

**Willett Family
Papers, 1733-1974
SC16670**

QUANTITY: 4 boxes and 1 loose folio document (1.0 cubic ft)
ACCESS: Papers are open to research; box 4 and other selected documents as indicated in the inventory are stored in the vault. Special arrangements are necessary to view the originals.
PROCESSED BY: William P. Gorman, February 1977; revised by Fred Bassett, Senior Librarian, October 2004; July 2011

Biographical Note:

Marinus Willett (1740-1830), a prominent merchant in New York City, is best known for his distinguished service during the American Revolution. Willett was born July 31, 1740, at Jamaica, Long Island, attended King's College, and served in the French and Indian War, participating in Abercromby's unsuccessful expedition against the French at Ticonderoga and in General John Bradstreet's campaign against Fort Frontenac.

In the years before the Revolution, Willett was a member of the Sons of Liberty, and as a leader of the radical patriots in New York City, he took part, in June 1775, in the seizure of arms from the British forces evacuating the city. Later in the year, he participated in the invasion of Canada under Gen. Richard Montgomery. He then engaged in various operations in the Hudson Valley, until ordered to Fort Stanwix in May 1777, where he was second in command to Col. Peter Gansevoort. In a British raid on the fort in August, Willett distinguished himself by leading a successful sortie against the enemy.

Willett joined the Sullivan-Clinton expedition against the Indians in 1779, and later in the war, he accepted command of a regiment of levies on the Tryon frontier, where in October 1781 he conducted a triumphant attack upon the British at Johnstown. For the remainder of the war, Willett continued as the commander of troops, stationed in a small chain of forts along the Mohawk Valley. From this vantage point, he defended the inhabitants of the valley against attacks by the British and Indians and preserved the valley's grain crops, a vital food supply source for the Continental Army, from destruction.

After the war, Willett moved to New York City, where he was elected to the Assembly in 1784. The next year, he was appointed sheriff of the city and county of New York, a position he held until 1788. In 1790, Washington named him a peace commissioner to the Creek Indians, and in 1792, Willett was reappointed sheriff for another four-year term. Willett reached the pinnacle of his political career in 1807, when he was chosen to succeed DeWitt Clinton as mayor of New York City. Four years later, as a candidate for lieutenant-governor, he was defeated by Clinton.

Marinus Willett was married three times, his first wife being Mary Pearsee, whom he married in 1760 and by whom he had one son, Marinus, Jr. When she died in 1793, Willett took as his wife, a widow, Mrs. Susannah Vardill. The marriage proved a failure and, in 1799, Mrs. Willett filed

for divorce. Probably sometime in 1799 or 1800, Willett married Margaret Bancker, by whom he had five children - Dr. Marinus, Rev. William M., Edward M., Elbert M., and Margaret M.

Scope and Contents Note:

The Willett Family Papers contain genealogy and family records, correspondence, writings, business and land papers, and various printed materials. Among documents of particular interest are a letterbook of Col. Marinus Willett, containing copies of letters written between 1780 and 1781, to Gov. Clinton, Philip Schuyler, Gen. Stark, Lord Sterling, and Willett's officers. There is also the correspondence of Willett written during the Revolution, including letters to and from his first son, Marinus Jr., and letters to Gen. Washington and Lord Sterling regarding the attack against the British at Oswego. There are also several letters between Mrs. Mary Pearsee Willett and her son, Marinus Jr., who was serving as a surgeon's mate in the Revolution.

Additional items of significance are a school and letterbook of Edward Willett (father of Col. Marinus Willett) and master of a school in Jamaica, Long Island, run by the Honorable Society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts, early land records of Col. Marinus Willett, business and land papers of his grandson, Rev. Marinus Willett, and numerous printed material pertaining to the Society of the Cincinnati, of which Col. Marinus Willett was a founder, and succeeding generations of Willetts were members.

Box and Folder List:

Box	Folder	Contents
		Genealogy and Family Records
1	1	Genealogy and family history papers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Genealogical chart of Thomas Willett of Bristol, Eng. and his descendants b. Genealogical notes of Samuel Willett Comstock re: the Thomas Willett family of Bristol, Eng. and various descendants, including Col. Marinus Willett, ca. 1947 c. Letter of Bernard Cowen to Thomas Willett re: research relating to the genealogy of the Willett family, 28 August 1936 d. Photocopy of the Willett family coat of arms e. Newspaper clipping re: Willett family genealogy f. Palmer ancestry of Miss Alice G. Palmer g. Miscellaneous
1	2-5	<i>The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record</i> , Vol. 80, Nos. 1-4, containing an article entitled "The Willett Family of Flushing, Long Island" by Rosalie Fellows Bailey, January, April, July, October, 1949
1	6	Wills, passports, and other documents <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Last will and testament of Thomas Willett, Greenwich, Connecticut, October 1897 b. German passport of Marinus Willett (son of Col. Willett), along with passport book and visas, 13 August 1835 c. Visa for travel in Europe, 1835

