

# **Joseph Martin du Colombier manuscript of "Napoleon Bonaparte, Martyr of St. Helena"**

**Ms. Coll. 1280**

**Finding aid prepared by Kelin Baldrige.**

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Last updated on March 27, 2017.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2017 March 22

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Creator</b>	Du Colombier, Joseph Martin, 1761–1846
<b>Title</b>	Joseph Martin du Colombier manuscript of "Napoleon Bonaparte, Martyr of St. Helena"
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1280
<b>Date</b>	1840
<b>Extent</b>	0.2 linear feet (1 box)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Language Note</b>	The first volume of this collection is written entirely in English, the second is written entirely in French.
<b>Abstract</b>	This collection contains two manuscript drafts of Joseph Martin du Colombier's play, "Napoleon Bonaparte, Martyr of St. Helena," written in 1840. The first volume is a draft of the play written in English and the second volume is a draft of the play written in French. This play, possibly inspired by the return of Napoleon's body to France in 1840, describes the end of Napoleon's life during his exile in St. Helena.

**Cite as:**

Joseph Martin du Colombier manuscript of "Napoleon Bonaparte, Martyr of St. Helena," 1840, Ms.

Coll. 1280, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## Biography/History

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Joseph Martin du Colombier was the youngest son of Martin du Colombier, a native of Lille, France who emigrated to St. Domingo in 1737 under the patronage of the French government and who became a wealthy plantation owner. Joseph Martin du Colombier was born in 1760 and sent to Paris at an early age to be educated. After the death of his father and the remarriage of his mother, he was sent to a seminary to become a priest. He quickly left and returned to his father's plantation in St. Domingo. He then came to America during the Revolutionary War where he acted as a surgeon in the French Army, offering services to American troops. He was a captive on the British prison ship *Jersey* where his musical abilities made him popular with the British who provided him with extra food and a more healthy environment. After the Revolutionary War, he returned to the plantation and married Charlotte Fillon with whom he had five children.

In the Haitian Revolution, du Colombier served as the Captain of Dragoons and Commander-in-Chief of Cavalry. In 1792, he returned to the United States and settled in Wilmington, Delaware, with his family. He earned a substantial fortune in commerce and trading with St. Domingo. During the Yellow Fever epidemics, he provided free medical care. When his wife died in 1805, he came to Philadelphia with his family. He appears to have stopped using du Colombier and referred to himself as Joseph Martin. He died on November 16, 1846 in Philadelphia.

Du Colombier clearly revered Napoleon, ending his play with the lines "Farewell, great chieftain; thy immortal name – stands you unrivaled on the rolls of fame – born is the rock and boundless is the wave – yet glory's sunbeams rest upon thy grave."

**Works consulted:**

Ward, Townsend. "Germantown Road and Its Association, Part Second." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. V No. 2, 1881 (pages 123-125).

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## Scope and Contents

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This play describes the end of Napoleon Bonaparte's life, during his exile on the island of St. Helena, starting in 1815. He was held by the British in the Longwood House, a building selected for its elevation and lack of vegetation, making it an ideal location to secure. Napoleon's health declined, possibly due to damp conditions in Longwood House (although the cause of his death is debated: stomach cancer, ulcers, or arsenic poisoning) and he died in 1821 at the age of fifty-one. In 1840, the same year the play was written, Louis Philippe I obtained permission from the British to return Napoleon's remains to France so

that a state funeral could be held.

This collection contains two manuscript drafts of Joseph Martin du Colombier's play, "Napoleon Bonaparte, Martyr of St. Helena," written in 1840. The play does not appear to have been published in English or in French. The first volume is a draft of the play written in English, containing a prologue, five acts, and an epilogue. It also contains several newspaper clippings (one describing Napoleon's last will and testament and one describing Napoleon's tomb) affixed to the inside front and back covers respectively as well as three additional articles originally laid in describing the "Arrival of the remains of Napoleon at Cherbourg," "Character of Napoleon," and "Wellington and Napoleon Compared." There is what appears to be a hand-drawn and colored illustration "Prometheus Victim to Jupiter's Rage" affixed to the title page.

The second volume is written in French but only contains the five acts, without the prologue and epilogue. A reproduction portrait of Napoleon is affixed to the inside front cover of this volume.

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## **Administrative Information**

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### **Access Restrictions**

This collection is open for research use.

### **Use Restrictions**

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### **Source of Acquisition**

Sold by William Allen, 1950.

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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**FORM/GENRE(S)**

- Manuscripts (document genre)
- Plays (performed works)
- Writings (document genre)

**GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)**

- France--History--1789-1900

**PERSONAL NAME(S)**

- Napoléon I, Emperor of the French, 1769-1821

**SUBJECT(S)**

- Authors, American--19th century
- Memory--Sociological aspects
- Playwriting--19th century

## Collection Inventory

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	Box	Folder
"Napoleon Bonaparte, Martyr of St. Helena," draft in English, 1840.	1	1
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"Napoleon Bonaparte, Martyr of St. Helena," draft in French, 1840.	1	2