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# **INTRODUCTION**

# **DUNLAP/DELAP PAPERS**

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# Dunlap/Delap Papers (T1336)

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## Summary

The Dunlap/Delap papers comprise 26 documents relating to the Dunlap and Rutherford families of Strabane, Co. Tyrone, including title deeds to Dunlap family property in Strabane, 1747-1803, the will of John Dunlap of Strabane, 1780; emigrant letters from John Dunlap and others, Philadelphia, USA, to the Rutherford family, Strabane, 1785-1823, memorandum, written c.1800, describing the career of John Dunlap, printer of the Declaration of Independence, who emigrated from Strabane to Philadelphia; and 19 legal papers, leases, etc, relating to the Delap (note the different spelling) family of Ramelton and Ray, Co. Donegal, 1786-1830.



## **The Dunlap family of Strabane**

The Dunlaps were well established inhabitants of the town of Strabane, which was part of the Earl of Abercorn's estate, and which had in the 18th century a considerable reputation as a publishing and printing centre. It is likely they were Scottish Planters in the 17th century, for in 1700 Jean Dunlap, the daughter of 'Widow Dunlap', won a spinning machine at a linen fair in Strabane. In 1709, Gabriel Dunlap, grandfather of John, the printer of the Declaration of Independence, who was a saddler, leased premises in what is now Meetinghouse Street, and in February 1735 John's parents' marriage settlement was signed when his father married Sarah Ector.



## John Dunlap

John Dunlap was born in Strabane in 1746. Tradition has it that he served his apprenticeship in Gray's Printery in Strabane. In 1756 he migrated to Philadelphia to join his uncle William, who was already established there as a printer and bookseller. In 1766 Uncle William became a Minister and transferred the printing business to John, who developed it and in 1771 began the publication of a weekly newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Packet or The General Advertiser*. In 1778 he made it into a tri-weekly paper and on 21 September 1784, he began publication as a daily – **the first daily newspaper in the United States**. It is now incorporated in *The Public Ledger* of Philadelphia.

In 1773 John Dunlap was appointed printer to the Continental Congress, whose members drafted the Declaration of Independence, and the Declaration itself was printed in 1776 in John Dunlap's office from Thomas Jefferson's manuscript, and circulated to the colonial assemblies. The Declaration not only announced the birth of the United States of America but expressed theories which have become dynamic forces throughout the world. Thomas Paine, in his pamphlet, *Common Sense*, provided in a popular form a philosophy of the natural rights of man which when incorporated in the Declaration of Independence stated the political and social principles on which the American Revolution depended. Government, it declared, was a compact between ruler and ruled to protect life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Until 1789 when the Federal Government was founded, Dunlap continued as printer to the Congress, and the Constitution of the United States was printed in the office of Dunlap & Claypoole and first published in their paper, *The Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser*.

In 1783 John Dunlap's father died and his will gives the first authentic Irish reference to John Dunlap 'in America':

*In the name of God amen I John Dunlap of Strabane saddler being weak in body but of sound mind and memory and understanding do make this my last will and testimony revoking all former wills by me heretofore made.*

*First I leave and bequeath to Robert Rutherford a table, a spit and waxes (?) to William Irvine and also a desk and chair; my working tools to my own son Gabriel the remainder of my furniture I leave to my wife during her life; I also will and order that my said wife may continue to live in the back house in which we lived for some time as long as it may be pleasing to my son John now in America. I also order and will that William Irvine may hold and enjoy the front house and other offices until my said son John claims the same; also appoint the said William Irvine and Archibald Allen executors to this my last will signed and published and pronounced this 10th day of February 1780.*

The Robert Rutherford mentioned in the will was the husband of John's sister. Correspondence of this family survives and gives us a picture of John Dunlap with his growing family in Philadelphia advising his relatives in Strabane on the method and merit of migration. He wrote in 1785:

*My dear sister, By Mr. Orr who will deliver you this I have wrote a letter to your husband Mr. Rutherford and one to your son. Should you think of sending him to this country, I will either observe your directions in having him taught some business or judge myself what will be the most suitable for him after he has finished the education you mean to give him, which may be had here as well as in Ireland, for the sooner the boys comes [sic] here after they have determined the better ...*

At the same time he wrote to his nephew in Strabane:

*Dear Billy, Your agreeable letter of last year came safe to hand: the account you there give of your progress in learning is very pleasing: education is the foundation on which young men must build their prospects of future happiness. if it is agreeable to you, your father and mother that you should come to this country, I will observe their directions in having you taught any business you may wish to learn ...*

He wrote also from Philadelphia to his brother-in-law, Robert Rutherford, referring to his brother, James Dunlap, who was likewise in America:

*... my brother James left this for Kentucky a few weeks ago; I expect him back in the summer; then perhaps he may take a trip to Ireland. The account he gives of the soil is pleasing but the difficulty of going to it from this is great; indeed the distance is not less than a thousand miles. I was there last year and must confess that although the journey is a difficult one I did not begrudge the time and labour it cost me. We are told the parliament of Ireland means to lay restrictions on those who want to come from that country to this; time will tell whether or no this will answer the purpose they intend. People with a family advanced in life find great difficulties in emigration but the young men of Ireland who wish to be free and happy should leave it and come here as quick as possible; there is no place in the world where a man meets so rich a reward for good conduct and industry as in America ...*

In the following century his sister, Mrs Rutherford, died and her children turned to their uncle in America for help and prepared to migrate. James Orr of Strabane wrote on their behalf in 1811 to John Dunlap:

*... though I was not favoured with a reply to the last letter I wrote you on the death of your sister I feel it is my duty to address you again for the purpose of introducing to you a very worthy young man, your nephew, John Rutherford, who considers himself called upon by duty and affection to be the protector and supporter of his two sisters whom his worthy good mother left in his charge. He is a good clerk and from every information is as good a currier and tanner as ever left this country; that business has of late years been so closed by heavy*

*duty on leather together with heavy taxes of every kind that he expect to do better for his own and sisters support in America as he has been informed by different people from that of his trade being a good one there. He is sober, industrious and steady, therefore I have no fears of his success. His sisters and he leave this with the best wishes of all that know them for their prosperity and happiness.*

John Dunlap's is not an untypical life story of many who 'went west' from Co. Tyrone in the 18th century to make a new life and create a new country to which they then encouraged and assisted others to migrate. One went and succeeded and therefore others followed. By the time he died, on 27 November 1812, aged 66, John Dunlap had amassed a large fortune and had subscribed £4,000 in 1780 to the National Bank formed to supply the American Army, and he held 98,000 acres in Virginia and the adjoining counties of Kentucky. He also owned the land on which Utica, Ohio, stands.

He had played his part in military affairs during the War of Independence, as a founder in 1774 of the 1st Troop of Philadelphia City Cavalry; as a cornet he accompanied this command in the campaign of 1776-1777, taking part in actions at Princeton and Trenton. After the war, from 1789 to 1792, he was a member of the Common Council of Philadelphia. In 1812 he was buried at Christ Church, Philadelphia.

The site of his birth at Meetinghouse Street, Strabane, is marked by a plaque erected by Strabane Urban District Council in 1965.

