

University of Chicago Library

Guide to the Reuben T. Durrett Collection of Richard H. Collins Papers 1761-1873



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.COLLINSR
Title	Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Richard H. Collins Papers
Date	1761-1873
Size	1 linear foot (2 boxes)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract Reuben Thomas Durrett (1824-1913), lawyer, manuscript and book collector, and Kentucky historian. Richard H. Collins (1824-1889) was a lawyer and journalist who wrote on the history of Kentucky. The Reuben T. Durrett Collection of the Richard H. Collins Papers consists primarily of materials related to Collin's revision and expansion of his father's (Lewis Collins) work on the history of Kentucky, Historical Sketches of Kentucky. It includes correspondence with Kentuckians, manuscripts, notebooks, and information taken from Kentucky county court records. It also includes two bound volumes: a notebook on Kentucky pioneering and a scrapbook of proof sheets.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Richard H. Collins Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Acquisition Information

The existence of the Durrett library first came to the attention of the University of Chicago through William E. Dodd, a professor of American history at the University who had consulted the library as a student. Like other faculty members of the Division of the Social Sciences early in the century, Dodd was concerned about the University's lack of extensive research materials for history and related subjects, and since he was aware of Durrett's advanced age, he persuaded A. C. McLaughlin, also of the history department, to accompany him to Louisville in June, 1910, to see the collection and to make discreet inquiries about plans for its disposition. The two found Durrett himself uncertain about his plans, but learned that the Durrett family opposed making a

donation of the collection, and that they were in communication with Princeton University and the University of Illinois about selling the library.

Dodd himself was very enthusiastic about the research potential which Durrett's library represented, and won the support of many of his colleagues on the social science faculties in his efforts to persuade President Judson to consider the purchase by the University of the entire library, numbering some 30,000 volumes. Convinced that the collection would be a valuable addition to the University's holdings, but wary of the expense involved, Judson agreed cautiously to investigate the idea. Although Dodd and his colleagues were anxious to conclude the agreement quickly, fearing competition from other would-be purchasers or the dispersal of the collection upon Durrett's apparently imminent death, the task of deciding upon a fair offer was made difficult by the fact that the collection had never been adequately catalogued.

Durrett's own suggestion made in December, 1912 of \$45,000 seemed high, so in February 1913, the University engaged Walter Lichtenstein, a Northwestern University librarian who had previously acted as purchasing agent for the University of Chicago libraries, to assess the value of the Durrett collection. Lichtenstein's report was submitted to President Judson on February 21, 1913, following a trip to Louisville to sample the collection.

The assessment, made on terms of commercial market value rather than scholarly significance, divided Durrett's library into four parts. Some 20,000 bound volumes (including 500 volumes of Kentuckiana) he estimated at \$7,200. Two hundred fifty file folders of pamphlet material had no apparent commercial value. Numerous manuscripts and newspapers were difficult to assess but Lichtenstein thought they could be fairly purchased for \$15,000. A collection of maps was estimated to have a value around \$50. Lichtenstein's estimate, therefore, totaled \$22,000-\$22,500, considerably less than Durrett's own. When the University authorized Lichtenstein to make this offer to the Durrett family, however, they accepted it, apparently favoring Chicago as the repository of their collection. The purchase sum, which was too high to be taken from the University's ordinary budget, was raised among outside donors, and under Lichtenstein's supervision, the library was dismantled and shipped to Chicago by early May. It filled 287 large packing crates. Its arrival provoked considerable comment in the Louisville and Chicago press, and almost immediately the University began to receive research inquiries from scholars and requests from several libraries for copies of some of the Durrett material to add to their own collections.

In his report Lichtenstein had warned President Judson that considerable effort and expense would be required to process the collection once it was at the University. His warning proved to be justified. Aside from the massive undertaking of unpacking, sorting, and cataloguing the collection, much of the material was found to be in poor condition, requiring cleaning, repair, and binding or rebinding. To facilitate the efficient processing of the Durrett acquisition, the entire operation was assigned to Edward A. Henry of the library staff, who, with the help of his assistants, was to devote most of his attention to the Durrett project for some seven years. It was decided that duplicates should be disposed of, that a number of Filson Club possessions in Durrett's library should be returned to the Club, and that most of the non-manuscript material in the collection would be distributed according to subject matter among the University's various departmental libraries. On several occasions between 1913 and 1937, items of an official

