

Passmore Williamson Papers

Manuscript Collection 196

Jasmine Smith
Librarian

Chester County Historical Society
West Chester, PA 19380
2017

Summary Information:

Collection Title: Passmore Williamson Papers

Collection Number: Ms. 196

Dates of Collection: 1814-1895, Bulk date 1855

Extent: 1 box

Repository: Chester County Historical Society, West Chester PA, 19380

Biography: A dedicated abolitionist, Passmore Williamson hurried toward a departing ship in the summer of 1855. Before the ship left Philadelphia, he needed alert slave Jane Johnson that according to Pennsylvania law, she was free to leave her master at any time while on Pennsylvania land. She and her two children left her master and disappeared into the protection of the Underground Railroad. The ensuing court case against Williamson set legal precedent for use of writs of *habeas corpus*, included a dramatic testimony from Johnson herself, and was of intense interest to the public, particularly abolitionists. Williamson was jailed for nearly five months before being released in November of 1855. This collection documents the long process of the trial through letters and publications. It complements the Passmore Williamson Visitors' Book.

Resources Used: "Narrative of Facts in the Case of Passmore Williamson." Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, 1855.

Related Materials: Passmore Williamson Visitors' Book

The Chester County Historical Society does hold other manuscripts and letters to or from Passmore Williamson and his family unrelated to the 1855 court case. Please consult our manuscript catalog to identify these additional manuscript items.

Collection Scope and Content Summary: This collection includes letters, ephemera, and publications.

The letters almost exclusively date from 1855 and document the course of Passmore Williamson's incarceration, trial, and release. Most are addressed to William Williamson, Passmore Williamson's uncle.

The ephemera includes calling cards, receipts, and organizational materials related to both Passmore Williamson and his wife. Many ephemera items do not relate to the trial but are included in this collection because of shared provenance.

The publications are contemporaneous writings on the trial and its wider legal implications.

Collection Arrangement: The letters are arranged by writer and date. The ephemera is grouped by donor.

Container Contents:

Folder #	Description
1	Letters from Edward H. Williamson to William Williamson concerning trial of Passmore Williamson, 1855, from Philadelphia MS 35574 – August 5 MS 35575 – August 9, includes sketch of Colonel Wheeler MS 35576 – August 16, telegram sent from Altoona MS 35577 – August 18 MS 35578 – August 25 MS 35579 – August 27 MS 35580 – August 29, describes Colonel Wheeler's statement MS 35581 – August 30 MS 35582 – September 1, Jane Johnson makes her court appearance MS 35583 – September 7 MS 35584 – September 15 MS 35585 – September 20 MS 35586 – September 22, new writ served for circuit court appearance MS 35587 – September 26 MS 35588 – October 22, judge refuses to hear release petition MS 35589 – October 31 MS 35590 – November 2 MS 35591 – November 3, Passmore Williamson discharged MS 35592 – November 7
2	Letters from Thomas Williamson to his brother William Williamson concerning trial of Passmore Williamson, 1855, from Philadelphia MS 35607 – July 31, MS 35608 – August 1, MS 35609 – August 2 MS 35610 – August 10 MS 35615 – August 13 MS 35611 – August 14 MS 35612 – August 20 MS 35613 – September 6 MS 35614 – September 27 MS 35616 – October 17 MS 35617 – October 24 MS 35618 – October 31 MS 35619 – November 7

- 3 **Letter, Passmore Williamson to his Uncle, August 6, 1855**
- 4 **Notes of a Legal Action vs. John Kane**
 Manuscripts 9031, 9032
- 5 **Passmore Williamson Documents**, donations of Mrs. P. Louis Lloyd
 Letter, Mercie Williamson to Passmore Williamson, February 22, 1850
 Letter, Sallie Emma Williamson to her parents, February 23, 1862
 Reading Circle memorial for Mercie Williamson, November 17, 1878
 Invitation sent to Passmore Williamson, 1844
 Williamson family births list, up to 1814
 Pennsylvania Women's Suffrage Association, letter to Passmore Williamson on death of
 Mercie Williamson, November 7, 1878
 In memoriam of Passmore Williamson, March 1895
- 6 **Passmore Williamson Documents**, donations of Mrs. Harry E. Barker
 Calling cards
 Letter, Passmore Williamson to his wife, undated, but indicates early July, 1855
 Letter, Passmore Williamson to Mercie K. Taylor, July 6, 1848
 Receipt to Passmore Williamson, hardware, 1877
 Receipt to Passmore Williamson, stationery, 1874
 Receipt to Passmore Williamson, furniture, 1877
 Receipt to Mrs. Williamson, dry goods, 1876
 Receipt to Mrs. Williamson, upholsterer, 1877
 Receipt to Mrs. Williamson, linens, 1877
- 7 **"Narrative of Facts in the Case of Passmore Williamson."** Philadelphia: The
 Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, 1855.
- 8 *Case of Passmore Williamson: Report of the Proceedings on the Writ of Habeas Corpus,*
 Issued by the Hon. John K. Kane, Judge of the District Court of the United States for the
 Eastern District of Pennsylvania, in the Case of the United States of America Ex Rel.
 John H. Wheeler vs. Passmore Williamson, Including the Several Opinions Delivered;
 and the Arguments of Counsel, Reported by Arthur Cannon, Esq., Phonographer.
 Philadelphia: Uriah Hunt & Son, 1856.