

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES**

*General Andrew Porter*

Andrew Porter was born on September 24, 1743 on his father's farm near Norristown, Pennsylvania. At the age of nineteen he was sent to live with an older brother to learn carpentry. After displaying a dislike of that profession his father enrolled him at a country school where he was to be educated in the sciences and the English language. In 1767 he moved to Philadelphia to take charge of a school and teach mathematics and English. He taught at this school until 1776 when he was commissioned as a captain in the marines.

His military career started on board the frigate "Effingham." After a short stint in the marines he transferred to the artillery. He was subsequently promoted through the ranks until he attained the rank of colonel. While in the army he was engaged in Revolutionary War battles at Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown and Trenton. It was during these battles that he gained the recognition of being an able leader and skilled tactician.

After the war he returned home to his family in Norristown. He was soon appointed to the Supreme Executive Council of the State as one of the commissioners to create a boundary between Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Ohio using astronomical calculations. He stayed on as the surveyor for this operation from 1784 to 1787.

In 1787 he returned home to his farm. He proceeded to farm and raise his family until 1809 when he was selected Surveyor-General of Pennsylvania, a position he held till his death in 1813.

Andrew Porter was married twice, first to Elizabeth McDowell and then after her death in 1773 to Elizabeth Parker. He had five children with his first wife and eight children with his second.

*Elizabeth Parker Porter*

Elizabeth Parker was the second wife of General Andrew Porter. She married him on May 20th, 1777 and immediately assumed the duties of mother to his five children. In addition to those five, she and Andrew had eight children, six who lived to adulthood.

*James Madison Porter I*

James Madison Porter I was born on January 6, 1793 at "Selma", his father's house near Norristown, Pennsylvania. He was the youngest son of Andrew Porter, a popular general during the Revolutionary War, who was also a scholar and noted statesman during the period of growth that followed.

James' education started at home with the study of Latin and Greek with his two brothers, David Rittenhouse Porter and George Bryan Porter. After a stint in the Norristown Academy, James Madison returned home and continued to pursue his studies.

By 1809, General Andrew Porter had been appointed Surveyor General of Pennsylvania and had sent for his son James Madison to be a clerk in his office. It was during this time that he acquired the knowledge that would lead him to enter the law office of John Passmore, Esquire. Working with John Passmore familiarized James Madison with the practice of law in all the inferior courts as well as the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

In 1812 he left Passmore's office to continue the study of law under his eldest brother, the Honorable Robert Porter, the President Judge of the Third Judicial District. Under his brother's tutelage, he continued to study law and made his first foray into the political arena. On April 23, 1813 he was admitted to the bar of the district court of the city and county of Philadelphia where he opened his office and proceeded to set up a practice. James Madison remained in Philadelphia until 1818 when the Attorney General of the State offered him the appointment of Deputy Attorney General of Northampton County. That same year he moved to Easton and began a law practice that was to last for over forty years. It was his skill as a trial lawyer and his knowledge of the laws that led to him being regarded as one of the finest trial lawyers in the state.

One of the most important and longest lasting endeavors of James Madison was his involvement in the founding of Lafayette College. In 1824 he returned from a trip to meet the Marquis de Lafayette with the idea of creating a college in Easton for the study of military science, German language and the Classics. This college, to be named after the Marquis de Lafayette, had its start with a small group of men that James Madison had gathered.

In the years that followed he stayed in the forefront of the development of the college as the President of the Trustees. He was also the Professor of Jurisprudence and Political Economy at the college, teaching classes and allowing students to clerk in his law office.

James Madison Porter was elected in 1838 to be a delegate to the state constitutional convention. After signing on as a member he became disillusioned with the amendments the convention called for and returned to Easton where he campaigned vigorously against them, practically insuring their defeat in Northampton County.

In 1839 his brother, David Rittenhouse Porter, then Governor of Pennsylvania, appointed him president judge of the 12th Judicial District of Pennsylvania. The districts he presided over included Schuylkill, Dauphin and Lebanon counties. Much to the regret of the people of those counties he resigned his position after less than a year of service. Upon returning to Easton he resumed his law practice in Northampton and the surrounding counties.

In 1843 President John Tyler appointed him Secretary of War. He served in the Cabinet only nine months, however, because the Senate did not confirm his nomination. It seems that President Tyler had offended the Whigs with this independent nomination. Upon hearing of the Senate's action James Madison Porter immediately resigned his commission and returned to Easton.

