

French and American Claims Commission Records
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm97084103>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms014034>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2014
Revised 2023 May

Collection Summary

Title: French and American Claims Commission Records

Inclusive Dates: 1861-1884

ID No.: MSS84103

Creator: French and American Claims Commission

Extent: 7,000 items

Extent: 21 containers

Extent: 8.4 linear feet

Language: Collection material in French with English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm97084103>

Summary: Commission established in 1880 by a treaty between the governments of France and the United States to resolve outstanding claims by French citizens residing in the United States for property confiscated or destroyed during the Civil War. Correspondence, petitions, inventories, depositions, lists, certificates, and receipts. Includes material relating to the Union Army's western offensive and occupation of New Orleans and to protests by French residents of Bagdad, Mexico, a settlement attacked and pillaged by U.S. Army soldiers in January 1866.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Banks, Nathaniel Prentiss, 1816-1894--Correspondence.

Butler, Benjamin F. (Benjamin Franklin), 1818-1893--Correspondence.

Seward, William H. (William Henry), 1801-1872--Correspondence.

Stanton, Edwin M. (Edwin McMasters), 1814-1869--Correspondence.

Organizations

France. Ministère des affaires étrangères.

French and American Claims Commission.

United States. Army--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Subjects

Diplomatic and consular service, French--United States.

French--Alabama--History.

French--Arkansas--History.

French--Florida--History.

French--Louisiana--History.

French--Louisiana--New Orleans--History.

French--Mexico--History.

French--Mississippi--History.

French--Missouri--History.

French--Texas--History.

French--United States.

Pillage--Mexico.

Places

Louisiana--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Mexico--History--19th century.

New Orleans (La.)--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Campaigns.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Claims.

Acquisition Information

The records of the French and American Claims Commission were purchased by the Library of Congress in 1931. The records were originally processed as part of the Manuscript Division's David Dixon Porter Papers from which they were separated.

Processing History

The collection was processed in 1997 by Margaret McAleer with the assistance of Deloris Butler. The finding aid was revised in 2012. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

Other Repositories

Other records of the French and American Claims Commission are available at the National Archives and Records Administration.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of the French and American Claims Commission is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The records of the French and American Claims Commission are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, French and American Claims Commission Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The records of the French and American Claims Commission span the years 1861-1884. The commission was established by a treaty between the governments of France and the United States in 1880 to resolve outstanding claims by French citizens residing in the United States for property confiscated or destroyed during the Civil War. The records include correspondence, petitions, inventories, depositions, lists, certificates, and receipts. The bulk of the correspondence is conducted in French among non-naturalized French residents, the French consul in New Orleans, and the French agent appointed to represent the claims before the commission. Correspondence from American officials is in English. The collection is arranged in two series: [Claimant Petitions](#) and [Miscellany](#).

The [Claimant Petitions](#) series is composed of two groups of case files arranged alphabetically by the name of the claimant or occasionally the name of an attorney or ship. The bulk of the first and largest group of cases dates from 1862 to 1865 and contains petitions and related documentation written by native French residents to the French consul in New Orleans, the French minister in Washington, and the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères in Paris. Many of the letters and inventories date from the spring and summer of 1862 soon after Union forces captured New Orleans and launched a major western offensive in Mississippi. The majority of petitions are from French residents of Louisiana, particularly New Orleans. Also included are petitions from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. This group of case files was turned over

to an agent assigned to represent French claims before the commission in 1880. A second case file was created by the agent and the commission in 1880.

The petitions provide insight into the Union Army's western offensive and its occupation of New Orleans. The vast majority of petitions concern the confiscation or destruction of property, including warehoused cotton, shop inventories, restaurant provisions, ships and ship cargoes, homes and personal effects, crops, livestock, wagons, and farm buildings. Some petitioners were Union prisoners suspected of fighting with or supplying the Confederate army. Petitioners' letters often describe the circumstances surrounding their loss of property or imprisonment. Also included are responses from American civil and military officials at times refuting the claims in some detail. Included are letters from Nathaniel Prentiss Banks, Benjamin F. Butler, William Henry Seward, and Edwin McMasters Stanton.

Apart from the events of the war, the files reveal much about the social composition and experiences of a transatlantic French community. Many of the letters contain biographical information, including date and place of birth, date of immigration, occupation, and occasionally family data. Detailed inventories shed considerable light on the economic activities and personal effects of the claimants.

Unnumbered folders filed at the end of the first group of petitions include petitions by groups and claims not covered by the commission, such as requests for compensation for damages caused by Confederate forces and for emancipated enslaved people. Also included among the unnumbered folders are protests from French residents of Bagdad, a town in Mexico near the port of Matamoros. According to its residents, the town was attacked and pillaged by United States soldiers in January 1866.

The Miscellany series contains legation correspondence, lists of claims, notification of attorney representation, powers of attorney, proofs of citizenship, and receipts for documents returned to petitioners.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in two series:

- Claimant Petitions, 1861-1884
- Miscellany, 1863-1883

Description of Series

Container

BOX 1-20

Series

Claimant Petitions, 1861-1884

Case files of correspondence, petitions, inventories, depositions, certificates, and printed matter.

Organized by the commission in two sets and arranged therein according to a numerical filing system and by the first letter of the last name of the claimant or attorney or the name of a ship.

BOX 20-21

Miscellany, 1863-1883

Legation correspondence, lists and schedules, printed forms, and receipts.

Arranged alphabetically by topic or type of material.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-20	Claimant Petitions, 1861-1884 Case files of correspondence, petitions, inventories, depositions, certificates, and printed matter. Organized by the commission in two sets and arranged therein according to a numerical filing system and by the first letter of the last name of the claimant or attorney or the name of a ship.
BOX 1	1861-1881, French agent's files
BOX 1	A-B, nos. 1-62 (6 folders)
BOX 2	B, nos. 63-110 (5 folders)
BOX 3	B-C, nos. 111-172 (6 folders)
BOX 4	C, nos. 173-224 (6 folders)
BOX 5	C-D, nos. 225-298 (6 folders)
BOX 6	D-F, nos. 299-364 (6 folders)
BOX 7	F-H, nos. 365-457 (6 folders)
BOX 8	H-L, nos. 458-521 (5 folders)
BOX 9	L, nos. 522-583 (6 folders)
BOX 10	L-M, nos. 584-640 (5 folders)
BOX 11	M-N, nos. 641-700 (5 folders)
BOX 12	N-P, nos. 701-776 (6 folders)
BOX 13	P-R, nos. 777-818 (5 folders)
BOX 14	R-S, nos. 819-874 (6 folders)
BOX 15	S-V, nos. 875-905 (5 folders)
BOX 16	V, nos. 906-930 (3 folders)
BOX 17	Unnumbered (6 folders)
BOX 18	1880-1884, commission files

Claimant Petitions, 1861-1884

Container	Contents
BOX 18	A-D, nos. 1-78 (6 folders)
BOX 19	D-N, nos. 79-195 (6 folders)
BOX 20	N-Y and miscellaneous, nos. 196-263 (7 folders)
BOX 20-21	Miscellany, 1863-1883 Legation correspondence, lists and schedules, printed forms, and receipts. Arranged alphabetically by topic or type of material.
BOX 20	Legation correspondence, 1881-1883
BOX 20	Lists and schedules, 1864-1881 (1 folder)
BOX 21	(1 folder)
BOX 21	Notification of attorney representation, 1880-1881
BOX 21	Proof of citizenship, 1863-1865
BOX 21	Receipt for return of original documents, 1880-1882