

Archives and Special Collections

Dickinson College

Carlisle, PA

**COLLECTION REGISTER**

Name: **Young, William (1755 - 1829)** **MC 2001.5**

Materials: Papers (1786-1801)

Volume: 0.25 linear feet (1 Document Box)

Donation: Gift of Boyd Lee Spahr

Usage: These materials have been donated without restrictions on usage.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

William Young was born near Irvine, Scotland, on June 27, 1755, the eldest of the ten children of John Young. The Young family was closely tied to the Associate Presbyterian Church, a subdivision of the Presbyterian Church which had broken with the Church of Scotland. A man of smaller stature and not very robust, Young decided upon a life in the ministry, and entered the Associate Presbyterian Seminary. In 1779 while still pursuing his studies, Young married Agnes McLaws, the daughter of a local family also affiliated with the Associate Church. However, Young withdrew from the seminary before completing his studies and opted instead to embark upon a career as a book dealer. At the age of twenty-eight, he left Scotland with his wife and son for America. The family arrived at Philadelphia in June 1784 and was greeted by a well-established Associate Presbyterian community planted by missionaries thirty years earlier.

In Philadelphia, Young opened a bookshop and printing establishment at his home on the corner of Second and Chestnut Streets. The business prospered, making Young and his partner, John McCulloch, two of the most respected book dealers in the city. In 1794, Young became one of the founding members of the Philadelphia Company of Printers and Booksellers; he served as president at the first meeting on July 4 of that year. Young's family also flourished; he and his wife had five more children after their arrival, although two of them were lost to childhood diseases. During the outbreak of the yellow fever epidemic in the city in 1793, both Young and his wife contracted the dreaded disease; both were placed under the care of Dr. Benjamin Rush. William survived, but Agnes did not, and she was buried in an unmarked grave at the Walnut Street Associate Presbyterian Church, which the Youngs had helped build in 1790.

Young continued in the book dealing business until 1802, when he sold his company to William Woodward. That same year he married Rachel Anderson and moved his family to a new estate in Rockland, Delaware. Young and his new wife would have eight more children, including two sets of twins. In Rockland, he established a paper mill, providing the much-needed stock for Woodward's printing business back in Philadelphia; Young was even awarded

a medal for the creation of a new stock of paper. However, the paper mill burned in 1814 and although it was reopened as a woolen mill, the profits were not the same, causing Young to rapidly lose money. Woodward's mismanagement of the printing business and resultant bankruptcy did nothing but aggravate the situation, removing any chance that Young had of recouping the debts to him that Woodward had incurred. In fact, Young had needed to borrow heavily from the firm of his son-in-law, John McAllister, Jr., and was forced to remove his family to Philadelphia once again in 1816. When William Young died on May 12, 1829, it was estimated that he owed the firm of McAllister & Son over \$57,000. He was buried in the Associate Church cemetery in Rockland, and when his widow died in 1836 she was buried beside him; the entire plot was removed to the Delaware Avenue cemetery at Wilmington in 1851. The repayment of Young's debt to the McAllisters through the sale of his estate took thirty years to complete. Despite his later financial troubles, Young is still considered to be one of the most important figures in the history of printing in Philadelphia.

Charles Nisbet was born in January 21, 1736 to Alison and William Nisbet near Haddington, in the county of East Lothian in Scotland. By 1754, he had completed studies at both the high school of the University in Edinburgh and had entered Divinity Hall to prepare for the ministry. Nisbet was licensed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh on September 24, 1760, and began preaching at churches in the Gorbals, near Glasgow. On May 17, 1764, he was ordained in the presbytery of Brechin and assigned to a church in Montrose, in Forfar. Two years later, he married Anne Tweedie and his first son Thomas was born. The Nisbets would have three more children: Mary, Alison, and Alexander.

Nisbet developed one of the highest reputations for scholarship in Scotland. He became an important member of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, outspoken in his defense of strict Calvinism. In the decade in which American affairs came to a head he voiced strong and public support for the American colonists. In recognition of this advocacy, he was awarded a Doctorate of Divinity Degree from Princeton in 1783. Nisbet's reputation as a scholar and as an American sympathizer also caught the attention of Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, who was struggling to establish a college at Carlisle in that same year. Rush began to pursue Nisbet as his choice for the presidency of the new college, calling upon Nisbet's dedication to the principles of freedom and education. After much coaxing, Nisbet finally agreed and sailed from Greenock with his family on April 23, 1785.

