 1896, the sale included the “names (in neat manuscript) of the butchers of New York City from the earliest times, alphabetically arranged, about 500 folio pages.” It sold for $20.00 but its value would be priceless. Today, many of De Voe’s papers are in the New-York Historical Society, where his research began.

— Jan Longone Curator of American Culinary History

The frontispiece of De Voe’s The Market Assistant shows him at work and advertises his stall in the Jefferson Market. De Voe is credited as the artist, but the figure is taken from the photograph of the author.
Modern Manhattan has almost completely lost touch with the intimate relationship to water that caused it to develop as the city it is today. Long before New York’s skyline was a range of tall buildings, it cast a profile of masts and spars, the sign of a thriving and prosperous seaport. The city’s physical and economic connections to the surrounding waters and to waterborne transportation made New York a commercial center of diverse international culture.

The ebbing and flowing of Long Island Sound, the Hudson River, and the Atlantic Ocean have made New York Harbor an extremely complex and unpredictable system of tides and currents. The hazards and rewards of this ecosystem have been plentiful. Extensive shallows and varying salinity of the water provided a rich fishing ground that was well known to the native Lenape as well as to Dutch and English colonists. By the eighteenth century, the cultivated oyster beds around New York extended to over 350 square miles and were among the most productive in the world. As a harbor, New York has always been well protected but problematic, especially for sailing vessels. Navigating the shoals of Sandy Hook sometimes required a wait of weeks for the right combination of wind and tide to allow passage into the port. Shipwrecks at the mouth of the lower harbor were not uncommon.

The Dutch, a robust maritime culture of traders, built the first wharf in New Amsterdam in 1648 near what is now Pearl and Broad Streets, along the East River. Efficient distribution of goods arriving by sea encouraged the construction of markets and warehouses near the waterfront. These slips and markets became essential social and commercial focal points in the city that attracted a mix of people who had one foot on land and one foot in the sea.

During the American Revolution, capturing the city of New York and securing the Hudson River were central to British schemes to divide and conquer their rebellious colonies. The dominant British navy easily gained control of the waterways around Manhattan, arriving with an overwhelming fleet of over four hundred vessels in 1776. From ships stationed in the lower harbor, British and Hessian troops landed unopposed on Staten Island and Long Island. General George Washington recognized that his position on the island of Manhattan was indefensible as British men-of-war cruised unmolested up the rivers. He had no choice but to abandon New York.

One of the biggest things to ever happen to the “Big Apple” was the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Prior to this event, New York was just one of many competing harbors serving predominantly local markets along the eastern seaboard. At a time when almost all bulk shipping and long-distance transportation was waterborne, Boston, Chesapeake Bay, Savannah, and Charleston could all boast significant commercial markets and protected harbors to attract commercial shipping and the related distribution businesses.

Western traders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries noticed that the tantalizingly short portages between upstate New York’s lakes and rivers suggested that a link between the Hudson and the Great Lakes might one day be possible. The challenge turned out to be less a technical one than one of political will. The canal concept would have to wait until nineteenth-century ambition drove the picks and mules to build the canal, essentially using eighteenth-century methods.

When the Erie Canal opened in 1825, linking New York, via the Hudson...
Part of the Grand Canal Celebration fleet is shown receiving salutes off New York's Battery on November 4, 1825. The beautiful, clear day is obscured by smoke from the steamboats that were increasingly common in New York Harbor. This is a detail from a colored lithograph of Anthony Imbert's panorama, View of the Fleet Preparing to Form in Line.

River, to upstate New York and the Great Lakes, New York Harbor became the port of entry for bulk shipping to the expanding western territories. In addition, the local market of New York grew exponentially as the new commerce created new jobs. New York Governor De Witt Clinton predicted that the Erie Canal represented “the greatest inland trade ever witnessed, that will concentrate in the city of New York. And before the revolution of a century, the whole island of Manhattan, covered with inhabitants and replenished with a dense population, will constitute one vast city.”

