



Public Record Office  
of Northern Ireland

# **INTRODUCTION**

# **WEIR PAPERS**

November 2007

# Weir Papers (D1140)

## Table of Contents

Summary .....	2
Emigrant letters.....	3
Business activities .....	4
Correspondence .....	5

## **Summary**

c. 70 documents, 1746-1854, relating to the Weir family of Stewartstown, Co. Tyrone.



## Emigrant letters

The papers include an exceptionally good group of emigrant letters sent to members of the Weir family in Stewartstown from relations and friends in and around Philadelphia, New York and Alabama in North America, May 1771 - January 1854. Some of the letters exhibit a preoccupation with the organising of Presbyterian communities in the Philadelphia area and a general concern with religious matters. In May 1771, Thomas Clark of Perth County, Albany (near Philadelphia) wrote to William Weir: 'I call upon you all to besiege Heaven . . . that the Lord may prevent Bishops and Deans coming over into America; there's a great talk of it now which excites great anxiety and terror in the hearts of many. The blood of many Christians is to be found in the skirts of the surplices, although there's been an Ussher and a Cranmer and a dear Harvey in that Communion. ...We have got a set of Methodist(s) too not far from us but our people stands aloft from them.'

In 1775, Jane Smith wrote from Philadelphia to her brother John Weir in Stewartstown: 'They talk of great revivals in the Black parts of this country but I fear much of it to be genuine; no doubt you have heard of...their Fainting and falling down in fits and when they come too exhorting and praying for hours together; if this be the work of the holy spirit they have enough of it in Kentucky and some of the adjacent states; some go so far as to say they are as pure as Adam and Eve was when they were created.'

The Weir family had a strong background in the linen trade and this is reflected in serious discussion of business and trade matters in some of these emigrant letters. Margaret Duncan wrote to William Weir on 17 December 1774: '[I]t is not the tax [on tea] but the mode of taxing we disspute - our Congress has by the publick consent resolved on stopping trade with the three kingdoms in importing from the 1st of December last and to export no more from the 1st of September next untill the wrong acts be repealed. ... We lament our difference with England and is determined to give there troops no offence but if they are commanded to cut us off we must defend our lives as far as we can'.



## **Business activities**

Setting aside the emigrant letters, the greater extent of the collection is concerned with the business activities, mostly in linen and woollens, of friends and relatives of the Weirs in Dublin, Belfast, and Liverpool, etc, 1780-c.1850. This was a period of growth in the Ulster linen trade and the estimates of annual sales in the Ulster brown linen markets rose from £231,040 in 1783 to £449,000 in 1803 and to £559,260, in 1816. In Stewartstown, Co. Tyrone, the home of the Weirs, the annual sales rose from £41,600 in 1783 to £52,000 in 1803, and during this whole period it had the third highest sales of any town in the county behind Dungannon and Strabane. This prosperity is reflected in the correspondence, eg a letter from Hugh Harper, Belfast, to William Weir, 9 September 1782, states that 'We have something in hand and much more in hope. We have journey bread and lodging in hand, and the promises as security for the future. ...I believe with regard to family comforts, and success in your worldly undertakings, God has in a great measure answered you in the joy of your heart.'



## Correspondence

William Weir and his wife, Sarah had fourteen children, six of whom died in infancy. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is some surviving correspondence between family members such as a letter from William Weir, Jnr, Liverpool, to his mother, Sarah in Stewartstown, dated 23 January 1799: '(I) am astonished to think that Silas [his younger brother] has so large a salary in America. ...I was yesterday offered £100 sterling per annum to go out as clerk to the West Indies by the captain of a West Indiaman, with my passage free to and (in case I did not like it) home again.' Other interesting family letters include one from William Weir Jnr, Newry, writing to his sister-in-law, Mrs Sally Weir, at Stewartstown, 20 March 1778: '...found your father and family well.....take great care of the shop and let no one behind the counter to pick shoes unless it be a particular acquaintance.....times look very alarming, great riots in England and also at Cork on account of oatmeal leaving that and coming to us.'