He continued to work in public service throughout the rest of his life. In 1849 he was elected to the state legislature and in 1853 filled a vacancy as president judge of the 22nd Judicial District of Pennsylvania in Pike, Monroe, Wayne, and Carbon counties. He soon resigned from both of these positions due to poor health.

In addition to his public service he was the president of the Easton Delaware Bridge Company, the Belvidere Delaware Railroad Company, and the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company, all of which prospered under his direction. One of his later ventures was the creation of the Dime Savings Bank of Easton, which flourished for a number of years before being incorporated into a larger regional bank.

He was married to Eliza Michler, daughter of Peter Michler, a prominent citizen of Easton. They had seven children; James Madison Porter II, Andrew Parker Porter, Mary Porter, Emma W. Porter, Elizabeth Parker Porter, Harriet Porter and Nathaniel Michler Porter, who died in infancy.

On November 11, 1862, James Madison Porter died after a prolonged illness. His hard work and influence left a substantial mark on many local institutions. Two of these in particular are Lafayette College and the Northampton County Bar.

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

***John Ewing (Parker) Porter***

John Ewing Porter was born May 11, 1784 to General Andrew Porter and Elizabeth Parker Porter at "Selma," near Norristown, Pennsylvania. He studied law under his brother Robert in Philadelphia and entered his own practice in April of 1805 in Chester and Montgomery counties. He practiced law for a number of years in these locations becoming highly respected for his skill as an attorney.

He continued practicing law until, after a disagreement with his father, he left Pennsylvania and discontinued contact with the family. This disagreement arose from John Ewing's breaking off an engagement with a woman he was to marry. After this break with his family, he took his mother's maiden name as his own, disowning the name Porter and never again speaking to his father.

After leaving his law practice he obtained employment as a schoolmaster in southern Pennsylvania. He taught school in this southern county till 1809 when he moved to Plymouth, North Carolina to become principal of their academy.

In 1813 he became the head of the Mathematics and English department of the Vine Hill Academy in Scotland Neck, North Carolina. He taught at Vine Hill till 1816 when he decided to study medicine.

John Ewing studied medicine near Vine Hill and Plymouth becoming a successful physician by 1818. Unfortunately, by this time he was a sickly man, constantly battling ailments of the stomach and lungs. He eventually succumbed to these illnesses on November 14, 1819 in Plymouth, North Carolina. He never married and had no children.

***Harriet Porter McKeen***

Harriet Porter was born October 19, 1786 at "Selma," near Norristown, Pennsylvania to General Andrew and Elizabeth Porter. She became the second wife of Colonel Thomas McKeen, a prominent citizen of Easton and president of the Easton Bank.

***Harriet Porter***

Harriet Porter was born the daughter of James Madison Porter I and Eliza Michler Porter in Easton, Pennsylvania. She lived in Easton her whole life overseeing the properties of her father and deceased sister, Elizabeth Parker Porter. She died in Easton leaving her estate to her sister, Emma W. Parker Grier. Her birth and death dates are unknown.

***Mary Porter Davis***

Mary Porter Davis was born the daughter of James Madison Porter I and Eliza Michler Porter of Easton, Pennsylvania. Her birth date is not known. Mary Porter married a local Easton man of the last name Davis and remained in Easton throughout her life. She died there in 1884.

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

***James Madison Porter II***

James Madison Porter II was born in Easton, Pennsylvania on March 16, 1833. After receiving his diploma from Easton's public school he entered Lafayette College and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1852. After graduating from Lafayette he studied law under his father, James Madison Porter I and in turn became a prominent member of the Northampton County Bar. He became the district attorney in Easton, and though he held this position for a number of years, never sought any other political office.

He married Ruth Pearson Cook, daughter of Dr. Silas Cook, of Easton. They had two children; James Madison Porter III and Eliza Michler Porter. On August 2, 1879, after a sudden illness James Madison Porter II died.

***James Madison Porter III***

James Madison Porter III was born in Easton, Pennsylvania on May 10, 1864. After public school courses in Easton, he prepared for college at the Blairstown Seminary and the Centenary Collegiate Institute, both located in New Jersey. He entered Lafayette College in 1882 and graduated with a degree in civil engineering in 1886. He was a member of the Zeta Psi fraternity at college and in his senior year became a Phi Beta Kappa.

He was employed after graduation at the Tippet & Wood structural iron manufacturers in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. He continued working there until 1888 when he left the company to tour Europe. Upon his return to the United States he accepted the position of assistant professor of civil engineering at his alma mater, Lafayette College. He took to the position with enthusiasm and so successful was his teaching that after two terms he was promoted to full professor.