character were returned to Kentucky upon request, including records of Jefferson County, journals of Kentucky constitutional conventions, and certain manuscripts and photographs of the Filson Club identified by the club's president, R. C. Ballard Thurston. Most of Henry's time seems to have been devoted to preparing the material for this dispersal. His assignment was expanded in 1914 when the University purchased a collection totaling 436 volumes of Kentucky newspapers and miscellaneous books from Mrs. Joel R. Lyle, sister of Robert C. Boggs of Lexington, Kentucky. It was deemed appropriate to merge the Boggs-Lyle acquisition with the Durrett, and the two were processed together.

By the end of the 1915-16 academic year, about 9,000 of the Durrett and Boggs-Lyle volumes had been processed and distributed to the departmental libraries. It was then that Henry and his staff turned some of their attention to the manuscripts--that is, to the material comprising the Durrett Collection as described in this guide. At that time the Durrett manuscripts were apparently divided into four large groups--the Joel Tanner Hart Papers, the Joshua Lacy Wilson Papers, miscellaneous manuscripts, and miscellaneous separately bound items--either mounted in scrapbooks or bound together. A card catalog was compiled for at least the first three of these groups.

The Durrett Collection remained in this state until the mid-1950s. By then it had been incorporated within the holdings of the Department of Special Collections (1951), and it became clear that reorganization of the manuscripts was necessary. Paul Angle, a member of the staff of the Chicago Historical Society, who had surveyed the University of Chicago's manuscript collection as a consultant in 1944, had pointed out that the Durrett miscellaneous bound manuscripts in particular were of little use to scholars as they were then arranged and described. Moreover, the Special Collections staff had observed that the mountings and bindings done by Henry's staff were detrimental to the lives of the manuscripts, and that the existing catalog and descriptions provided inadequate access to the documents. The manuscripts, therefore, were removed from their bindings and divided into smaller and more coherent sub-collections.

In the 1970s, an effort was undertaken to edit the 1956 guide, to enhance the descriptions of the Durrett codices for greater detail and accuracy, and to differentiate between transcripts and original manuscript material bound together in the codices. Manuscript material also received conservation treatment. In 1983, another attempt was made to write a comprehensive guide to the entire collection. This guide remained in use until 2015. The current guide was completed in 2016.

Biographical Note

Richard H. Collins (1824-1888) was born in Maysville, Kentucky, the son of Lewis Collins (1797-1870), a Kentucky judge, politician, and historian. The younger Collins was educated at the Maysville Seminary and at Centre College, Danville, Kentucky, where he received both a baccalaureate (1842) and a Master's degree (1845). Collins then studied law at Transylvania Law School, Lexington, and later, in 1880, received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Austin College (Texas).

Collins' early career was divided between journalism and the practice of Law. In 1847 he purchased his father's newspaper, the Maysville Eagle, which he edited until 1850, and again from 1853 to 1857. He practiced law in Maysville from 1851 until 1853 and in Cincinnati (although he lived in Covington, Kentucky) from 1862 until 1871. Collins was also an active member of the Presbyterian Church, acting as editor for a time of a local Presbyterian quarterly, and contributed as well to various other aspects of community life.

Like his father, Richard Collins had a lively interest in Kentucky history. He was an early officer of the Kentucky Historical Society, and in 1884 helped found the Filson Club. He seems, however, to have had little time for systematic research or writing until about 1871. At that time a demand arose for the publication of a revised edition of Lewis Collins' Historical Sketches of Kentucky, then out of print for some twenty years.

Richard agreed to undertake the work and spent four years preparing the new edition. He wrote numerous letters, asking for information from old Kentucky residents about various aspects of the state's early history, arranged for persons especially well-informed on particular topics to collaborate in the writing of eleven new articles for the edition, revised about 350 pages of his father's work, and prepared some 1,500 pages of new material himself. By 1874, the work—more a collection of organized data and individual monographs than a continuous narrative—was complete and published in two volumes.

Scope Note

The bulk of the Richard H. Collins Papers consists of materials related to his efforts at revising and expanding his father's history. The collection is split into three series.

