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# Guide to the Rueben T. Durrett Personal Papers circa 1850-1912



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## **Descriptive Summary**

<b>Identifier</b>	ICU.SPCL.DURRETTR
<b>Title</b>	Durrett, Reuben T. Personal Papers
<b>Date</b>	circa 1850-1912
<b>Size</b>	3 linear feet (5 boxes)
<b>Repository</b>	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. The Reuben T. Durrett Personal Papers contain a small amount of correspondence, manuscripts, notes, newspaper clippings, transcripts and memorabilia. The collection includes biographical and genealogical information on numerous historical figures from Kentucky, lists of prominent Kentuckians, copies of historical letters, documents concerning Kentucky, and documents relating to the Filson Club, a historical society founded by Durrett. Papers document Durrett's interest in acquiring a variety of materials on the history of Kentucky and the Ohio River Valley.

## **Information on Use**

### **Access**

The collection is open for research.

### **Citation**

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Durrett, Reuben T. Personal 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**

Born in Henry County, Kentucky, on January 22, 1824, Reuben Thomas Durrett took pride in his descent from a family with an early history of intellectual achievement. The family was of French background (the surname was originally Duret) and counted among its members the authors of several mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth century French treatises on various scientific subjects. The Saint Bartholomew religious persecutions in France forced one branch of the family to emigrate to England. From there three brothers, John, Richard, and Bartholomew Durrett, migrated to Spotsylvania County, Virginia, early in the nineteenth century. Francis Durrett, the grandfather of Reuben, was born there and he returned after serving in the Illinois

campaign of George Rogers Clark in 1778-79. Soon after the turn of the century, however, Francis moved to the western country, settling with his family in Henry County, Kentucky.

The son of William and Elizabeth Rawlings Durrett, Reuben Durrett received his primary education in the Henry County schools, and studied at Georgetown College, Georgetown, Kentucky, from 1844 until 1846. He received the degree of A.B. from Brown University in 1849 and returned to Kentucky where he enrolled as a law student at the University of Louisville. Upon receiving the LL.B. in 1850, he began a practice that was to continue for some thirty years. He served a term in 1853 as a member of the Louisville city council, and from 1857 until 1859, edited the Louisville Courier, of which he was a half-owner. In 1852 Durrett married Elizabeth H. Bates, daughter of Caleb and Elizabeth Humphreys Bates of Cincinnati. The couple had four children, of whom only one, William T. Durrett, lived to adulthood.

The success of his legal practice enabled Durrett to retire in 1880, and for the remainder of his life he devoted himself to his historical and literary interests. Earlier (about 1856) he had begun systematically to build an extensive library on a wide variety of subjects, and now he dedicated his resources particularly to enriching his collection of materials on Kentucky. Having initially "made it an object to secure every book about Kentucky or Kentuckians or that was written by a Kentuckian or even printed in Kentucky," Durrett expanded his goals and seems in the end to have hoped to acquire every conceivable kind of source material on the history of Kentucky and much of the surrounding region. His Library grew to include not only printed but also manuscript works (including many brief genealogical or anecdotal sketches written in answer to Durrett's queries by descendants of prominent Kentuckians), transcripts of manuscript material on Kentucky located in private collections or in archives outside the state, and sundry books and manuscripts which, whatever their subject, Durrett deemed historically significant because they had once been owned by prominent Kentuckians.

Not content with simply amassing historical source materials, Durrett also made an effort to publish the results of his own researches into his collections. Moreover, in 1884 he persuaded nine other historically-minded Kentuckians to join him in founding the Filson Club, an organization dedicated to collecting primary source materials on Kentucky, encouraging historical study, and publishing literature on historical topics. The club was named after John Filson, who published in 1784 *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke*, a promotional tract that was later recognized as the first history of the state. From 1884 until his death, Durrett served as president of the society. Durrett also established the Louisville Public Library in 1871, and throughout his life made his own collection available to scholars interested in Kentucky affairs.

Durrett was an active member of his community in many other ways. He served on the Board of Park Commissioners and the Board of Councilmen. He was President of the Children's Free Hospital and the Episcopal Orphans' Home. At various points in his life he directed the

Kentucky Title Company, the Kentucky Title Savings Bank, the First National Bank, the Kentucky Heating and Lighting Company, and the Louisville Lighting Company.

To assure that his library would remain accessible to scholars after his death, Durrett began in the last years of his life to make tentative plans to donate his collection to the city of Louisville. His family, however, thought it unwise to make an outright gift of such a valuable collection, and encouraged him to consider offers from would-be purchasers. A stroke in July, 1912, left Durrett unable to take a very active role in the disposition of his library, and after some consideration of other offers, the family concluded a purchase agreement with the University of Chicago early in 1913. Durrett died in Louisville on September 16, 1913.