Box	Folder	Contents
		d. American passport of Marinus Willett (grandson of Col. Willett), 27 April 1854
		Correspondence and Papers of Col. Marinus Willett (1740-1830)
1	7	Col. Marinus Willett, Montreal, to his son, Marinus, Jr., 19 November 1775 (Fragile condition) Photocopy; original in vault.
1	8	Col. Marinus Willett, at Fort Schuyler, to his son, Marinus, Jr., 20 June 1777
1	9	Marinus Willett, Jr., at Valley Forge, to his father, Lt. Col. Marinus Willett, at Fort Schuyler, 1 April [1778]
1	10	Marinus Willett, Jr. to his mother, Mrs. Mary Pearsee Willett, at Fort Schuyler, 6 April 1778
1	11	Mrs. Mary Pearsee Willett, Albany, to her son, Marinus, Jr., surgeon's mate in the Flying Hospital, Geo. Washington's camp, 19 April 1778
1	12	Col. Marinus Willett, Fort Schuyler, to his son, Marinus, Jr., 7 May 1778
1	13	Transcript of a letter from Charles McKnight, Princeton, to Col. Marinus Willett, Grand Army, Danbury, Conn., 14 July 1778; re: the death of Willett's son, Marinus, Jr., from illness
1	14	Draft of a letter from Willett, at Albany, to Washington, at Newburgh, 29 November 1782; re: the planned expedition agst. the British at Oswego (Fragile condition). Photocopy; original in vault.
1	15	Lord Stirling (William Alexander), at Albany, to Willett, 16 December 1782; re: the withdrawal of troops from Johnstown, and a return of the levies. With Willett's reply from Fort Rensselaer, dated Dec. 22, re: details of a plan for an expedition against the British at Oswego. (Fragile condition) Photocopy; original in vault.
1	16	Willett to (Gen. Washington), 28 December 1782; re: plans for an expedition against the British at Oswego, hopes for new desertions, etc. The cover is addressed to "Col. Willett on the Mohawk River" with the notation "Reccmd to the particular care of Lord Stirling". (Fragile condition). Photocopy; original in vault.
1	17	Henry Glen, at Schenectady, to Willett, at Fort Rensselaer, 6 February 1783; re: the expedition against the British at Oswego. (Fragile condition). Photocopy; original in vault.
1	18	Draft of a letter from Willett, at Fort Herkimer, to (Washington), 8 February 1783, re: the expedition against the British at Oswego. Of particular interest is Willett's request of Washington to backdate a warrant for the impressments of sleighs. These sleighs were to be used in the attack on Oswego. Willett had seized the sleighs a few days earlier and he wanted Washington to backdate the warrant so that he could avoid legal liability for improperly appropriating them (Fragile condition). Photocopy; original in vault.
1	19	Document re: the proceedings of a court martial involving John Wilkinson, a drummer in the New York State troops, confined for killing a hog. This document may have been sent by Washington (see cover) to Willett, December 1783 (Fragile condition). Photocopy; original in vault.
1	20	Cover of a letter addressed to Col. Willett on the Mohawk River with the signature of Geo. Washington. Photocopy; original in vault.