The changes to New York that followed were both commercial and social. The city’s population rapidly expanded with its growing trade area. A great westward movement of immigration followed the canal. Commerce from overseas ports steered for New York, bringing foreign goods and culture. Freight rates from Buffalo to New York dropped from approximately $100 per ton over road to $10 per ton by canal, giving an economic boost to goods from the American interior.

The first journey over the completed canal began at the opening ceremonies in Buffalo on October 26, 1825. The canal boat Seneca Chief, bearing Governor Clinton, also carried two barrels of water from Lake Erie for Clinton to empty into the Atlantic Ocean at New York in a symbolic ceremony. Triumphant celebrations accompanied the first vessel along the entire route.

The United States of the nineteenth century knew how to celebrate its achievements. And celebrate it did when the Seneca Chief and other canal boats from Buffalo entered New York Harbor on a beautiful, clear day on November 4, 1825. In town, over one thousand firemen prepared to march. They were accompanied by more than fifty other groups, including horsemen, brass bands, lumbermen, millers, tradesmen of all kinds, students of Columbia College, clergymen, politicians, and everyday citizens—all anticipating great economic and social gains from the canal. Over 100,000 people—about two thirds of the total population of the city—cheered on the parade.

Meanwhile, in the harbor, a fleet with vessels of every description and size assembled to escort the Seneca Chief down the last miles of the Hudson to the ocean at Sandy Hook. After returning from the ceremonial “Marriage of the Waters,” Governor Clinton and the other dignitaries joined the parade in Manhattan. The speeches, fancy balls, exhibitions, and displays went on for two days.

Within the documentation of this remarkable series of events is a notable publication, Memoir, Prepared at the Request of a Committee of the Common Council of the City of New York, and Presented to the Mayor of the City, at the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals. By Cadwallader D. Colden. Colden was a colonel of volunteers in the War of 1812, a member of the New York State Assembly in 1818, and mayor of New York from 1818 to 1821. His memoir, quickly prepared at the request of a committee of the Common Council of the City of New York, documents the planning and construction of the Erie Canal. It also includes a detailed account of the celebration, written by William L. Stone. Colden’s Memoir is in itself a collection of varied media of the type that the Clements has long sought—printed admission tickets, maps and elevations of the canal, a written history of the construction, illustrations of participants in the parade, and facsimile manuscript letters from John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Charles Carroll, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams and the Marquis de Lafayette.

The publication of Colden’s memoirs was also a technological achievement in printing. To accelerate the production of the numerous plates,
Anthony Imbert, a former French naval officer and artist, took advantage of a new printing process—lithography. Although it had been developed in the late-eighteenth century, lithography was still in the early experimental stage in the United States by 1825. The illustrations in Colden's memoirs are among the first published American lithographs.

Economical use of the canal was short-lived, but its effects on the development of the city were permanent. Railroads soon appeared. The Mohawk & Hudson River line was chartered in 1826. By 1831 it was competing directly with canal traffic between Schenectady and Albany using a steam locomotive named, somewhat ironically, for De Witt Clinton, the biggest booster of the Erie Canal.

With the arrival of practical steam-powered vessels in the early nineteenth century, crossing the Atlantic from European harbors to New York became fiercely competitive. In 1838 the first vessel to cross entirely on steam power, the Sirius, entered New York to great fanfare, having left Ireland eighteen days previously. By the turn of the century, the fastest ship, holder of the prestigious “Blue Riband” of the Atlantic, would cross in less than six days.

On the Hudson River and the widened canal system, steamboats brought the upstate region’s commercial markets to within a day’s travel of New York City. This accelerated shipping time greatly increased the availability of spoilable goods to and from New York. Coastal steamship lines connected Boston, Philadelphia, and other ports to New York on a regular daily schedule. By the 1840s, more passengers and a greater tonnage of cargo came through the port of New York than all other major harbors in the country combined. The growth in commercial traffic in New York Harbor continued, reaching its peak during World War II, as it became the most active staging area for transatlantic convoys and troop ships.