Professor "Mud" Porter, as he was known on campus, was especially interested in the construction of bridges. He presented the college with materials to build a section of a steel bridge on campus to aid students in the theory and technique of constructing bridges. For years the students studied this section of bridge, and then, at different times during the semester could be seen erecting and then dismantling it.

In 1917 he left Lafayette College to pursue work as a consulting engineer, specializing in construction work. He became president of the Easton Bridge Company and eventually vice-president of the General Crushed Stone Company.

James Madison Porter III married Mary Virginia Drake on November 15, 1888 and had one child, James Madison Porter IV. James Madison Porter III died June 3, 1928 in Easton, Pennsylvania. During his life he authored numerous textbooks on engineering and metal testing and invented instruments for the testing of metal responses to varying conditions associated with the load bearing needs of construction.

***James Madison Porter IV***

James Madison Porter IV was born March 7, 1896 in Easton, Pennsylvania. He represents the last in a long line of Porters associated with Lafayette College and Easton, Pennsylvania. Like his father before him, he attended Lafayette College and became a Zeta Psi. He attended Lafayette from 1914 to 1917. In 1917 he left Lafayette to enlist in the Navy as an aviation ensign. During World War I he served in Europe as a pilot.

After the war he returned to Pennsylvania where he became a car salesman at the Quig Motor Car Company in Easton. In 1923 he left Quig's to become the vice-president of the Bushkill Motor Car Company.

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

He stayed with the Bushkill Company until his retirement in the 1950's.

James Madison Porter IV married Hulda Brown and had no children. After a number of years of retirement he died August 5, 1959 in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The Porter Family Papers are a diverse collection of letters, notebooks and legal papers. The collection has been brought together through a number of donations and purchases. These materials represent various generations of the Porter family from the early nineteenth century into the twentieth century.

The correspondence and notebooks of James Madison Porter I make up a large part of this collection. It contains documents concerning business transactions and numerous letters from his sister, Harriet. Within the collection there are two letters from James Madison Porter I to his father, Andrew Porter and brother, David Rittenhouse Porter. The letter to his father discusses his studies and career in law as a younger man just entering law practice. James Madison Porter's I letter to his brother, David Rittenhouse, then Governor of Pennsylvania concerns the Pennsylvania legislature and Northampton's delegate to that body. In this same letter he relates his feelings on the death of his six-year-old son, Nathaniel Michler Porter.

Another letter authored by James Madison Porter I involves his association with Lafayette College. In this letter he and two other trustees offered a military and civil engineering professorship to Nathaniel Hall Loring. It also contains a holograph offering, in much more detail, a professorship of German to Frederick List of Reading, Pennsylvania.

In addition to maintaining his law practice and participating in the local government, James Madison Porter I served for a short period as the United States Secretary of War. A unique addition to these papers is a letter he wrote after traveling the country compiling records on Native American affairs. This 1843 letter records interest payments of Native American tribes for loans made to them by the United States government.

Included in this collection are two notebooks attributed to James Madison Porter I. The first notebook contains brief handwritten sketches of famous local men, including General Andrew Porter, George Wolf, and James Madison Porter I himself. These biographies were printed in books on the Lehigh Valley and Easton such as, Biographical Sketches of some of Easton's Prominent Citizens by Frank B. Copp, 1879 and the History of the Lehigh Valley by Mathew S. Henry, 1860. While some of these sketches are obviously copied from an original printed text many possess the characteristics of the final draft of an original manuscript.

The second notebook contains handwritten transcriptions of newspaper articles from the Carbon Democrat and the Easton Sentinel. These articles were excerpted from newspapers written in 1847 and 1853 and describe the Lehigh Valley region through the eyes of a traveler to that area. The descriptions are detailed and informative to an outsider because they describe the history and importance of the canals with the knowledge of someone associated with them. The articles also describe the anthracite coal industry and explain the impact that hard coal had on the canalling and iron industry on the Lehigh Valley. The articles found in this book were all signed under the pseudonym "Mercator," which might actually be James Madison Porter I, though no direct links have been found.

Within these two notebooks are a number of religious and humorous poems. A few of them were tucked into the books and have since been removed and are now separate. The majority are religious in content and seem to have been collected by a number of different Porter family members. There are two humorous poems, one written in the notebook with the articles and the other on a sheet of loose-leaf paper. The topics of these two humorous poems are the purpose of the nose and a court case involving a cord of wood. The connection

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

between these two poems and James Madison Porter is sketchy. He was known, however, throughout the county for his wit and humorous writings, some of which were purportedly published in the local newspaper under a pseudonym.

