

The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 3

Finding Aid for

**William Carey Letter, 1800**



William Carey signature. Credit to MRL 3: William Carey Letter, 1800,  
The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Finding Aid prepared by: Jessica Patterson, July 2013  
With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

**Summary Information**

Creator: William Carey, 1761-1834  
Title: William Carey Papers  
Date: 1800  
Abstract: English Baptist missionary in England, known as the “father of modern missions.” Founded the English Baptist Missionary Society (1792). Translated the Bible into Bengali, and was subsequently appointed Professor of Sanskrit and Bengali at Fort William College in Calcutta. Carey continued to translate the Bible into various India dialects. Founded the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India (1820), as well as hundreds of schools and churches. Successfully campaigned against infanticide and the practice of suttee (widow burning). This collection contains a single handwritten letter dated 1800.  
Size: 10S box, 2.00 linear feet  
Storage: Onsite storage  
Repository: The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Email: [burkearchives@libraries.cul.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@libraries.cul.columbia.edu)

**Administrative Information**

- Provenance:** Originally part of the independent Missionary Research Library, these records were moved with the MRL to the Brown Memorial Tower of Union Theological Seminary in 1929. In 1976 the records were accessioned to the Burke Library archives with the closure of the MRL.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to [burkearchives@libraries.cul.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@libraries.cul.columbia.edu), or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions:** The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, MRL 3: William Carey Letter, box 1, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

**Biography**

William Carey was born into humble beginnings in Paulerspury, Northamptonshire, England in 1761. Carey's father worked as a handloom weaver, barely keeping his family out of poverty, and later became a schoolmaster and parish clerk. His parents, adherents of the Church of England, apprenticed him to a shoemaker so that he could learn an indoor trade because of a skin allergy to sunlight that was discovered when Carey was young. Under the influence of fellow apprentice, John Warr, Carey joined the Baptist Church at the age of twenty-two in 1783. Carey began to preach in local chapels and had the desire to become a pastor, although his preaching was so poor that his first church initially refused to ordain him. Carey was primarily self-taught, researching and learning both Latin and Greek while working as a cobbler. Eventually, Carey gave up cobbling and began teaching in the village school where he was able to combine instruction with preaching. He famously crafted a leather-covered globe in his classroom, demonstrating to students the masses of "heathens" in need of assistance. Until that time, Protestant Missionary work had been confined to the British colonies of North America, but Carey had a larger vision of needed missionary work.

In 1792, Carey published a pamphlet entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, debating the Calvinistic theology of some of his denominational colleagues, who believed that God would convert non-Christians without the need for human intervention. In addition, the pamphlet explained the importance of worldwide missionary work, and to take the work seriously. Due to the popularity of his pamphlet, as well as a coinciding sermon, the Northamptonshire Baptist Association met in Kettering in 1792. At the meeting, it was decided upon that the creation of the "Particular Baptist Missionary Society for propagating the gospel among the heath" was needed. The organization later became known as the Baptist Missionary Society, which was the first English-speaking Protestant missionary society.

In June, 1793, Carey, with his wife, sister-in-law and five children, sailed for Calcutta, India, which was under the rule of the chartered British East India Company. Also joining Carey on his journey to India was Dr. John Thomas and his wife. Thomas had brought the need for missionaries in India to Carey's attention. When arriving in India, Carey faced a multitude of problems. First and foremost, the East India Company's policy at the time was to oppose all missionary work so trade would not be interrupted between British traders and the Indian population, mainly made up of those who were Hindu and Muslim. This policy made missionaries notionally illegal and unwelcome. Secondly, due to the financial mismanagement of Thomas, the missionary's funds were exhausted in a short time. This left the missionaries to hunt their own food and try cultivating land in the Sundarbans, a tiger-and crocodile-infested area on the Bay of Bengal, southeast of Calcutta. Carey then secured a management position at the Mudnabati Indigo Factory in the Malda district of Bengal. There, Carey lost his five year old son. Carey's wife did not recover from her son's death, as well as constant bouts of dysentery, and died in 1807.

While managing the indigo plantation, Carey had the ability to preach on Sundays, as well as the off season when the crop was not being propagated. Carey taught himself Bengali, the local language, and worked to translate the New Testament into that language for the local populace. He attempted seven further times to create an acceptable translated version, but ultimately succeeded in creating a prose literature for Bengali. During this time, Carey went on to study the classical Indian language, Sanskrit, as well as Persian.

In 1799, the small missionary party that was originally sent to India was bolstered by four recruits from England. At this time, Carey received notice that his position at the indigo plantation would be terminated because the facility was closing. Carey was given the responsibility of starting a mission settlement, and was going to rely on his income to do so. Carey made the decision to relocate to Frederiksganar (now Serampore), a Danish enclave in India, sixteen miles west of Calcutta. There, Carey worked with the two surviving missionaries to translate and print the Bible.

Converts in India came slowly, as Carey did not baptize his first convert until December 1800, seven years after arriving in India. Although conversion was slow moving in the beginning stages of the mission, by 1821 the missionaries had baptized more than 1,400 people. During this time, the missionaries lived together and shared their resources to keep their mission afloat.

In 1798, Carey obtained a position as a professor of Bengali at the newly opened College of Fort William in Calcutta. The position was well-paid and Carey's income helped the mission to be financially independent. He held the position for twenty years. Another hobby of Carey's also provided helpful, as his interest in horticulture helped the mission maintain a self-sufficient food supply. The mission was able to accomplish one of their main goals, providing the Bible to Indians in their own languages. The mission completed the Bengali Bible in 1809, and printed at least portions of the Bible in more than forty languages by 1837. Carey singularly translated the entire Bible into Sanskrit, Marathi, Oraya, Hindi, and Assamese. Carey also went on to write a Sanskrit grammar. The missionaries opened over one hundred and twenty schools, serving 10,000 students, the first opening in 1798. In 1819, Carey founded the Serampore College as a training college for local pastors and a liberal arts college for other students that included a

medical facility. Carey's interest in horticulture led him to help found the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India in 1820. Carey was also an adamant campaigner against infanticide and the Hindu practice of suttee (widow burning), helping to outlaw both practices within his lifetime. Carey died in Serampore in 1834, never returning to England.

#### Sources:

- Barratt, David. "William Carey." *Great Lives From History: The Nineteenth Century* (2007): 1. *Biography Reference Center*. Web. 26 July 2013.
- Culross, James. *William Carey*. New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1882. Print.
- Davis, Walker Bruce. *William Carey: Father of Modern Missions*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1963. Print.
- Latourette, K. S. "Carey, William." *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed. Vol. 3. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 108. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 26 July 2013.
- "William Carey." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2013. Web. 26 July 2013.

#### **Collection Scope and Content Note**

This collection contains one handwritten letter by William Carey. The letter is difficult to read and in some areas illegible. The letter was written in December 9, 1800, soon after Carey had relocated from Bengal to Serampore. The letter addresses an individual who Carey calls "My Dear Bro."

#### **Processing**

The letter has been placed in a glass frame.

#### **Further Sources**

Yale University has the Baptist Missionary Society Archives, which includes records for the society, as well as the correspondence of missionaries. Contained within this collection are the personal correspondences as well as a journal of William Carey. The pathfinder can be located here: <http://www.library.yale.edu/div/fa/BMS.htm#part4>

Further information on missionary programs in South Asia can be located in the in The Missionary Research Library Collection at the Burke Library, Series 3: South Asia. Pathfinders for multiple collections can be found here:

<http://library.columbia.edu/locations/burke/archives/mrl.html>

#### **Contents list**

Box	Contents
1	Letter, "My Dear Bro" December 9, 1800