Box	Folder	Contents
1	21	Warrant for the arrest of Wm. Duer for debt owed to the Soc. of the Hospital in the City of New York. Signed by John McKesson and sent to Aaron Burr. With Burr's receipt (on reverse) for money received from Marinus Willett for payment of the debt. (Receipt contains signature of Buff), 27 January 1787
1	21a	Affidavit relative to promise to make provisions of blankets to Oneida Indians in 1784 – A.D.S. January 26, 1792
		Correspondence of Willett's Descendants:
1	22	Caroline Willett (granddaughter of Col. Marinus Willett), Newburgh, to her mother, Mrs. Marinus Willett, 27 October 1848
1	23	Bill Stuyvesant, Paris, to Marinus Willett, Liverpool, England, 1 January 1853
1	24	Thomas Willett, New York City, to his brother, Marinus, at sea off the coast of Yokohama, Japan, 26 February 1882 (Thomas and Marinus were great-grandsons of Col. Marinus Willett)
1	25	A.E. Bronson, New York City, to Thomas Willett (great-grandson of Col. Marinus Willett), 22 December 1883
1	26	Dodd, Mead, and Co., Booksellers and Publishers, New York City, to Thomas Willett, Port Chester, New York, 11 December 1909
1	27	J. Emma Winslow, New York City, to Miss Julia Willett (great-granddaughter of Col. Willett), 23 February 1916
1	28	Allison Scully, vice president, Bank of Manhattan and Trust Co., New York City, to Mrs. Thomas Willett, Port Chester, New York, 22 April 1930, with a facsimile copy of the signature of Col. Marinus Willett
1	29	Bernard Cowen, lawyer, New York City, to Thomas Willett, Greenwich, Connecticut., 9 April 1939, re: "the matter of establishing the Willett interests in the marsh lands which are to comprise the Marine Park that is being developed by Park Commissioner Moses"
1	30	Marinus Willett (great-great-grandson of Col. Willett) to Mr. Kinnarid, 6 October 1971
		Writings
2	31	School and letter book of Edward Willett, father of Col. Marinus Willett and schoolmaster. Book is divided into 3 sections: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An Alphabetical School Book, containing the names of pupils and dates of attendance, for a school supported by the Honorable Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Jamaica, Long Island. Willett was master of this school from 1734 to 1741. 2. Marriage records and other vital statistics of the Edward Willett family. Contains marriage data and birth and death records of their 13 children 3. Edward Willett's letters to the Honorable Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts and memorandums of bills of exchange, 1733-1741
2	32	Journal of a voyage from New York to Singapore (October 24, 1849-March 8, 1850) and from Canton to New York (May 24-August 25, 1850). Also a journal of a voyage aboard the yacht <i>Mariner</i> (August 8-September 4, 1859). These journals were probably kept by Marinus Willett, grandson of Col. Marinus Willett

Box	Folder	Contents
2	33	Book of religious writings (handwritten), 21 July 1819
		Land Papers
2	34	History and copy of the transfer of the original purchase by Thomas Willett to the agent of the New Plymouth Co.
2	35	Bond. Thomas Vail and Thomas Willett (great-uncle of Col. Marinus Willett), 7 May 1838
2	36	Release. Thomas Chandler to John French, 9 April 1767
2	37	Mortgage. John French to Marinus Willett, 15 October 1767
2	38	Release. John French to Marinus Willett, 5 October 1769
2	39	Release. John Chandler to Marinus Willett, 16 July 1783
		Business and Land Papers of Rev. Marinus Willett (grandson of Col. Marinus Willett)
3	40	Papers relating directly to Rev. Marinus Willett. Papers include bonds, mortgages, receipts, etc., 1853-1882 (18 items)
3	41	Papers relating to the business and land enterprises of Rev. Marinus Willett and other Willett family members. Papers include bonds, mortgages, deeds, receipts, applications for loans, etc. Many of these documents concern the transactions of Frederic Bronson, executor of the estate of Miss Caroline Willett and L.A. Ward of Rochester, agent, 1844-1862 (28 items)
3	42	Correspondence relating to the business and land enterprises of Rev. Marinus Willett and other Willett family members. A) General Correspondence, 1844-1850 (12 items) B) Correspondence of L.A. Ward, Rochester, New York, agent, 1844-1862 (9 items)
3	43	Contract between Thomas, Julia C., Eliz. A. Willett, G. Willett Van Nest (great-grandchildren of Col. Marinus Willett) 1901
		Printed Materials
3	44 (EL)	Christmas poem, 25 December 1812. Written on an illustrated form titled "The Creation of a New School Piece," depicting scenes relating to the Fall of Man. Publ. by David Longworth, Shakespeare Gallery, New York. (Contains a poem titled "Christmas" by Marinus Willett, Jr. dedicated to his mother, Mrs. Margaret Willett, December 25, 1812) (original files w/extra-large documents)
3	45	Copy of a print depicting the residence of the late Col. Marinus Willett, Mayor of New York, in 1807-1808. From <i>D.T. Valentine's Manual</i> , 1854
3	46	Official post card (No. 30) of the Hudson-Fulton Celebration Commission. (Shows a picture of an exhibition float commemorating the "Exploit of Marinus Willett") 1909
3	47	Broadside of the Sons of the Revolution re: a memorial for Col. Marinus Willett
3	48	Newspaper clippings containing biographical sketches and articles re: Col. Marinus Willett and other members of the Willett family (15 items)
3	49	Documents Relating to the Society of Cincinnati, 1851-1974. (The Society of the Cincinnati was founded in 1783 as a fraternal organization of officers of the American Army of the Revolution. The society has continued to the present day and members include male descendants of officers of the

