

Title:	Merchant ship captain John F. Kennedy fonds, 1796-1862		
Creator:	John F. Kennedy		
Dates of Material:	1796-1862, n.d.	Record Group Number:	RG 626
Summary of Contents:	<p>The fonds consists mainly of letters from merchant ship captain John F. Kennedy to his wife Marcia Gray, written from 1796 to 1818. One letter is from Kennedy to James Mosher, a banker in Baltimore, dated December 28, 1808. Other print documents include two pages of financial accounts (1833-1835); a one page family register recording births, marriages and deaths; and a manuscript fragment of a poem. The collection also includes 3 photographs. One is a photograph of an unidentified woman (possibly Marcia Gray Kennedy); a photograph of Lucy Hansel MacGrotty Phipps, dated October 8, 1862; and a photograph of a building in Pittsfield, New Hampshire, by American photographer Frank B. Berry (ca. 1890s).</p> <p>The fonds was sorted into correspondence, other print material, and photographs:</p> <p>1.1 Correspondence, 1796-1818.</p> <p>The letters are from John Kennedy to his wife Marcy, except for one addressed to James Mosher, a banker in Baltimore, dated December 28, 1808. The letters are dated from places around the world, including Havana, St. Thomas, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Port Louis [Mauritius], Gibraltar, and several east coast American cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk. Like many American merchants at the time, Kennedy's overseas shipments faced the risk of confiscation by the British, French and Barbary pirates during the Napoleonic wars, the War of 1812, and the Barbary Wars. In his June 19, 1796 letter he writes his ship will "go out under the protection of our fine frigate the Constellation". His ships did not always evade capture. In a letter dated August 12, 1805, he writes about the "loss of my favorite Brig Jane shamefully captured by the French...She is again recaptured by the British and sent to Jamaica, to which place I have this day sent our friend H. Child to pay the salvage and bring her home". The situation put Kennedy in a financial bind, who writes on August 27, 1805 that "the loss of the Jane at a moment when I required an immense sum of money to meet my engagements threw me into such difficulty that to make my payments required all my energy and industry to get money without borrowing or going into the disreputable schemes of slavers".</p> <p>Reference is made to the siege of Baltimore by the British during the War of 1812 in a letter dated October 3, 1814. Kennedy was recovering from illness in Norfolk, Virginia, and writes to his wife that "Your two letters of the 21st came together last evening. Their receipt has eased my mind</p>		

	<p>more than it is in my power to express. I thought you or some of the children sick or dead, not hearing from you. Knowing that you are all well I feel an unusual comfort and happiness...My God what a time my love you must have had during the siege. Altho the fortune of man might have put an end to me or deprived me of a leg or an arm and put an end to all my hopes in this world, I regret my not being in Fort McHenry as the greatest misfortune of my life”.</p> <p>Kennedy continued to have financial difficulty after the seizure of his ship Jane in 1805, and another in 1807. In a letter dated November 20, 1816, he blames his business troubles on the “dishonest conduct of Jno. Duconnan an ungrateful scoundrel who was everything to me. This has so completely subverted all my aspirations that the voyage that would have turned out for my concern a very profitable one will perhaps be little better than a ruinous one and to me the most unfortunate that I ever made”. Apparently his wife was displeased with the situation, as Kennedy continues “Oh! Marcy your letter is...a dagger to my already lacerated heart—indeed I have but one wish—to make you and my sweet children happy...the disappointments I feel the more as they put it out of my power to contribute to your comfort to your ease and happiness”.</p> <p>1.2 Other print material, 1797-1857, n.d.</p> <p>Other print documents include two pages of financial accounts (1833-1835); a one page family register recording births, marriages and deaths (1857); and a manuscript fragment of a poem (1797).</p> <p>1.3 Photographs, 1862, n.d.</p> <p>The collection also includes 3 photographs. One is a photograph of an unidentified woman (possibly Marcia Gray Kennedy); a photograph of Lucy Hansel MacGrotty Phipps, dated October 8, 1862; and a photograph of a building in Pittsfield, New Hampshire, by American photographer Frank B. Berry (ca. 1890s).</p>
<p>Physical Description / Condition:</p>	<p>56 letters 3 photographs Family register of births, marriages and deaths (1 page) 1 poem Financial accounts (2 pages)</p>

Other Notes:	<p>John F. Kennedy was a merchant ship captain from Baltimore (not to be confused with another Baltimore merchant of the period named John Kennedy, who was the father of the American novelist John Pendleton Kennedy). He married Marcia Gray in 1799 or 1800. They had two daughters and a son.</p>		
Location:	Brock University Archives		
Source Information:	Material purchased in 2017.		
Described by:	Chantal Cameron	Date:	October 2017