Nisbet and his family would endure many hardships when they arrived in Carlisle a few months later. The family became desperately ill due to the harsh summer climate. In October, just months after he had arrived, Nisbet resigned as Principal of the College and proceeded to plan his return to Scotland. For reasons described variously as fearing a winter Atlantic crossing, or refusing to sail on an available ship with an Irish captain, his departure was delayed. During that time, the health of his family was recovered and on consideration he requested his old position. Nisbet was unanimously re-elected as Principal on May 9, 1786 by the Board of Trustees. For the following eighteen years, his efforts as Principal of the College were untiring.

Under Nisbet, the grammar school and the college were combined under one governing Board of Trustees, and in 1799 seven acres of land were purchased upon which a new college edifice could be constructed. Unfortunately for Nisbet, he would not see the full fruits of his labor. The large college edifice that he had long advocated had been completely destroyed by fire on the night of February 2-3, 1803, just as it was nearing completion. Nearly a year later, on New Years' Day, he contracted a cold which progressed rapidly into pneumonia; Charles Nisbet died on January 18, 1804.

## COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The William Young Papers are contained in one document box and are organized into one series, titled Correspondence. This collection was donated to the College by Boyd Lee Spahr, Class of 1900 and President of the Board of Trustees for over thirty years.

The Correspondence section is comprised of the letters received by William Young. The majority of these letters were written by Charles Nisbet over a span of ten years; the subjects of these letters range from Nisbet's transactions with Young as a printer and book dealer to local events and world news. There is one letter from Young to his wife, dated 1788. The letters in this series have been arranged alphabetically by author and then chronologically.

## COLLECTION INVENTORY

### BOX 1 - MC 2001.5

#### CORRESPONDENCE

Mason, John Mitchell

Folder 01) Letter to William Young – Aug. 25, 1795

Nisbet, Alexander

Folder 02) Letter to William Young – May 8, 1799  
Letter to William Young – Sept. 9, 1800  
Letter to William Young – Feb. 24, 1801  
Letter to William Young – July 20, 1801

Nisbet, Charles

Folder 03) Letter to William Young – Jan. 8, 1790  
Letter to William Young – Sep. 30, 1790  
Folder 04) Letter to William Young – Sep. 5, 1791  
Letter to William Young – Oct. 1, 1791  
Letter to William Young – Nov. 23, 1791  
Folder 05) Letter to William Young – June 9, 1792  
Letter to William Young – Nov. 6, 1792  
Folder 06) Letter to William Young – Mar. 22, 1793  
Letter to William Young – June 1, 1793  
Letter to William Young – July 3, 1793  
Letter to William Young – July 10, 1793  
Letter to William Young – Aug. 7, 1793  
Folder 07) Letter to William Young – Jan. 18, 1794  
Letter to William Young – Mar. 25, 1794  
Letter to William Young – Apr. 23, 1794  
Letter to William Young – July 29, 1794  
Letter to William Young – Nov. 14, 1794  
Folder 08) Letter to William Young – Feb. 13, 1795  
Folder 09) Letter to William Young – June 25, 1796  
Letter to William Young – Sep. 15, 1796  
Letter to William Young – Oct. 1, 1796

**BOX 1 - MC 2001.5 (cont.)**

CORRESPONDENCE (cont.)

Nisbet, Charles (cont.)

- Folder 10) Letter to William Young – Apr. 5, 1797
- Letter to William Young – May 11, 1797
- Letter to William Young – Nov. 13, 1797
- Folder 11) Letter to William Young – Nov. 23, 1798
- Letter to William Young – Feb. 4, 1799
- Letter to William Young – Aug. 21, 1800
- Letter to William Young – Dec. 10, 1801

Ross, James

- Folder 12) Letter to William Young – Apr. 26, 1786

Young, John

- Folder 13) Letter to William Young – Jan. 18, 1791

Young, William

- Folder 14) Letter to his wife – Aug. 18, 1788

This collection register was prepared by Michele M. Tournay, February 2001.