Another portion of this collection consists of the letters of Harriet Porter McKeen to her brother James Madison Porter I. These ten letters follow James Madison Porter's life from 1813 to 1831, from his youth to his establishment as a prominent lawyer in Easton. In the letters Harriet reports on the activities of his mother's household, "Selma," and the whereabouts and activities of their older siblings.

The collection's oldest materials are twelve letters from John Ewing (Parker) Porter to his mother, Elizabeth and sister, Harriet. The letters describe in detail his health, career changes and living situations. John Ewing also discusses some of the family's problems and concerns about his father's estate. They date from October 1800 to October 1819, one month before he died.

Other documents in this collection are from ensuing generations of the Porter family. These items include the wills of Mary Porter Davis and Harriet Porter, the daughters of James Madison Porter I and a matriculation certificate of James Madison Porter II, his oldest son. Many of the documents in this collection from the twentieth century are from the last in the line of James Madison Porters, James Madison Porter IV. His contributions to this collection include a photograph from The Lafayette, published while he was in school and his pass and berthing card on the "Mauretania" during World War I.

The Porter Family Papers also benefit from the notebooks and teaching materials of James Madison Porter III. These notebooks were the references he used in teaching classes on civil engineering at Lafayette College. They represent an accumulation of material he collected while building the civil engineering program at the college. The books contain his class notes, calculations and drawings for subjects such as standpipes, bridge construction, roof trusses etc.

Photographs of James Madison Porter I, James Madison Porter III, and James Madison Porter IV can be found in the College's Historical Photograph Collection.

Articles and other publications by James Madison Porter I and James Madison Porter III may be found in Special Collections in the Lafayette Collection.

**NOTE ON PROVENANCE**

The Porter Family Papers have been assembled from a series of donations and purchases. The donors include Israel Meyer, Reverend Robert Jacob, Class of 1974 and James Madison Porter IV, Class of 1917. In addition to these gifts the college has enlarged their holdings through purchases of related items. Each folder is identified as to whether it was purchased or donated.

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918  
INVENTORY**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

**Box 1**

James Madison Porter I-James Madison Porter IV

Folder

- 1 Porter, James Madison to his father, Porter, General Andrew: 1813 (Sep. 28) ALS, 4p, Philadelphia, PA.
- 2 Potter, Ezekial H. to Porter, James Madison: 1819 (November 24) ALS, 3p, Plymouth, North Carolina.
- 3 Porter, James Madison to Loring, Nathaniel Hall: 1828 (February 16) ALS, 1p, Easton, PA. Also,  
Porter, James Madison to List, Frederick: 1828 (February 16) Holograph, 2p, Easton, PA.
- 4 Porter, James Madison to his brother, Porter, David Rittenhouse: 1829 (Feb. 26) ALS, 2p, Easton, PA.
- 5 Porter, James Madison to Smith, Richard E., Cashier of the Bank of the Metropoly: 1843 (July 3) ADS,  
3p. [n. p.]
- 6 App, John receipt to Porter, James Madison [n.d.] ADS, 1p, [n.p.].
- 7 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1813 (July 19) ALS, 1p, Harrisburg, PA.
- 8 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1821 (December 2) ALS, 2p, Norristown, PA.
- 9 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1824 (May 30) ALS, 2p, Easton, PA.
- 10 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1824 (June 6) ALS, 3p, [n.p.].
- 11 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1824 (Sunday June 13) ALS, 2p, [n.p.].
- 12 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1824 (June 20) ALS, 3p, Easton, PA.
- 13 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1824 (October 23) ALS, 4p, Philadelphia, PA.
- 14 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1830 (Monday December 28) ALS, 2p, [n.p.].
- 15 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1831 (Sunday January 1) ALS, 2p, [n.p.].
- 16 Porter, Harriet P. to Porter, James Madison: 1831 (January 2) ALS, 2p, [n.p.].
- 17 [Parker], John Ewing Porter to Porter, Harriet P.: 1800 (October 2) ALS, 3p, New Germantown, NJ.
- 18 [Parker], John Ewing Porter to Porter, General Andrew: 1805 (Dec. 8) ALS, 1p, West Chester, PA.
- 19 [Parker], John Ewing Porter to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1813 (December 24) ALS, 1p, [n.p.].
- 20 [Parker], John Ewing Porter to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1814 (May 24) ALS, 3p, Scotland Neck,  
North Carolina.
- 21 J.E.P., John Ewing Porter[Parker] to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1814 (September 30) ALS, 2p, Scotland  
Neck, North Carolina. J.E.P., John Ewing Porter[Parker] to Porter, Harriet: 1814 (September 30)  
ALS, 1p, Scotland Neck, North Carolina.