Series I, Correspondence, consists of a small sampling of responses to historical queries concerning prominent Kentucky residents and events in Kentucky history. Correspondents include Christopher Columbus Graham and R.J. Menefee. Correspondence is arranged chronologically.

Series II, Kentucky History, contains Collins' historical notes, essays, and a speech relating to Kentucky history. The majority of these notes are taken from records in Kentucky county courts, concerning legal and administrative matters. The remainder of the notes consist of notebooks on topics such as prominent Kentucky families, political representatives and religious congregations. Materials are arranged by type (manuscript notes, notebooks, speeches or essays).

Series III, General History, contains Collins' historical notes and essays relating to secular and religious history outside of Kentucky. Much of the materials relate to the history of Virginia. The collection also contains four brief papers on religious and general history topics. Materials are arranged by type (manuscript notes, notebooks, or essays).

Series IV, Scrapbook, contains a bound volume of proof sheets from an historical monthly that Collins planned.

Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/>

Researchers interested in topics represented in the Durrett Collection should check the author, title, or subject headings relevant to their interests in the Library catalog for potentially useful books and pamphlets from the Durrett Library, which were dispersed among the existing departmental libraries at the time of acquisition. Some of these items have since been transferred to the Rare Books collection and to the Reuben T. Durrett Collection of Broad­sides, Pamphlets, and Leaflets, in the Special Collections Research Center.

The Durrett rare book collections include works of literature, travel and description, early histories of Kentucky such as Mann Butler's, biographies, legislative acts, and other legal documents.

Examples include Henry McMurtrie's *Sketches of Louisville and Its Environs* (1819); a collection of humorous verses, *The Kentucky Miscellany*, by Thomas Johnson, Jr. (1821), one of two known copies of the fourth edition, the first known to survive; and *The Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp ...* (1826).

Among the newspapers are 135 titles published in Kentucky, beginning in 1788 with the *Kentucky Gazette*, the first newspaper established in the state. Other important titles include the *Mirror*, the *Palladium*, the *Guardian of Freedom*, the *Farmer's Library or Ohio Intelligencer*, and numerous campaign newspapers such as *The Patriot* and *The Spirit of '76* from 1826.

Included in the American Paper Currency Collection in the Special Collections Research Center is Durrett's collection of confederate currency, among which are many examples of notes issued by the Bank of Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Correspondence, reports, and clippings concerning the acquisition of the Reuben T. Durrett Collection for the University of Chicago are found in the University of Chicago Library Records Addenda.

In addition, the following collections contain material related in subject matter to various portions of the Durrett Collection:

Codex MS 798 Lettres de Mr. Cahusac, Américain, juge de paix à Fleurance, 1806-1836

Church History Documents Collection

Codex MS 790, Letters to Virgil David, 1828-1838

Douglas, Stephan A. Papers

English, William H. Papers

Ethno-History Collection

Lafayette Manuscripts

Lafayette-Bonaventure. Collection

Lane, Ebenezer, Family. Papers

Lewis, Fielding. Papers

Robertson, Wyndham. Papers

All Durrett sub-collections are as follows:

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Boggs Family. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Boone Family. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Broad­sides, Broad­sheets, Pamphlets, and Leaflets

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Christopher Columbus Graham. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. George and William Croghan. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. George Nicholas. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. George Rogers Clark. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Government Records

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Edmund Lyne Estate. Records

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. James Wilkinson. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Joel Tanner Hart. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Joshua Lacey Wilson. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Lewis Family. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Louisville, Kentucky Board of Trustees. Records

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Mann Butler. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Michael Walsh Cluskey. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Miscellaneous Manuscripts and Codices

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Portraits, Illustrations, and Cartographic Material

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Reuben T. Durrett. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Richard H. Collins. Papers

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Richard Jouett Menefee Collection on Matthew Harris Jouett

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Shelby Family. Papers

Subject Headings

- Collins, Lewis, 1797-1870
- Collins, Richard H., 1824-1889
- Durrett, Reuben T. (Reuben Thomas), 1824-1913
- Frontier and pioneer life -- Kentucky
- Kentucky -- Description and travel
- Kentucky -- Biography
- Kentucky -- History