New York is still an active harbor but with only a fraction of the traffic of the past. Of the bulk commodities that are still shipped by water, such as oil, natural gas, and automobiles, most steer to specialized transfer points in other areas. Our overland transportation networks are now so efficient that proximi-

Dutch shipping crowds the East River in this print depicting New York and its wharves in the seventeenth century.
ty to a local market no longer matters.

The vast majority of the large tankers and freighters that do enter New York Harbor end up at the container ship facility at nearby Newark Bay. The number of charming and purposeful tugs and scows, once commonplace in the harbor, is now greatly diminished. Up until the 1960s, New York was still the hub of international travel, dominated by transatlantic ocean liners. A steamship arriving on her maiden voyage received a ritual greeting from every available tug with horns blowing and whistles tooting. The new ship would be framed by fountains of water, shot high into the air from New York’s fireboats. Rising costs and inexpensive airline travel have now all but eliminated this splendid form of transportation. The excitement that greeted the arrival of a transatlantic liner in the harbor has been replaced by mundane “deplan ing” at the city’s remote airports. Interestingly, the dense automobile traffic in the Hudson River tunnels has caused ferry service to New Jersey to make a recent comeback.

A view of Coffee House Slip gives a sense of the intimate connection between commercial shipping and the streets of New York.

If ever there were a sign that modern New York is no longer dependent on its waterfront, it was the closing of the Fulton Street Fish Market in 2005. Waterfront markets were once plentiful and central to the lives of New Yorkers. By the 1980s, however, the fishing in and around New York harbor had come to a complete halt because of polluted waters and over-harvesting. The location of the Fulton Street Fish Market, still near the waterfront of lower Manhattan, became irrelevant and inconvenient as virtually all fish arrived not by boat but by truck, and few New Yorkers bought directly from this market. The Fulton Street Fish Market moved to a new location in the Bronx, where access to major highways is easier.

With transatlantic liners now a rarity, local fishing extinct, and the multitude of ferries largely replaced by bridges, the reasons for New Yorkers to venture to the waterfront have changed. Highways, condominiums, and parks have replaced the slips that were once the most important point of entry and exchange for New Yorkers. The massive piers along the Hudson River have been taken over by entertainment venues and health clubs. The harbor, no longer seen as an essential resource and medium of transportation, is now little more than a scenic backdrop.

— Clayton Lewis
Curator of Graphic Materials
Late-eighteenth-century Philadelphia was a cosmopolitan seaport that enjoyed the benefits of world trade—and some of the hazards as well. The city was struck by a devastating outbreak of yellow fever in 1793 and lesser epidemics in 1797 and 1798. The Clements Library has numerous published works relating to these health crises but only recently received a copy of Félix Pascal’s Ouvrière, *An Account of the Contagious Epidemic Yellow Fever, Which Prevailed in Philadelphia in the Summer and Autumn of 1797* (Philadelphia, 1798). The book was a gift of Margaret F. Emery.

John Winthrop (1714–1779) was professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at Harvard College, one of the foremost scientists in eighteenth-century America, and the country’s first astronomer. The Library recently purchased a funeral sermon, *The High Value of a Great and Good Name*... (Boston, 1779), preached by Samuel Langdon (1723–1797) on the Sunday following Winthrop’s death. The pamphlet includes a contemporary sketch of the distinguished scientist’s life.

The author of *New American Cookery, or, Female Companion*... (New York, 1805) is given simply as “an American lady.” This culinary item was a gift of Jan and Dan Longone. Although the author is anonymous, the recipes are all drawn from the works of Amelia Simmons, author of the first American cookbook, and Susannah Carter, a British author.

The soldiers’ letters and diaries of the Schoff Civil War Collections are an important part of our manuscript holdings. In the fall of 2007 the Library purchased the scrapbook of Moses Allen Cleveland, who left Ohio in 1864 during the Civil War to join the 7th Massachusetts Battery and serve with it in Louisiana and Alabama in 1864–65. A large part of this 250-page volume is a manuscript copy of his diary for that period, which includes some letters, sketches, rough maps, and memorabilia of reunions of his unit. This recent acquisition complements Cleveland’s manuscript autobiography, obtained in 1997.

