L&A Treasures
By Tom White
Archivist

Colonial Collections

Lawrence Woods, Jr., was a Pittsburgh insurance company executive who collected books and manuscripts related to the early history of Western Pennsylvania. Woods (c. 1900-1990) was an active member of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and also served as the chairman of the Pittsburgh Bicentennial Celebration in 1958. His collection, which he donated to the Archives of the Historical Society, contains documents written by or sent to more than a dozen prominent colonial figures with Western Pennsylvania connections.

In light of the 250th anniversary of the French and Indian War (1754-1763), many of the manuscripts are particularly relevant. A 1745 warrant was signed by General Edward Braddock, who would become infamous 10 years later for his crushing defeat at the Battle of the Monongahela. A letter from a W. Wade, written shortly after the battle, contains a list of British and colonial officers who participated and indicates if they were killed or wounded. The letter contains one interesting mistake; George Washington, who had many close calls but emerged from the battle unscathed, is listed as wounded. Woods also acquired a 1760 letter regarding payment for supplies and services from General Thomas Gage, who was also present at the battle and later became Washington's adversary during the American Revolution.

Two of colonial Pennsylvania's most important and influential Indian negotiators and traders are represented in the collection. Conrad Weiser and George Croghan helped Pennsylvania maintain peaceful relations with the tribes of the region until the eve of the French and Indian War. A 1771 letter from Croghan, who died impoverished, acknowledges a debt of 1,005 pounds to several Philadelphia merchants. The manuscript is marked with Croghan's wax seal, complete and intact.

The Woods collection contains many other deeds and letters from prominent figures, such as John and Thomas Penn, Governor Thomas Mifflin, Revolutionary War veteran and Pittsburgh merchant Col. John Irwin, and Col. David Broadhead, who launched successful missions against British-allied Indians from Fort Pitt during the Revolution.

The Library and Archives collects manuscripts and other materials related to the history and culture of our region. The L&A is open Thursday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., or visit http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh to search the catalog.