



**Special Collections
Research Library
and Archive**

Finding Aid - In Process

001 Liberty Hall Collection

1711-1847 (Bulk: 1790-1832)

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Kean University
Special Collections Research Library & Archive
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Summary

Creator

Multiple people who lived in Liberty Hall/Ursino contributed to this collection. Residents included Susan Livingston Kean Niemcewicz (1759-1833), Peter Philip James Kean (1788-1828), John Kean (1814-1895), and their families.

Size

25 linear feet (56 manuscript boxes)

Storage Note

001, Bay 1, Section 1-2

Languages

English, French, Polish, Dutch

Abstract

The Liberty Hall Collection consists of approximately 4000 unique manuscript items dated between 1711 and 1847, formerly at Liberty Hall, now Liberty Hall Museum, accumulated by the Livingston and Kean families. Two-thirds of the manuscripts are correspondence; the remainder are financial records, legal documents, and other papers. Most of the collection is related to Susan Livingston Kean Niemcewicz (1759-1833). The Livingston and Kean families frequently corresponded and held accounts with other prominent colonial and early American families in New Jersey, especially Elizabeth Town, NJ, Philadelphia, PA, New York, NY, upstate New York, South Carolina, Georgia, England, France, and Poland. A small portion of the collection includes correspondence with early Virginia families unrelated to the Livingston and Kean families.

The collection includes insights from men, women, and children, patriots and loyalists, homemakers, and political leaders. They wrote about family concerns, politics, and business practices. The collection also includes second-hand accounts of Enslaved People owned by the Kean and other families, offering a glimpse into their forced work and places of residence.

At this time, one-third of the collection is on Kean Digital Commons.

Access and Use

Access Restrictions

This collection is open to the public for research use.

Use Restrictions

Personal photographs for research purposes. Inquiries regarding publishing material from the collection should be directed to SCRLA@kean.edu.

Copyright

Copyright remains with Kean University.

Credit this material

Liberty Hall Collection; Special Collections Research Library & University Archive, Kean University, Union, NJ.

Background Information

Acquisition

The Liberty Hall Collection was developed over the last 200 years and housed in Liberty Hall, currently called Liberty Hall Museum and Arboretum, the National Landmark and historic home of William Livingston and the Kean family. In 2007, the Liberty Hall Collection was deeded to Kean University by John Kean Sr. through a formal agreement.

Archival Appraisal Information

Materials were not deaccessioned from the collection.

Processing Information

Kean University acquired the collection and put it into the Liberty Hall Academic Center & Exhibition Hall Special Collections Research Library & Archive in August 2019. The collection was processed in Fall 2019. The finding aid was started in Spring 2020.

Conservation

The mending of tears, creases, and surface cleaning began in Spring 2020.

History

The Collection is the historical record of people who lived in the Liberty Hall estate, also called Ursino, and their relatives, business partners, acquaintances, and others.

William Livingston first purchased land in New Jersey in 1760. He started the construction of Liberty Hall in the spring of 1773. It was a 14-room Georgian-style country manor. He named it Liberty Hall. Livingston died in 1790, and his son Henry Brockholdt Livingston sold the house and gardens in 1798 to George Richard Belasie and his wife, who were known as Lord and Lady Bolingbroke. Thomas Eddy purchased Liberty Hall in 1806. Two years later, Thomas Salter bought it.

In 1811, Peter Philip James Kean purchased Liberty Hall on behalf of his mother, Susan Livingston Kean Niemcewicz, uniting the house's history to both the Livingston and Kean families. Soon after the purchase, it was renamed Ursino after Susan's second husband and Peter's step-father, Count Julian Ursin Niemcewicz. They all resided in the house after Peter married Sarah Sabina Morris in 1813. They had 11 children, 4 of whom survived to adulthood. Peter unexpectedly died in 1828. Sarah remarried and moved to New York City in 1831. Susan remained in and owned the house until 1833. When she died, the house was willed to her oldest grandson, John Kean (1814-1895). In 1847, he married Lucinetta "Lucy" Halstead. The house expanded to a 50-room Victorian Italianate villa during their ownership. Of their 11 children, nine lived to adulthood.

John Kean (1814-1895) left the house to his son, Senator John Kean (1852-1914). He never married and left the house to his nephew, Captain John Kean (1888-1949), who lived there with his wife, Mary Alice, and their three children. After the captain's death, Mary Alice lived in the house. She returned the name to Liberty Hall in 1974. John Kean (1929-) inherited the house after she died in 1995. He donated Liberty Hall to the Liberty Hall Foundation in 1997. Ten years later, the property was acquired by Kean University.

The manuscripts in the Liberty Hall Collection were stored in drawers and boxes in the estate and the Ice House. In 2007, the Liberty Hall Collection was deeded to Kean University by John Kean Sr. through a formal agreement. The collection moved into the Liberty Hall Academic Center and Exhibition Hall in August 2019.

