

REV. COMFORT WILLIAMS PAPERS  
1806-1840

Introduction

Comfort Williams was born January 23, 1783,<sup>1</sup> at Stepney Parish in Rocky Hill, Connecticut (at that time part of Wethersfield, Connecticut). He was the son of Eliel Williams, a tanner and currier, and Comfort Morton Williams. Prepared for college by Rev. Calvin Chapin, he entered Yale in 1804 at the age of 21 and graduated four years later in 1808, after joining the college church in May of that year. He then studied theology at Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts until 1810 when ill health forced him to leave. On June 12, 1810, he was licensed to preach by the New Haven East Association of Ministers.

On May 20, 1811, Comfort Williams married Lucy Williams at Rocky Hill,<sup>2</sup> and soon afterwards went to Ogdensburgh, New York, to begin his career as a minister. Here their first child Alfred was born August 11, 1812. Because of danger of attacks from the British and Indians during the War of 1812, Rev. Williams sent his wife Lucy to friends in Leyden, New York, while he remained in Ogdensburgh. However, due to the war his congregation scattered and so for a time he taught in Clinton, New York. When the war was over in 1815, the people in Ogdensburgh could not support a minister. On August 22, 1815, the Presbytery of Geneva at their council in Gates considered the formation of a new church. On January 17, 1816, Rev. Comfort Williams was installed as the first pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Rochester, New York (also the first pastor in Rochester, then called Rochesterville). When he started, the church membership was 16; when he left it was about 90. He also helped organize the Brighton Presbyterian Church, an offspring of the first church, on September 18, 1817.

Due to internal difficulties, Rev. Williams was dismissed as pastor by his own request on June 6, 1821. He continued to live with his family on a farm he had purchased on the outskirts of Rochester. He preached in various communities, opened a school, and also gave private instruction in his home. Lucy Williams died September 21, 1824,<sup>3</sup> in Rocky Hill. Comfort Williams died in Rochester, New York, on August 26, 1825, and was buried there.<sup>4</sup> Four small children were left, all of whom grew to maturity.

The records were given to the Library on February 28, 1956, by Mrs. Wray L. Davidson (formerly Jessie Williams), a great granddaughter of Comfort Williams. They include correspondence, estate papers, sermons, and two journals of Lucy Williams.

Total footage: 5 inches.

<sup>1</sup>Yale Biographies and Annals, 1805-1815, by F. Dexter, page 233.

<sup>2</sup>Rocky Hill Congregational Church Records, Stepney Parish, page 141.

<sup>3</sup>Rocky Hill Congregational Church Records, Stepney Parish, page 170.

<sup>4</sup>"The Rev. Comfort Williams Papers 1805-1822." Transcript. By Clarence R. Williams. Page 82.

List of Records

1. Correspondence, 1806-1829. Box 1  
[only box]
  - a. Letters, 1806-1823, to and from Comfort Williams and his wife Lucy. Also other family members. (3 inches)
  - b. Letters, 1826-1829, to Capt. J. Graham (a relative), Rocky Hill, Conn., from Ashley Samson (administrator of Comfort Williams' estate), Rochester, N.Y.  
Letters concern settlement of estate and care of the children. One son, Charles H. Williams, was cared for by Capt. Graham at Rocky Hill. (1 folder)
2. Sermons preached by Rev. Comfort Williams, c. 1810-1821. (1 folder)
3. Journals (2) of Lucy Williams.  
Begun May 20, 1811.
4. Estate papers of Comfort Williams, 1826-1840. (1 folder)

Reference Restrictions

None.

Related Materials

5. "The Rev. Comfort Williams Papers 1805-1822."  
Letters, Journal, Sermon, etc.  
Typewritten transcript made by Clarence R. Williams.  
Photostatic copy made at the Connecticut State Library 1945.  
(920 W65942 p) (~~in stacks~~)  
Clarence R. Williams was a great great nephew of Comfort Williams. He tried to collect and transcribe papers of Rev. Williams from various sources. Some, but not all, of the materials in RG 69:8 are included in the transcript, having been lent to Clarence Williams by Mrs. Wray Davidson before she gave them to the Connecticut State Library. The originals of other transcribed papers are not in the Library.