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Finding Aid for the JOHN LETCHWORTH PAPERS, 1755-1870

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**INFORMATION FOR USERS**

Elizabeth Letchworth, wife of John Letchworth, is often referred to as Betsy.

All correspondence dates are standardized rather than transcribed, viz: yr mo/day.

Though not all letters are listed individually, those that are highlighted are done so on the basis of content of the letter or historical importance of the letter writer.

**RESTRICTIONS**

No restrictions

**ABSTRACT**

A well-rounded picture of an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century minister in the Society of Friends, John Letchworth, as detailed through his letters and journal entries.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

John Letchworth (1759-1843) was born in London, the son of John and Diana Letchworth. The family moved to Philadelphia when he was eight years old. He was apprenticed to a chair maker at age 11. In 1783, he m. Elizabeth Kite, daughter of Thomas Kite. Their children included: Mary and Robert Letchworth. He became a member of the committee for relieving the sick and distressed during the Yellow Fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793. Although it is unclear whether he was a birthright Quaker, he became a minister in the Society of Friends. In 1801, he received a minute from his Meeting (Philadelphia Monthly Meeting?) to accompany Gulielma Widdefield and Hannah Shinn to visit other Quaker Meetings, where he noted the effects of slavery. In 1819, John Letchworth accompanied Isaac Pennock to visit Meetings and several

tribes of Indians, via Tunesassa in New York, and going as far west as Kentucky. John Letchworth's wife, Elizabeth, died in 1834.

(Information from internal evidence and the Dictionary of Quaker Biography)

## **SUBJECT HEADINGS**

Quakers – Family relationships  
Lay ministry -- Society of Friends  
Letchworth, Elizabeth Kite, d. 1843  
Letchworth, John, 1759-1843

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION**

Series List:

Series I. Biographical  
Series II. Correspondence  
Series III. Journals  
Series IV. Copybook

## **SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION**

The letters and journal entries of John Letchworth (1749-1843) of Pennsylvania, a minister in the Society of Friends who is called to journey in New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky to attend various Friends' Meetings, as well as to be present at Indian Councils where he and other Quakers are warmly greeted. The letters portray a loving husband and father, concerns for health, difficulties of travel, and especially the spirit and content of the Meetings he attends. They depict the circumscribed life of a gentle and pious Quaker. In addition, there is a work permit from the city of London for his father, John Letchworth in 1755, and a certificate of removal for the elder John Letchworth's children from the meeting in Norwich, England to Philadelphia, 1767.

## **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION**

### **Series I. Biographical:**

Some account of John Letchworth, 1749-1843. 1 folder (1 item)

Note: The account is a manuscript in an unsigned hand on 62 folio sheets. According to the manuscript, the information was chiefly taken from letters and memoranda. In comparing the originals in the collection to the transcriptions in the manuscript, the latter

has been edited, sometimes excluding passages, sometimes changing a word found in the original.

## **Series II. Correspondence:**

### John Letchworth letters to his family, 1801-1808. 1 folder (ca. 20 items)

Note: Letters are almost all to his wife, Betsy; one to his daughter, Mary. Letters include description of attendance at Meetings and Friends met as he traveled through parts of Maryland, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, stopping along the way at various Friends' houses and describing the locales through which they pass and meetings with Native Americans. They express his loving relationship with his family and his own shortcomings.

Some highlights include:

to Betsy. Baltimore, 1801 10/10. [learning the value of traveling Friends as he travels to other Meetings in company of Gulielma and Hannah]

to Beloved Wife. Ceres Town, 1803 10/9. [Mary Gilbert has decided not to accompany them to the Indians, though Penrose and he are willing to accompany Anne, though there is no road open and they would have to go by water, though that way is almost impassable. Francis King, his daughter, Joel Swain and others, including an Indian, would accompany them. In Cornplanterstown, attended Indian Council, at which Cornplanter expressed his satisfaction [with Quaker presence], and that they ceased drinking whiskey; met with other Indian groups]

to Beloved Wife. Muncey (Wm. Ellis'), 1803 10/18. [mentions the "pestilential fever" that threatens Philadelphia]

### John Letchworth letters to his family, 1810-1811. 1 folder (ca. 15 items)

Note: Letters are addressed to his wife, children and other family members, and discuss visits to Quaker Meetings in NJ and PA, reports on Friends, hospitality from local Friends, as well as his health. Some letters are "fair" copies of originals (most of the originals are here as well), as they are placed within quotation marks.