### **Scope Note**

The Reuben T. Durrett Personal Papers consist of historical notes and manuscripts, a few pieces of correspondence, and miscellaneous memorabilia. Materials span the years 1850-1792. The collection is divided into six series:

Series I, Personal, contains a biographical sketch of Durrett, personal ephemera including travel brochures, funeral notices, and a list of newspapers in Durrett's personal library.

Series II, Correspondence, contains the personal correspondence of Durrett. In his last years Durrett seems to have been engaged primarily in gathering biographical information on numerous Kentucky historical figures. This series contains all correspondence relating to these inquiries. Other research notes and materials can be found in Series IV. Materials are arranged chronologically, with separate folders for extended correspondence.

Series III, Clubs, contains materials pertaining to Durrett's involvement with the Filson Club and the Sagamundi Club. This includes invitations, correspondence about club activities, articles of incorporation, a petition, and a small collection of meeting minutes. Materials are arranged in folders by type, then chronologically.

Series IV, Research, contains notes, lists, clippings, and correspondence connected to Durrett's historical and biographical research. This series also contains historical and biographical accounts written by others. Materials are arranged by type or by individual being researched.

Series V, Writings, contains transcripts of lectures and essays by Reuben T. Durrett and other members of the Filson Club. The majority of these writings are biographical sketches or accounts of historical events. Materials are arranged alphabetically, by author.

Series VI, Oversize, contains one bound volume of notes for an unfinished biographical encyclopedia and extracts from notes on Colonel William Linn.

## **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**

- Durrett, Reuben T. (Reuben Thomas), 1824-1913
- Jouett, Matthew Harris, 1787-1827
- Filson Club, Louisville, Ky
- Kentucky -- History
- Kentucky -- Biography
- Kentucky -- Newspapers
- Ohio River Valley -- History

## **INVENTORY**

### **Series I: Personal**

#### **Box 1**

##### **Folder 1**

Perrin, William H. – Biographical Sketch of Reuben T. Durrett – July 1, 1891

#### **Box 1**

##### **Folder 2**

Funeral Notices – Daniel Steel Durrie and Samuel David Gross – 1884-1892

#### **Box 1**

##### **Folder 3**

Invitations - Civic Events – 1909-1910

#### **Box 1**

##### **Folder 4**

Souvenir Booklets and Travel Brochures – 1910

#### **Box 1**

##### **Folder 5**

"Bonforts Wine and Spirit Circular" – Journal – January 10, 1910

### **Series II: Correspondence**

#### **Box 1**

##### **Folder 6**

Responses to Biographical and Genealogical Inquiries – 1883-1889

#### **Box 1**

##### **Folder 7**

Responses to Biographical and Genealogical Inquiries – 1890-1894

**Box 1**

**Folder 8**

Responses to Biographical and Genealogical Inquiries – 1895-1899

**Box 1**

**Folder 9**

Responses to Biographical and Genealogical Inquiries – 1900-1909

**Box 1**

**Folder 10**

Responses to Biographical and Genealogical Inquiries – 1910-1912

**Box 1**

**Folder 11**

Miscellaneous Personal Correspondence – 1889-1893

**Box 1**

**Folder 12**

Hayden, Sarah Marshall to Reuben Thomas Durrett - A.L.S. 27 p. – 1894

- Cdx. 91; Contains genealogical information for George Leech

**Box 1**

**Folder 13**

Pickett, Thomas E. to Reuben T. Durrett – A.L.S 29p. – 1905

- Cdx 149; Contains genealogical information for Colonel John Pickett

**Series III: Clubs**

**Box 2**

**Folder 1**

Salgamundi Club – Invitations and Responses – 1894-1896

**Box 2**

**Folder 2**

Filson Club – Petition to the Congress of the United States of America for the Old Custom House – Annotated Draft of Petition, Correspondence and Bill H.R. 6570 - February 2-February 26, 1896

**Box 2**

**Folder 3**

Filson Club – Copy from the First Minute Book of the Filson Club, May 15, 1784 – June 26, 1884

**Box 2**

**Folder 4**

Filson Club – Memorial Book – "Proceedings of the Memorial Meeting" – Notebook containing manuscript, typescript and newsprint 110 p. – 1890

- Cdx 28

**Box 2**

**Folder 5**

Filson Club – Articles of Incorporation – October 6, 1891

**Box 2**

**Folder 6**

Filson Club – Notes for the correction of errors in the History of Transylvania University  
–Typescript 12 p. – 1896

- Cdx 147; Written by Peter Robert concerning the 11th publication of the Filson Club

**Box 2**

**Folder 7**

Filson Club – "Journal of the proceedings of the house of delegates, or representatives, of the colony of Transylvania, 1775" – Manuscript 125 p. – undated