INVENTORY

Series I, Correspondence

Box 1

Folder 1

Correspondence, 1871-1886

- Raitt, J.W., Cloverport, Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins, Covington, Kentucky - July 22, 1871.
- McCorkle, J.M.S., Louisville, Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins - August 4, 1871
- Collins, Richard. H, Kentucky, to Christopher Columbus Graham, Louisville, Kentucky - October 14, 1872
- Stedman, E.K., Stedmansville, Franklin Co., Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins - December 2, 1872
- Collins, Richard. H, Covington, Kentucky, to Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham, Louisville, Kentucky - December 3, 1872 (Sends "Dictionary of the Stations and Early Settlements" to Dr. Graham for corrections)
- Higgins, Sally Ann, Crab Orchard, to R.H.C., January 7, 1873 (Family of Col. William Whilley)
- Samuel Kerr, Maysville, Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins – May 1, 1873 (Information about Joseph Logan)
- Mefford, Nathan, Mason Co., Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins – May 6, 1873 (Grandfather's emigration to Kentucky (1783), troubles with Indians)
- Forman, J.S., Washington, Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins, Covington, Kentucky – May 8, 1873 (Names of early pioneers in area)

- Thomas, Isaac, Maysville, Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins, Covington, Kentucky – May 8, 1873 (Names of early pioneers in area)
- Thomas, Isaac, Maysville, Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins, Covington, KY – May 11, 1873 (Early Maysville history)
- Collins, Richard H., Louisville, Kentucky, to Richard Jouett Menefee, Louisville, Kentucky – September 28, 1886
- Hunter, Davice, Washington, Kentucky, to Richard H. Collins, Covington, KY - May 1, [1886] (Arrival of James McKinley in Kentucky)

Series II, Kentucky History

Box 1

Folder 2

Notes - Early Kentuckians – undated

- Including Albert Gallatin Hodges, Gustavus Woodson Smith, and Elizabeth Thomas

Box 1

Folder 3

Notes - Early Kentucky religious congregations – undated

Box 1

Folder 4

Notes – Kentucky Land Office – undated

Box 1

Folder 5

Notes – Kentucky Depositions - undated

Box 1

Folder 6

Notebook - Kentucky electors and representatives, and Kentucky Families – undated

- Includes Todd, Boone, and Wilkinson

Box 1

Folder 7

Notebook - Kentucky newspapers and court records, and Transcript of John Swift's Journal, 1761 – undated

Box 1

Folder 8

Notebook - Lists of Kentucky state officials and congressmen, 1792-1820 – undated

Box 1

Folder 9

Notebook – Kentucky public officials, judges, courts, and appeals – undated

Box 1

Folder 10

Notebook - Various sources regarding early pioneers in Kentucky – undated

Box 2

Folder 1

Speech Draft - "The Historians of Kentucky" – June 5, 1872

- Delivered before the Kentucky Editorial Convention

Box 2

Folder 2

Essays – Kentucky geography – undated

- Including manuscript essay on Kentucky Rivers, manuscript essay on Kentucky geographical features, and notes on surveying and determination of territorial boundaries

Box 2

Folder 3

Essays - Kentucky pioneering – undated

- Including notebook entitled "Chapters of First Things in Kentucky"

Series III, General History

Box 2

Folder 4

Notes – General Chronology - undated

Box 2

Folder 5

Notes – Miscellaneous historical notes and note fragments – undated [1/2]

Box 2

Folder 6

Notes – Miscellaneous historical notes and note fragments – undated [2/2]

Box 2

Folder 7

Notebook – Depositions and Transcript of Journals of Rev. James Smith – undated

- 3 Journals to the Western Country, from Powhattan Co., VA, Oct. 1 to 21st Dec, 1785; Oct. 4 to Dec. 23, 1795; Aug. 31 to Nov. 12, 1797

Box 2

Folder 8

Notebook – Calendar of Virginia State Papers - undated

Box 2

Folder 9

Notebook – Constitutional and Legislative matters – undated

Box 2

Folder 10

Essays – General History – undated

- Manuscript essay on battle between British and native troops at Lucknow, India, 1857;
Notes on "Names and number of the Apostles." Notes on biblical references to history;
Manuscript essay of lecture on "The Gold of Ophia: A New Ophia"

Series IV, Scrapbook

Box 2

Folder 11

"Proof Sheets of the Intended Monthly Collins' Historical Magazine" – Bound Manuscript - undated