A further addition to our Civil War manuscripts is a forty-page diary kept by Hiram Coppennoll during 1864. The Union soldier recorded details of his training and, later, his participation in the Battle of the Wilderness and the bloody attack on “the Crater” at Petersburg. Coppennoll’s diary, a gift to the Library from Sarah and Dave Henderson, includes entries from a sweetheart, “Eliza,” and a carte de visite photograph of the soldier. Another image of a Civil War soldier was acquired with a collection of letters written by Edwin Wright of the 9th New York Cavalry. Wright served from 1861 to 1865 and his correspondence was directed to two young women, Loanda Leake and Lotte Carle. The letters came to the Library in two groups—a larger clutch of twenty-six, followed soon after by the fortunate discovery of two more letters and a carte de visite photograph of the soldier. It was satisfying to see the letters reunited.

Culinary material is also included in our manuscript collections. One example, purchased during 2007, is an 1832 recipe book, with index, associated with Mary S. Moore. The book was kept in at least two different hands. The War of 1812 has long been an area of strength in the Clements manuscript collections. In the autumn of 2007 the Clements Library Associates voted to purchase the manuscript orderly book of Colonel George Weirick’s regiment of Pennsylvania Militia, kept at Camp Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania, from October 5 through November 29, 1814. Weirick’s unit was part of a force assembled to guard the approaches to Philadelphia following the burning of Washington by the British, and many of the courts martial recorded in it illustrate the tensions that existed between state militia forces and federal army officers assigned to overall command.

**2008 PRICE FELLOWSHIPS**

We are pleased to announce the award of eight Jacob M. Price Visiting Research Fellowships to scholars who will make use of the Clements Library collections during the 2008 calendar year. The awards are made to graduate students and junior faculty to support some of the expenses of traveling to Ann Arbor. This year’s group comes from around the United States, with one from the United Kingdom. Their research topics are as diverse as ever.

**Angela Jill Cooley**, University of Alabama, for her dissertation, “Eating Jim Crow: Southern Food Practices from Civil War to Civil Rights.”

**Linda C. Frank**, University of California, Los Angeles, for her dissertation, “The Personal is Political: The Cady-Stanton Marriage and the Development of Reform Politics, 1839–1869.”


**Michelle Orthel**, Syracuse University, for her dissertation, “The Infamy of Self-Creation: The Democratic-Republican Societies and Political Communication in 1790s America.”

**Liam Joseph Paskvan**, The College of William and Mary, for his dissertation,
“The King’s ‘Harum-Scarum Army’: Slaves and Social Others in British Military Policy and Political Culture During the American Revolution.”

Thomas George Rodgers, University of Warwick, for his dissertation, “Terror in the Southern Colonies during the American Revolutionary War, 1775–1783.”

William Wagner, University of California, Berkeley, for his dissertation, “Reading, Writing, and Rambling: The Literary Culture of Travel in Antebellum America.”

Dr. Jennifer L. Weber, University of Kansas, for her book, America’s First Draft.

TRACY W. MCGREGOR BIOGRAPHY

It is uncommon for newly published works to be noted in the Quarto. However, members of the Clements Library Associates might wish to be aware of Tracy W. McGregor: Humanitarian, Philanthropist, and Detroit Civic Leader, published this year by Wayne State University Press. Written by Clements Library Associates board member and past president Philip P. Mason, the biography tells the story of an important figure who helped save and preserve precious historical resources, including the Clements Library. The book is available through the publisher at wsupress.wayne.edu or by phone at (800) WSU-READ.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 2–October 3, 2008: Exhibit: “The Old Girl Network: Charity Cookbooks and the Empowerment of Women.” Weekdays, 1:00–4:45 p.m.