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

- 22 J.E.P., John Ewing Porter [Parker] to Porter, Harriet and Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1815 (January 6) ALS, 3p, [n.p.].
- 23 J.E.P., John Ewing Porter [Parker] to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1815 (April 7) ALS, 2p, Vine Hill Academy, North Carolina.
- 24 J.E.P., John Ewing Porter [Parker] to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1815 (September 14) ALS, 1p, Scotland Neck, North Carolina.
- 25 J.E.P., John Ewing Porter [Parker] to Porter, Harriet P.: 1816 (February 3) ALS, 1p, Scotland Neck, North Carolina.
- 26 J.E. Parker, [John Ewing Porter] to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1818 (September 14) ALS, 2p, Shocco Springs, North Carolina.
- 27 J.E. Parker [John Ewing Porter] to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth and Porter, Harriet P.: 1818 (October 22) ALS, 1p, Plymouth, North Carolina.
- 28 J.E. Parker [John Ewing Porter] to Porter, Mrs. Elizabeth: 1819 (October 12) ALS, 2p, Halifax County, North Carolina.
- 29 Will of Harriet Porter 1884 -Daughter of James Madison Porter I and sister of James Madison Porter II.
- 30 Will of Mary Porter Davis 1905 -Daughter of James Madison Porter I, sister of James Madison Porter II.
- 31 Testimonial Certificate awarded to James Madison Porter I by the Franklin Institute in 1833
- 32 Matriculation certificate of James Madison Porter II, issued at Heidelberg University: November 9, 1867.
- 33 Handwritten speech, possibly by James Madison Porter I. [n.d.]
- 34 Notebook containing brief biographies of prominent Pennsylvanians-James Madison Porter I
- 35 Notebook containing transcribed newspaper articles on the Lehigh Valley-James Madison Porter I.
- 36 Poetry and verse removed from notebook in folder 34
- 37 James Madison Porter I-Addresses, speeches, eulogy's etc.(Photocopies)
- 38 Obituaries
- 39 Porter Family Clippings
- 40 James Madison Porter IV –newspaper: The Lafayette February 7, 1917 and boarding pass for the Mauretania, 1918.

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

**Box 2**

James Madison Porter III

Folder

- 1 James Madison Porter III -General List and Valuation of Machinery and Apparatus in Pardee Hall  
Belonging to J.M. Porter, June 14, 1917.
- 2 James Madison Porter III "Report of the Suspension Bridge across the River Delaware at Riegelsville,  
NJ" 1904
- 3 James Madison Porter III - Lafayette College, Department of Civil Engineering Testing Laboratory
- 4 James Madison Porter III Blueprint-Bridge weight, stress variables
- 5 James Madison Porter III - Standpipes
- 6 James Madison Porter III - Notes-Riveting
- 7 James Madison Porter III - Bridges
- 8 James Madison Porter III-Mechanics of Materials Notebook

**Box 3**

James Madison Porter III

Folder

- 1 James Madison Porter III - Plate Girder Notebook
- 2 James Madison Porter III - Article One on the Truss
- 3 James Madison Porter III - Graphic Statics
- 4 James Madison Porter III - Roof Truss Notes
- 5 James Madison Porter III - Course in Bridge and Roof Construction
- 6 James Madison Porter III - "Stresses in Highway and Rail Road Bridges" 1893 Part One -Simple Trusses
- 7 James Madison Porter III - "Stresses in Highway and Rail Road Bridges" 1893 Part One -Simple Trusses
- 8 James Madison Porter III- "Laboratory Notes in Cement Testing"-1907
- 9 James Madison Porter III-"Transition Curves"-1907
- 10 Circuit Court of Appeals-James Madison Porter vs. Emaline Buckley and Samuel S. Buckley –case  
involving accident between an automobile and horse and carriage

**PORTER FAMILY PAPERS,  
1800(1813-1829)-1918**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

**Oversize Material – Flat Files – Drawer A12**

Folder

1      Blueprint of the Delaware River Bridge, Easton, PA, March, 1895