Scope and Content

The Liberty Hall Collection consists of the correspondence, financial records, legal documents, and other manuscript material of the Livingston and Kean families, dated from 1739 to 1847. Most of the collection is related to Susan Livingston Kean Niemcewicz (1759-1833). Susan was the niece of William Livingston (1723-1790), who established Liberty Hall and was New Jersey's first elected governor and signer of the US Constitution. Susan was the wife of John Kean (1755-1795), a South Carolina Continental Congress Representative and Cashier of the First Bank of the United States, and later married Polish Count Julian Ursin Niemcewicz (1758-1841). Susan's only son, Peter Philip James Kean (1788-1828), purchased Liberty Hall on her behalf in 1811. The Livingston and Kean families frequently corresponded and held accounts with other prominent colonial and early American families in New Jersey, especially Elizabeth Town, NJ, Philadelphia, PA, New York, NY, upstate New York, England, France, and Poland.

Other people in the collection include Susan's only son, Peter Philip James Kean (1788-1828), and his wife Sarah Sabina Morris (1788-1875), whose grandfather Lewis Morris signed the Declaration of Independence. Four of their children lived to adulthood. Of those, the collection

includes many of the papers of John Kean (1814-1895) and his wife Lucinetta Pitney Halstead (1825-1912), sister Julia Kean (1816-1887), and her husband Hamilton Fish (1808-1893). A small portion of the collection includes correspondence with early Virginia families unrelated to the Livingston and Kean families.

The collection includes second-hand accounts of people whom the Kean and other families enslaved: letters, receipts, and legal documents offering a glimpse into their forced work and places of residence. On the Kean Digital Learning Commons site, the SCRLA team uses the keyword “enslaved.” When given, the names of Enslaved People are included in the document description.

Arrangement

There are five series in the collection. The descriptions and complete numbers will be updated when processing is complete.

Series 1: Livingston Family Papers, 1739-1847

Dates: 1739-1846, undated

Extent: 1 manuscript box

Languages: English, Dutch

Description: This series of manuscript material belonged to Livingston family members, excluding Susan Livingston, who married John Kean (1755-1795) in 1786. The Livingstons and Keans frequently wrote on personal, financial, and inheritance topics. Series 1 is the smallest series.

Series 2: John Kean, Susan Livingston Kean Niemcewicz, and Julian Niemcewicz Papers, 1783-1847

Dates: 1781-1833, and undated

Extent: 35 manuscript boxes

Languages: English, French, Polish

Description: This series includes the manuscript material that belonged to Susan Livingston (1759-1833), her first husband, John Kean (1755-1795), her second husband, Julian Ursin Niemcewicz (1758-1841), and her son Peter Philip James Kean (1788-1728), before his marriage in 1813. It includes personal correspondence, and financial and legal documents. The addresses (to or from) include New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Georgia, Pennsylvania, France, England, and Poland. There are over 2000 items either addressed to or from Susan. This series includes second-hand accounts of multiple Enslaved People in South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. When available, the names of the Enslaved are included in Kean Digital Learning Commons descriptions.

Series 3: Peter Kean, Sarah Sabina Morris, and Looe Baker Family Papers, 1787-1847

Dates: 1787-1847, and undated

Extent: 10 manuscript boxes

Languages: English, Polish

Description: Peter Philip James Kean (1788-1828) married Sarah Sabina Morris (1788-1875) on February 18, 1813. This series includes Peter's papers after their

marriage, Sarah and her family's papers, and documents that belonged to their children before marriage. These letters contain the Kean family's personal, financial, and legal accounts. Peter and Sarah had 11 children, 3 of whom lived to adulthood: John Kean, 1814-1895; Julia Ursin Niemcewicz Kean, 1816-1887; and Christine A. Kean, 1826-1915. Peter unexpectedly died on October 2, 1828. Sarah married Looe Baker on January 6, 1831, and moved from Ursino to New York.

Series 4: John Kean and Lucinetta Halsted Family Papers, 1776-1847

Dates: 1776-1847, and undated

Extent: 3 manuscript boxes

Languages: English, Dutch

Description: Material that belonged to John Kean (1814-1895) after his marriage on January 13, 1847, to Lucinetta (Lucy) Halsted (1825-1912), the papers that belonged to her family, and documents that belonged to John Kean's siblings, particularly Julian Ursin Niemcewicz Kean and her husband, Hamilton Fish. The Halsted family were enslavers and there are legal documents for the sale and purchase Enslaved People in this series.

Series 5: Misfits

Dates: 1711-1847, and undated

Extent: 7 manuscript boxes

Languages: English

Description: These manuscripts have no apparent connection to the previous series. There are early land records from Philadelphia, PA, and many items from Virginia. This series needs more attention.