

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY  
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

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**NAME OF COLLECTION:**

Sheldon, William, Notebooks, 1789?; 1795-1804

**LOCATION(S):**

Octavo vols. "S"  
Folio vols. "S"  
Misc. mss. boxes "S"

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**SIZE OF COLLECTION:**

five octavo volumes; one folio volume (74 leaves); one folder (132 leaves)

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**SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON COLLECTION:**

William Sheldon's article "Brief Account of the Caraihs, Who Inhabited the Antiles," is found in *AAS Transactions*, vol. 1, p. 365-433. For biographical notes on Priestley, see *DAB*, vol. 15, p. 223-226; Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Jews ...* (New York: B. Gomez, 1794). For notes on David Levi, see H. Simonoff, *Jewish Notables in America* (New York: Greenberg, 1956), p. 115. For biographical information on Sheldon, see "The Diary of Isaiah Thomas," *AAS Transactions*, vol. IX, p. 60.

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**SOURCE OF COLLECTION:**

unknown

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**COLLECTION DESCRIPTION:**

William Sheldon (1762-1822) was born in England on 17 November 1762 and educated at Oxford University. He resided in North Providence, R.I., for several years and was an editor, c. 1809 to 1810, of the Massachusetts Spy, a newspaper published in Worcester, Mass. Sheldon was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1813 and apparently resided in Jamaica, W.I., at that time. He died on 28 June 1822 in London.

The collection consists largely of Sheldon's religious opinions and disputations, remarks on biblical history, and philosophical writings. The collection contains items that pertain to the writings of Dr. Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), and David Levi (1740-1799), Hebraist, author, and translator. Priestley immigrated to America in 1794 to seek religious freedom. He was a scientist, educator, and prolific writer on politics and Unitarian theology. Sheldon addressed himself to Priestley's Letters to the Jews: Inviting Them to an Amicable Discussion of the Evidences of Christianity (1794) in which is also published Levi's Letters to Dr. Priestley in Answer to Those He Addressed to the Jews. Sheldon opposed the views of both the liberal Priestley and Levi and he rebutted their interpretations of specific scriptural passages with extensive quotations throughout. He also attempted to prove that the biblical prophecies, both positive and negative, concerning the Jewish people had already been fulfilled and that

Trinitarianism, not Unitarianism, was the proper doctrine. The bound manuscript was apparently written for publication in the period 1795 to 1798, while the octavo volume was probably written earlier, c. 1789.

There are three volumes that discuss biblical perspectives of various kings and leaders, sometimes relating Sheldon's views to the principals of American independence. In another volume Sheldon wrote about natural phenomena (the orbits of the planets, the sun, tides, comets, etc.) and discussed natural philosophers, including Newton, Priestley, Bacon, and Boyle.

The folio volume contains a lengthy disputation of the writings of Michaijah Towgood (1700-1792), an English dissenter from the Church of England. Sheldon favored the establishment of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. In addition, there are recipes for ham and a medical solution, accounts for sales of food and household items, two pages of receipts from North Providence residents for taxes, wages, and other purchases from 1800 to 1804, and a list of fowl shot by individuals from April 1799 to January 1800.

See Contents List.

**American Antiquarian Society**  
**MANUSCRIPTS DEPARTMENT**

WILLIAM SHELDON, NOTEBOOKS, 1789?, 1795-1804  
CONTENTS LIST

**OCTAVO**

**VOLUME**

- 1 Notebook  
--re: writings of Dr. Joseph Priestly and David Levi
- 2-4 Notebooks  
--re: biblical perspectives of various kings and leaders
- 5 Notebook  
--re: natural phenomena and natural philosophers

**FOLIO**

**VOLUME**

Notebook,  
--re: writings of Michaijah Towgood;

**FOLDER**

"Observations on Mr. Levi's Introductory Letter; and the Doctor's reply."