

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

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 6

Finding Aid for

D.W.C. Olyphant Papers, 1827 - 1851



Image Credit: D. MacDougall, ed., *Scots and Scots Descendant in America*, New York: Caledonian Publishing Company, 1917.

Finding Aid prepared by: Gregory Adam Scott, June 2010

Reviewed and Updated by Brigette C. Kamsler, February 2014 with financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: David Washington Cincinnatus Olyphant, 1789 - 1851

Title: D.W.C. Olyphant Papers

Dates: 1827 - 1851

Abstract: Copied selections from seven letters written by D.W.C. Olyphant, an American trader with offices in New York and Guangzhou, and a prominent supporter of the American missionary enterprise in China. Letters last copied in 1916, document years 1827-1851.

Size: 1 box, 0.25 linear feet

Storage: Onsite storage

Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027

Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

- Provenance:** These records were part of the independent Missionary Research Library prior to its closure in 1976, when the records were accessioned to The Burke Library. The Content and scope below lists a projected history of the transcriptions ending with David W. Lyon, who may have arranged the donation of these copies with his own papers to the Missionary Research Library.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkearchives@library.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. The collection can be viewed online with this [lower-quality PDF](#).
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, MRL 6: D.W.C. Olyphant Papers, box #, folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

David Washington Cincinnatus Olyphant was born in Newport, Rhode Island on March 7, 1789. He was the son of Dr. David Olyphant, a Scottish supporter of Charles Edward Stewart who had come to America in the 1740s, and Ann (née Vernon) Olyphant, granddaughter of Richard Ward, governor of Rhode Island. D.W.C. Olyphant was raised Presbyterian, although some sources mention connections to the Religious Society of Friends. After his father died in 1805, Olyphant went to New York City and found employment with King and Talbot, a trading firm engaged in business in China. In 1820 he went to China himself, where he met the pioneering Scottish missionary Robert Morrison 馬禮遜, 1782 - 1834, in Guangzhou 廣州 (Canton). This was the beginning of a long-standing and close relationship between Olyphant and the Protestant missionary enterprise in China.

Olyphant returned to the U.S. in 1823 and had a son, Robert Morrison Olyphant, in 1824 with his wife Ann Archer (née McKenzie) Olyphant. He returned to live in China from 1826 to 1827, during which time he wrote a letter, a copy of which is included in this collection. This letter is credited with bringing the first American missionaries to China.

In 1828 he organized the trading firm Olyphant and Company from the remains of his former employer's business which had gone bankrupt. He was well-known for his opposition to the opium trade, and his was one of the only large trading firms not to engage in opium smuggling in China. He again spent time in China from 1834 to 1837, and in 1838 was elected to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the organization that had dispatched the first American missionaries to China in 1829. In addition to his financial support, his trading ships also offered free passage to missionaries traveling to and from China.

In 1850 he traveled once again to China, but ill health forced him to set out on a return journey to the U.S. the next year. Olyphant died while en route overland across Egypt on June 10, 1851.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of six pages of typewritten selections from letters originally written by D.W.C. Olyphant. The recipient of the letters is not recorded. The letters were copied from the originals by hand by Robert Morrison Olyphant, and then typewritten.

In 1914 these copies were lent to Henry Blair Graybill, 1880 - 1951, a missionary educator associated with the Canton Christian College, who copied them yet again. Finally a Chinese typist under the supervision of David Willard Lyon, 1870 - 1949, copied them in 1916.

In 2014 the collection was digitized. A blog post was also written about the collection which includes lower quality copies of the images and a description of the collection. The blog post can be [viewed online](#). The PDF of the letters is available by following [this link](#).

Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes.

In 2014, the collection and finding aid were updated as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant.

Further Sources

The Burke Library offers other collections which pertain to topics in this collection, such as the David Willard Lyon Papers and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) Records. For more information on these collections please see the Burke Library Archives website at: <http://library.columbia.edu/locations/burke/archives.html>.

Contents list

Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	Typewritten Copies of Correspondence Selections, 1827 - 1851 Canton, August 6, 1827 Canton, September 23, 1850 Shanghai, September 29, 1850 Shanghai, October 7, 1850 Shanghai, November 23, 1850 Canton, March 27, 1851 [No location] March 28, 1851