- Cdx 187; Printed in the 16th Publication of the Filson Club

**Box 2**

**Folder 8**

Filson Club – List of Members – January 1, 1901

**Series IV: Research Materials**

**Box 2**

**Folder 9**

John Breckenridge – notes, clippings, research correspondence, and transcripts of Breckenridge papers – 1885-1886

**Box 2**

**Folder 10**

General William Preston – clippings – ca. 1827- ca.1887

**Box 2**

**Folder 11**

Abraham Lincoln - notes, clippings, research correspondence, transcripts of Lincoln papers – 1885-1886

**Box 2**

**Folder 12**

Resolution of 1798 – Clippings and research correspondence – 1886

**Box 3**

**Folder 1**

Biographical and genealogical notes - Individuals – undated

- Including George Rogers Clark; Reverend Jesse Head; Matthew Jouett; Captain James Patton; Benjamin Sebastian

**Box 3**

**Folder 2**

Biographical and genealogical notes – Families – undated

- Including Bryan (or Bryant); Clay; Stout; Suggett; Bradley; Sumners; Turpin

**Box 3**

**Folder 3**

Notes on Circuit Court Records - undated

- Including Eli Cleveland vs. George Rogers Clark, 1781

**Box 3**

**Folder 4**

Notes on Early Kentucky Settlers – undated

- "Early comers to Kentucky for the purpose of settling or speculating in lands, as shown by some cases reported in Kentucky Reports of Hughes Snead."

**Box 3**

**Folder 5**

Notes on the Western Courier – undated

**Box 3**

**Folder 6**

Notes on Kentucky History (General) – undated

**Box 3**

**Folder 7**

Facsimiles of Historical Letters

- Including Danville, to [?], September 9, 1786; Thomas Jefferson, Philadelphia, to [?], January 29, 1800; W. T. Casto, Maysville, to Colonel Leonides Metcalfe, May 6, 1862;
- Leonidas Metcalfe, Maysville, to W.T. Casto, May 6, 1862;

**Box 3**

**Folder 8**

Facsimiles of Marriage certificates

- Ponter and Suttin (1823); Vandiver and Conary (1824)

**Box 3**

**Folder 9**

Lists of prominent Kentuckians – ca. 1880- ca.1900

**Box 3**

**Folder 10**

List of Kentuckians – 1904

- Sent to Knickerbocker Publishing Co., 156 Fifth Ave., New York, March 12th, 1904

**Box 4**

**Folder 1**

List of sources for Kentucky history – Notebook – undated

**Box 4**

**Folder 2**

List of Kentucky histories – 19 p. – undated

**Box 4**

**Folder 3**

List of Kentucky Newspapers – undated

**Box 4**

**Folder 4**

Newspaper Clippings – Kentucky History – ca.1899-ca.1908

**Box 4**

**Folder 5**

Newspaper and Article Clippings – Early Kentucky History – c.1919

**Box 4**

**Folder 6**

Transcripts from the Kentucky Gazette, June 1827-November 1828

**Box 4**

**Folder 7**

Miscellaneous Clippings and Note Fragments

**Box 4**

**Folder 8**

Draper, Lyman C. - Evan and Isaac Shelby in Battle of Point Pleasant, October 10, 1774 – Historical Account – undated

**Box 4**

**Folder 9**

Quisenberry, A. C. "Battle of Winchester, KY" – Historical Account – undated

**Box 4**

**Folder 10**

Smith, Zachary F. – "The Mother of Henry Clay" – Biographical Sketch – Codex Typescript 17p. – 1897

**Series V: Writings**

**Box 4**

**Folder 11**

Biographical sketches of Kentuckians – ca. 1861- ca.1898

- Dr. Absalom Bainbridge; George M. Bibb; Pierce Butler; Reverend Ichabod Camp; Fortunatus Cosby, Sr.; Reuben Thomas Durrett; William Graves; William Hickman Hanson; Thomas Bell Monroe; Samuel Smith Nicholas; Wilson Cary Nicholas; Captain James Patton; Henry C. Pindell; General Charles Scott

**Box 4**

**Folder 12**

Draft of Speech for Brown University – June 21, 1899

**Box 4**

**Folder 13**

On the murder of Robert Johnston – Historical Account – undated

**Box 4**

**Folder 14**

"Drennon's Springs" – Historical Account – undated

**Box 4**

**Folder 15**

"Jackson's Troops in Battle of New Orleans" – Historical Account – undated

- Cdx 174

**Series VI: Oversize**

**Box 5**

**Folder 1**

Durrett, Reuben T. – "Extracts concerning Colonel William Linn" – Biographical Sketch – Codex Typescript 8 p. – ca. 1775-ca.1781

- Cdx 121

**Box 5**

**Folder 2**

Notebook - Notes for Biographical Encyclopedia – undated