A CATALOGUE OF MANUSCRIPTS
BY SIGNERS OF THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Exhibited at the Clements Library

July to December, 1951

For more than a hundred years collectors of American manuscripts and letters have pleasured themselves with attempts to gather collections of letters written by the high-minded men who voted for and signed the Declaration of Independence. The forming of such sets has not been easy. Several Signers wrote and signed few documents which have survived our hundred and seventy-five years of Independence. Hundreds and hundreds of sets have been put together lacking only the signatures of two men—Button Gwinnett and Thomas Lynch, Jr. Today, there are believed to be thirty-four complete sets.

The distinguished collection exhibited at the Clements Library and described in this catalogue was loaned to us by Dr. Joseph E. Fields, a Clements Library Associate of Joliet, Illinois. Dr. Fields has worked for many years trying to bring his collection of Signers as close to perfection as possible. (Perfection would be fifty-six autograph letters, signed, on July 4, 1776, describing the writers' reasons, emotions, or actions when signing the great document.) Failing impossible perfection, Dr. Fields has gathered letters with important contents, typical of their writers, written as close to July 4, 1776, as possible.

The exhibition was opened on July 5 with a special showing for members of the History Department and the Department's graduate students. The following evening, we displayed the collection at a reception in honor of the staff and students of the Department of Library Science. During the fall, numerous groups of junior high school and high school pupils visited the Library to see the exhibition. Associates received special invitations to visit the exhibition on the mornings of home football games.


*** "I send you a Curiosity. Mr. McKean is mistaken in a day or two, the final Vote of Independence, after the last debate, was passed on the 4th or third of July, and the Declaration prepared and signed on the 4th.

"What are we to think of History? When in less than 40 Years Such Diversities appear in the Memories of living Persons who were Witnesses."


*** "I must inform you that you were yesterday unanimously chosen Paymaster General with the pay of 100 Dollars per month, if I do not misremember."

*** "But I hope & trust that the Supreme Disposer of all Events, who loveth Justice & hateth iniquity will Continue to favor our righteous Cause and that the wickedness of our Enemies will fall on their own heads."


*** "Business as usual. It is difficult to read into this letter any awareness of war, except in the remark, "Your Iron is here in great demand as far as fifty or sixty pounds a gun.""


*** "Your father & myself were always on the very best terms, our political views & principles were ever in unison, we signed at the same time the declaration of Independence."


*** "The Bearer herof Capt. Johnson is not the person accused of plunder..." The note contains an autograph manuscript signed by Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Thus, in a 1776 letter, there are signatures of two Signers!


*** August 2 was the first day on which the engrossed copy of the Declaration was ready for the signatures of the Signers.


*** "But if other Provinces are too backward, [Massachusetts] is fully ripe in every part, nothing but the most guarded Conduct on the part of the General [Thomas Gage] can secure its quiet, for the least movement of the Troops will be followed by a general Insurrection."


*** "I am informed that measures have been devised or are devising to procure my removal from Office—What allegations have been or may be made against me to accomplish this purpose I don't know, and therefore cannot undertake to invalidate them."


*** "The publications of Mr. Dean, and Mr. Paine make a great talk in this place, and I am afraid will throw Congress and the people at Large into violent parties."


*** "The letter is franked by Franklin "B Free Franklin."


*** "Great Delays have taken place in ye marine Department. I am sure it is high Time to adopt a Plan for a Board of Admiralty that can be obliged to attend the Business."

BUTTON GWINNETT. (1732-1777) Signer from Georgia. Autograph Letter signed. [November 5, 1761.]

*** "The document is part of a leaf from "The Orders and Rules of the Charity-School for Boys in the Parish of Wolverhampton" It is signed by Gwinnett as one of the "Subscribers" of the institution.


*** Request for a flag to permit Mr. Miller to pass through the lines.


*** "The enclosed Resolutions I Transmit you by order of Congress."


*** In this letter, Harrison offers Hudson "one of the finest and fastest sailing Vessels ever built in America" which he expects to finish building in May. The ship was to have been fitted for eighteen guns.


*** A receipt in favor of Col. Jacob Drake.


*** "I am exceedingly uneasy (so are my Colleagues) not that I think we are doing anything but what Necessity will justify, but I fear we shall be obliged to promise for our Colony much more than it will perform and perhaps more than it is able to bear..."


*** The letter contains Heyward's promise to attend Court when necessary.


*** This excellent war letter contains a strong plea for filling the North Carolina regiments.


*** "Your Mother has been poorly this Three Weeks taken first with a fever and flux a common disorder here at that Time..."


*** "The Intimacy of my Connection with Mr. DuPâne renders all assurances unnecessary that the Letter addressed by him to your Excellency on the 8th of Octr last, gave me the greatest Concern."

**•** "I enclose I have sent you the printed Copy of the Resolution of Congress mentioned in my last—Most of those here who are termed the Cool Gideator Men think it amounts to a declaration of Independence—It certainly Savours of it . . . ."


**•** Ross was trying to adjust his accounts with the estate of a Mr. Cameron in this letter.


**•** Among American love letters, those of Benjamin Rush stand very high. This charming example was written during Mrs. Rush's absence from home. "I did not know 'till since we parted how much you were a part of myself, and I feel some Abatement of my Affection for my country when I reflect that even she has deprived me of an hour of my dear Julia's Company."


**•** This most interesting letter offers the recipient warm support in Congress, where "you have sustaine'd for a length of Time an uncommon Load of Calumny."


**•** "Andrew Gilman who has the care of a party of Penobscot Indians on their march to Join the Army under Your Excellency's Command applied to Governor Trumbull & the Council to furnish him with some money . . . ."


**•** Smith had investigated a case of trespass on lands owned by himself and Yeates and in this letter reports his findings.


**•** Rush was Stockton's son-in-law; he had apparently sent some political tracts as a gift for which Stockton thanks him warmly.

THOMAS STONE. (1743-1787) Signer from Maryland. Autograph Letter signed. Haverndenvent, July 8, 1782. To his brother.

**•** This letter contains an amusing description of a sulky which Stone wanted made for his own use to fit his size.


**•** Taylor was concerned with the financing of the Pennsylvania Hospital which is the subject of the letter.


**•** Belknap had apparently sent a series of nine questions about Lordlonderry which Thornton answers in this letter.


**•** Walton here protests the removal of the Georgia government to South Carolina.


**•** "By the inclosed papers You'll see the disposition of the Southern Colonies, with regard to independence. I need not tell you the disposition of the Northern Colonies. When you are sure there is a weight, somewhere, & find the ends are free; it will not require a Newtonian head to determine the weight must be in the Middle. However there is no doubt with me but these difficulties will soon be removed."


**•** "I have conveyed with Mr Ellsworth and Mr Ellery upon the Subject of granting to you and Capt. Wright a protection from Congress for withdrawing your property from Jamaica to the United States."


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**•** "... in many Places of this Country the Languages are very imperfectly taught & it is what I have taken very much pains to remedy in this Place."


**•** "I am glad to be informed by you that People seem determined in supporting the mighty Cause upon the Decision of which the Fate of this and future Generations depend . . . ."


**•** This letter describes Wythe's actions regarding a slave belonging to the estate of Henry Randolph.