Box	Folder	Contents
		American Army of the Revolution, as well as honorary members)
		Letter books, 1780-1781 (stored in the vault)
4	50	Contains outgoing letters written by Col. Marinus Willett (1740-1830) regarding his command of troops in northern New York from 14 September to 16 November 1781. Also includes a daily calendar listing where his troops were stationed from 8 June 1781 to 28 October 1781; muster roll of the Light Infantry Company, 19 August 1780; and personal letters, ca. 1780-1781.
4	51	Contains outgoing letters written from 20 June 1781 to 7 September 1781 concerning troops garrisoned at Fort Rensselaer, New York. Includes letters addressed to Henry Livingston, George Washington, John Hancock, Philip Schuyler, and John Stark. Also includes copies of regimental and garrison orders from circa 21 May to 7 November 1781. (Formerly catalogued as BD15705) <i>See Calendar to Marinus Willett Letterbook and Book of Regimental Orders, May-November, 1781, Fort Rensselaer and Albany, N.Y.</i>
EL	52	Dissected map of New York, Merriam, Moore, & Co., Troy, NY [1854]
EL	53	Christmas poem, 25 December 1812. Written on an illustrated form titled "The Creation of a New School Piece," depicting scenes relating to the Fall of Man. Publ. by David Longworth, Shakespeare Gallery, New York. (Contains a poem titled "Christmas" by Marinus Willett, Jr. dedicated to his mother, Mrs. Margaret Willett, December 25, 1812) (from Box 3 folder 44))

**Calendar to Marinus Willett Letterbook and
 Book of Regimental Orders
 May-November 1781
 Fort Rensselaer and Albany, N.Y.**

This calendar to the Marinus Willett letterbook and book of regimental orders was created in 1973. Original accession number: 15705

Register of Letters (Drafts)

Date	Letter addressed to	From
n.d.	Notes by Willett	n.p.
June 20, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer
June 28, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer
July 1, 1781	Col. Whemple (?)	Fort Rensselaer
June 30, 1781	Sgt. ?	Canajoharie
November 2, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer
July 14, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer
July 14, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer
July 14, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer
July 14, 1781	Major McKinsted (?)	Fort Rensselaer
July 14, 1781	Major Villefranch	Fort Rensselaer
July 15, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer

Date	Letter addressed to	From
July 13, 1781	Gen'l. Washington	Fort Rensselaer
July 17, 1781	Commissioners of Conspiracies In Albany	Fort Rensselaer
July 17, 1781	Captain Marshall	Fort Rensselaer
July 1781	Col. Henry Livingston et al	Albany
July 1781	Captain Harrison (?) et al	Albany
July 26, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Albany
July 26, 1781	Gov. John Hancock of Mass.	Albany
July 26, 1781	Four officers "and the officer and commanding at Fort Rensselaer"	Albany
August 1781	Major Throop	Albany
n.d.	Uncompleted draft of a letter	n.p.
August 3, 1781	Major Villefranche	Albany
August 6, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Albany
August 17, 1781	Gen. Schuyler	Fort Rensselaer
August 19, 1781	?	Fort Rensselaer
August 25, 1781	Gen. Stark	Fort Rensselaer
August 31, 1781	Major Villefranch [sic]	Fort Rensselaer
August 31, 1781	Captain ?	Fort Rensselaer
September 2, 1781	? (uncompleted draft)	Fort Rensselaer
September 2, 1781	Gov. Clinton	Fort Rensselaer
September 5, 1781	Capt. Hall	Fort Rensselaer
September 7, 1781	?	Fort Rensselaer

Book of Regimental Orders (opposite side of volume)

Date/Place	Description
n.d.	One page memo about horses left at Albany, Barrington, etc.
May 21, 1781/Albany, N.Y.	Regimental Orders - listing of officers, etc.
June 21, 1781/Albany, N.Y.	Regimental Orders
August 7, 1781/Albany, N.Y.	Regimental Orders
August 22, 1781/Albany, N.Y.	Garrison Orders - ordering arrest of an officer for disturbing the peace
n.d.	Regimental Returns
n.d.	"Orders for the Regulation of the Garrison"
July 30, 1781/Albany, N.Y.	Regimental Orders
August 21, 1781/Fort Rensselaer, N.Y.	Orders
September 5, 1781/Fort Rensselaer, N.Y.	Garrison Orders (Evidence against an officer on trial)
October 3, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Order
September 6, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Garrison Order
September 7, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Garrison Order
September 12, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Garrison Order
September 16, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Evidence used in military trial

Date/Place	Description
September 23, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Orders
September 23, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Regimental Orders
September 25, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Garrison Orders
October 1, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	General Orders (Court Martial held in Saratoga, September 25, 1781)
October 9, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Garrison Orders
November 2, 1781/Fort Rensselaer	Tryon County Orders
n.d.	Draft of an order complimenting troops in “turning out to oppose the enemy...”

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