to Brother. East Fallowfield, 1810 11/25. [response to the death of his brother's wife]

### John Letchworth letters to his family, 1813-1817. 1 folder (ca. 15 items)

Note: Letters are mainly addressed to his wife, but other family members as well, and discuss visits and logistics of visiting Quaker Meetings in Pennsylvania, NJ, Ohio and Indiana and Friends met, health and weather

to Elizabeth. Mount Pleasant, 1813 8/15. [traveling in company with Jonathan Grave; difficult to find the road without aid of a map]

to Elizabeth. Middleton, 1813 8/24. [marriage issue among women Friends]

to Elizabeth. Wayne County, Indiana Territory, 1813 9/28. [as they travel to New Garden, considered on the frontier where few families remain on account of fear of the Indians]

to Elizabeth. Philadelphia, 1814 1/? [gives prices of many commodities, including copper, pork and orchard grass]

to Sister. East Fallowfield, 1817 1/2. [on crops and a question about jail time for Robert Mullins]

to Thomas Kite. East Fallowfield, 1817 1/4. [comments on the delivery and other qualities of some ministers in the Society of Friends]

John Letchworth letters to his family, 1819. 1 folder (8 items)

Note: letters to his wife written from New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Kentucky on visits to Quaker Meetings as well as Iroquois Indians, specifically Cataraugus and at Tunesassa, with fine descriptions of the routes taken. Many Friends are mentioned. Interest in crops at home.

to Elizabeth. Cataraugus, 1819 9/22. [currently at the home of Jacob Taylor who lives near the Indians "with a view to their Civilization;" they concluded to convene the Indians at that settlement, about 300-400, though only ~50 in attendance due to another Council and busy with harvest. The chief warrior of the Seneca Nation said they were glad of the Friends' visit.

to Betsy. Tunissassa [sic], 1819 9/26. [left word with Joseph Elkinton, teacher at the Indian school at Tunesassa and interpreter, that they were willing to meet with some of the chiefs or 2 or 3 families together, however it might suit, and a satisfactory meeting took place]

to Elizabeth. Kendal, 1819 10/7. [intends to visit Wappacanetty, a settlement of Indians under the care of the Ohio Yearly Meeting and two other settlements]

to Elizabeth. Miami County, 1819 10/24/ [have had 7 opportunities among the Indians who all appeared to listen with great attention and appreciated the visitors' plain truths; bilious fever present]

Letter writers other than John Letchworth; documents other than letters, 1823-1870. 1 folder (ca. 12 items)

Note: Many of the letters are religious in nature; as well attendance at Meeting and health are discussed.

Letter writers include:

Ezra Comfort, Elias Hicks, A. Knight, M.O. Letchworth, Robert Letchworth,  
Sarah Letchworth

Highlights include:

Letchworth, Sarah. Frankford, [PA], 1847 9/3. [reference to some Friends being placed in jail, testing their doctrine and principles]

Two documents are poems:

- “Lines suggested by the death of E.A. Cheyney” by John Letchworth
- “To Thomas Clarkson on his Portraiture of the Quakers” copied by John Letchworth

### **Series III. Journals:**

John Letchworth’s journal of a “Visit to Ohio Yearly Meeting, the Indians and Kentucky, 1819”

Note: See also letters above, which were written at the same time as this journal

### **Series IV. Copybook**

John Letchworth’s letters and journals, 1801-1809. 1 folder.

Note: John Letchworth’s “fair” copies of his own letters and journals, as well as a small part of “Some account of John Letchworth, 1749-1843.” That these are copies of originals is made clear by Letchworth’s use of quotation marks at the beginning of each document. A small “x” has been placed on each item in the copied set that is not contained in the original. In particular, some letters of 1805, 1806, 1807 and parts of 1808 exist only in the copy section.

As well, there are three journal sections, found interspersed with the letters, one beginning “31<sup>st</sup> (n.y.)” on p. 71, and including attendance at Darby Creek (PA), but also Union Meeting on the Great Miami River and West Branch Monthly Meeting et al, another beginning “15<sup>th</sup>” (n.y.) on p. 92, including attendance at Little Egg Harbor (NJ), and Visit to Salem, Ohio, 1809 on p. 101

### **Series V. Miscellaneous**

- work permit from the city of London for John Letchworth's father, John Letchworth in 1755
- certificate of removal from the meeting in Norwich, England to Philadelphia for the children of the elder John Letchworth signed by members of the meeting, 1767.

John Letchworth Papers

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