



## **Extended History of Collection M-002: Astor, John Jacob**

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John Jacob Astor (1763-1848) was a German-American business magnate, merchant and investor who was the first prominent member of the Astor family and the first multi-millionaire in the United States. He came to the U.S. in 1784 and built a fur-trading empire that extended to the Great Lakes, Canada, and later to the American West and Pacific coast. His fur trading post of Astoria in 1811 was the first U.S. settlement on the Pacific coast. In the early 19th century he diversified into New York City real estate and later became a patron of the arts.

Charles Gratiot Sr. (1752-1817) was a French merchant in St. Louis during the American Revolution and the decades following. Born in Lausanne, Switzerland, he was a descendant of Huguenots. He emigrated to Montreal to work with an uncle involved in the fur trade. He later moved to the Illinois country and started his own business in 1777, opening a store at Cahokia and becoming an influential trader. When George Rogers Clark arrived in 1778, Gratiot provided supplies to Clark's men and loaned him \$8,000 for his campaign against the British at Vincennes, Indiana. In 1781, Gratiot relocated to St. Louis, where he married Victoire Chouteau, a daughter of Pierre Laclède Liguist, (the influential founder of St. Louis as well as a respected business man), and his common law wife Marie Therese Bourgeois. They had 13 children, including General Charles Gratiot, Jr and Henry Gratiot.

The Astor Expedition of 1810-1812, was the next overland expedition from St. Louis to the mouth of the Columbia River following Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery Expedition. The expedition leader was Wilson Price Hunt (1783-1842), a junior partner in Astor's company, and is the person referred to in Astor's letter. Astor planned to establish a post near the ocean shore in the Pacific Northwest to move furs by boat from land-based trappers in North America to the Chinese porcelain and silk trading port of Canton. His sailing vessels would bring Chinese goods to American markets and supply his Columbia River post. He founded the American Fur Company for the Rocky Mountain region in 1808, the Pacific Fur Company for the Columbia watershed in 1810, and the South West Company in 1811. The Astor Expedition and the founding of the Astoria outpost was conducted under the auspices of the Pacific Fur Company.

W.P. Hunt and another Pacific Fur Company partner, Donald MacKenzie (1783-1851), left Montreal Canada by canoe, probably in late March 1810, and arrived at Mackinaw (the confluence of Lakes Michigan and Huron) on July 23, 1810. They headed south and arrived in St. Louis on September 3, 1810. (They traveled down Lake Michigan to Green Bay, to the Fox River, then the Wisconsin River to Prairie du Chien and on down the Mississippi River). It is likely that during the trek to St. Louis they could have stopped at Fort Oswego, New York, on Lake Ontario on 9 April, 1810, the date



referenced in Astor's letter. Hunt arrived in St Louis in September of 1810 and left the following month. However, Astor's letter to Gratiot is dated July 24, 1811, ten months after Hunt's departure. The first letter suggests that Astor was unaware of Hunt's progress long past when he and MacKenzie put in at Fort Oswego in April, fifteen months prior to the July 1811 letter.

Of the 60 men of the original Hunt-Mackenzie party, who left St Louis in October 1810, about 54 arrived at Astoria in early 1812. They had previously split into four groups in Idaho, each making their way separately to their destination. W.P. Hunt eventually returned to New York in 1816 by sea from the Pacific. He later settled in St Louis and married Anne Lucas Hunt in 1836. She was the daughter of Jean B.C. Lucas and widow of Hunt's cousin Captain Theodore Hunt (d. 1832), a retired US Navy officer. Wilson Price Hunt died in 1842. (See the Mercantile Library's letters [M-32](#) and [M-83](#))

The letter to Anthony Charles Cazenove of Alexandria asks about a commodity that Astor wishes to buy. He is requesting Cazenove to buy for him if he comes across some of good quality. Since both Astor and Cazenove were in the animal hide trade, hides may be the item Astor is seeking. This is further indicated by Astor mentioning in the 1810 letter to Gratiot above that the price of deer hides at that time was 20 cents a pound. The person Jean he mentions is unknown but apparently someone connected to Astor and most likely in the Alexandria VA vicinity.

Anthony Charles Cazanove (1775-1852) was a businessman, merchant and Swiss consul to the United States. The Cazenove family dates to the 15th century in southern of France. Family members were Huguenots who sought refuge in Geneva, Switzerland, after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre - 1572. Active in international commerce, branches of the family settled in England, Italy, Spain, and the United States. Anthony-Charles Cazenove, was the second son of Paul Cazenove and Jeanne Elizabeth Martin. He was born 1775 in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1790 he went to London to work for a time in the counting house of James Cazenove & Co. In 1794 he and his brother, John-Anthony emigrated to Philadelphia, to escape the French Revolution which had come to Geneva. He settled in Alexandria, Virginia.

About 1795 Cazanove became a partner in the firm Albert Gallatin & Co whose multiple partners were all immigrants to the US from Geneva except for Gallatin's brother-in-law. In 1797 Anthony married Anne Hogan in Alexandria. They had nine children. By the 1830's he was one of the town's chief importers and the proprietor of large tracts of commercial real estate. His world wide trade in hides, cotton wraps, wine and other goods made him a wealthy man with much influence in local and industrial affairs. Cazenove's granddaughters married into other prominent families, particularly the Lee's and du Pont's. In 1850 his son Louis-Anthony Cazenove (1807-1852) bought the Lee-Fendale House in Alexandria (built in 1785 and still existing). Both Louis and Anthony died in 1852. The Mercantile Library letter collection has many other letters sent to Cazenove by prominent personages of his day.