American Material in the Crampton Papers
1844-1856

The private and confidential correspondence of
Sir John Fiennes Twisleton Crampton, Bart, KCB

Introduction by
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University of Keele
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from the Bodleian Library, Oxford

Material selected by Mary Silverstein

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Introduction

The papers included on this microfilm cover an important and sensitive period in Anglo-American relations during the middle of the nineteenth century. One of the common misconceptions about relations between Great Britain and the United States after the Treaty of Ghent in 1814 had concluded the War of 1812 is that they settled into a rhythm of peaceful resolution of differences. The grain of truth contained in this popular view is a small one. Throughout the century relations were uneasy and punctuated by disputes, several of which could have easily degenerated into renewed war, from the disagreements over fortification of the Great Lakes and fishing rights which led to the Conventions of 1817 and 1818 through the difficult years of the American Civil War to the dispute over the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana in 1893, in which the United States took an active interest. It was only after that dispute was settled that the two governments clearly began moving towards the stance that has characterised much of the twentieth century.

Issues which shaped Anglo-American relations during the nineteenth century certainly developed out of the attainment of American independence in 1783 but were in important respects different from those which had precipitated the original rebellion. Thus ideological differences between a republican and increasingly democratic American regime and a monarchic and still very conservative British regime had little direct impact on the conduct of foreign policy by the two governments. Similarly, no matter how important economic grievances had been in precipitating the Revolution, by the middle of the nineteenth century the two countries were partners in a mutually advantageous economic system of transatlantic trade. Each was the other's best customer. Britain invested capital, supplied technology and despatched emigrants to America, and the United States exported huge quantities of agricultural products to Great Britain, including most notably cotton and grain.

Instead disagreements derived principally from different and often opposed strategic interests. Thus the United States was concerned with establishing firstly its control over the territory it had acquired at independence and later by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803; secondly, it had interests in the area it later incorporated, together with the need to protect it; and lastly, and increasingly in mid-century, it developed commercial, political and strategic interests in the Caribbean and Central America. For its part, Britain was at the peak of its global power during the first half of the nineteenth century, yet was obliged to define its strategic priorities in acknowledgement of the fact that it could not undertake unlimited authority or responsibilities. In practice as far as North America was concerned, this meant responding to the growth of the United States, defending residual interests in British North America by providing for the security of the Canadian-American border, and protecting commercial and political interests in Central America and the Caribbean. Each area contained the seeds of bitter conflict between Britain and America, and in each instance the question facing successive British governments was whether British long-term interests were better advanced by challenging the United States or by accommodating to its aspirations, if necessary, by making tactical concessions and even withdrawals. These judgements had to be made against a background of global interests and in the context of important British concerns with the disposition of power in continental Europe. Sir John Crampton was a significant actor in the contest during his period at the British legation in Washington, and the papers contained in this microfilm are an important ingredient in the story.

Sir John Crampton

Sir John Fiennes Twisleton Crampton was born on August 12 1805 into a family which had settled in Ireland in the seventeenth century. He entered the diplomatic service, first as an unpaid attaché in Turin and successively at St. Petersburg, Brussels and Vienna. He was promoted to be Secretary of Legation at Berne in December 1844 and transferred to the same position in Washington on July 3 1845, where Sir Richard Packenham was Minister.
Between May 1849, when Packenham returned to England, and December 1849, when Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer took up his appointment, Crampton served as chargé d'affaires, a position he also occupied from August 1851 until January 1852, when he himself was appointed Minister— in common with many countries such as Spain, the United States was not considered sufficiently important to justify appointment of a full ambassador at the time. He remained in office until President Franklin Pierce broke off diplomatic relations with him on May 28 1856. Thereafter he returned home, where Lord Palmerston made him K.C.B. on September 20. He later served in Hanover, St. Petersburg, and Madrid. He retired on July 1 1869.

During his time in Washington, Crampton served under the Earl of Aberdeen as Foreign Secretary until 1846, Palmerston from July 6 1846 to 1851, Earl Granville from December 26 1851 until February 1852, the Earl of Malmesbury between February 27 and December 1852, Lord John Russell between December 28 1852 and February 1853 and the Earl of Clarendon from February 21 1853 until his departure. At the same time Sir Robert Peel was Prime Minister until 1846, Lord John Russell between June 30 1846 and 1852, the Earl of Derby between February 23 and December 1852, the Earl of Aberdeen from December 19 1852, and Viscount Palmerston from February 6 1855.

Crampton succeeded to his father's baronetcy on June 10 1858 and married Victoire Balfe in 1860; they were divorced in 1863. He died on December 5 1886 at his home Bushey Park, near Bray, County Wicklow.

While a member of the British legation in Washington, Crampton was involved in many of the issues which made Anglo-American relations so sensitive in the middle of the nineteenth century. The diversity of his activities is evident from his correspondence. It includes disputes between Britain and the United States over fisheries in Canadian waters, the need to develop Canadian-American trade, and American attempts to acquire naval bases in Cuba and other parts of the West Indies. More importantly, the two governments clashed over the activities of American filibusters in Nicaragua and especially British interests in the Mosquito Coast and control over routes for a possible canal across the central American isthmus, which would have major strategic importance for both countries. But what destroyed Crampton's utility as British minister was his activity in attempting to recruit volunteers for service in the British army during the Crimean War. Although personally popular in Washington, his conduct was regarded as illegal and unacceptable and led to President Pierce's refusal to continue dealings with him.

The Manuscripts

The papers included in this film are taken from the correspondence and papers of Sir John Fiennes Twisleton Crampton, Bart., in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The collection had been left to Miss Selina A. Boyle, also of Bushey Park, Enniskerry, County Wicklow, Ireland, who in turn left them to Miss Doreen Boyle, who donated them to the Library in 1967. She also donated other Crampton Papers to Trinity College, Dublin.

A full catalogue of the papers in Bodley was compiled by T.D. Rogers in 1985; it has been reproduced by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts [No. 85/22]. The Catalogue includes some detail of the subject matter and an index of personal names; it can be used to locate material on the film.

The papers consist of Crampton's correspondence, both private and official, during his service in Washington. His correspondence with the Foreign Secretaries under whom he served includes private letters as well as official dispatches; Palmerston in particular encouraged this practice in order to preserve confidentiality since it was common for official papers to be published. In addition, Crampton maintained contact with many other correspondents,
including the governors of Canada, the Admiral commanding the British fleet in North American and Caribbean waters, and British consuls, including those in central America and Cuba. Among others included in this collection are diplomats, Washington politicians, businessmen, friends and the family as well as literary figures wishing to promote a copyright treaty.

Related material can be found in the correspondence of George William Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon, which is also in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The relevant papers have been published on microfilm as *The American Papers of the 4th Earl of Clarendon*1. The Crampton correspondence in Trinity College, Dublin, is mainly concerned with his father, Sir Philip, but also has material on Sir John. Other relevant material can be found in the British Library, the Public Record Office and elsewhere in Great Britain. For details, see J.W. Raimo, ed, *A Guide to Manuscripts relating to America in Great Britain and Ireland*, rev. ed. (London: Meckler for the British Association for American Studies, 1979). The Crampton Papers are described in print, in Mary Clapinson and T.D. Rogers, *Summary Catalogue of Post-Medieval Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford: Acquisitions 1916-1975* 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), under SC nos. 38167-260.

**Secondary Works: relating to Crampton**


Beckles Willson, *Friendly Relations: A Narrative of Britain's Ministers and Ambassadors to America (1791-1930)* (London: Lovat, Dickson and Thompson, [1934])

**Secondary Works: General**


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