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Descriptive Summary

Identifier ICU.SPCL.DURRETT.TRUSTEES

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

Date 1779-1825

Size 0.75 linear feet (1.5 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. The collection contains records of the Louisville, Kentucky Board of Trustees, from 1779 to 1825. The Board of Trustees was the primary local body of government responsible for the development and administration of Louisville prior to 1828. The bulk of the collection dates to 1780-1786, and pertains to the sale, purchase, and development of land in Louisville in the first decade after its foundation. The collection includes indentures, list of lots for sale, and records of transactions with surveyors. There is also a small collection of meeting minutes from 1781 to 1791.

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. Louisville, Kentucky Board of Trustees Records, [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.

**Historical Note**

The first Anglo-American settlement in the vicinity of modern day Louisville was established by Colonel George Rogers Clark in 1778. He was conducting a campaign in the region north of the Ohio River and sent the Illinois Regiment, a group of 150 soldiers, along with approximately 80 civilians, to start a farming settlement and communications post at the Falls of the Ohio.

The first local government was established almost immediately. The initial settlement was on Corn Island, but in May 1779, at the request of Clark, the settlers crossed the river and
established a permanent settlement on the mainland, naming it Louisville in honor of King Louis XVI of France. The first Trustees were selected in April of 1779, as part of this transition, with the first board consisting of seven men – William Harrod, Richard Chenoweth, Edward Bulger, James Patton, Henry French, Marsham Brashear, and Simon Moore.

On May 1, 1780, the Virginia General Assembly approved the town charter of Louisville. At that point, and for the following fifteen years, the Virginia legislature appointed a board of seven to nine trustees, who were responsible for the legislative and civic affairs of the town, and for the development and management of the land. Until 1795 the Trustees did not have to reside in Louisville.

One of the earliest Trustees, James John Floyd, was recruited by Clark and given the authority to plan and lay out the town. This done, Jefferson County, named after Thomas Jefferson, was formed as one of three original Kentucky counties from the old Kentucky County, Virginia, with Louisville as the county seat. Under the guidance of the Trustees the town underwent significant growth in the early 1780s and three hundred families immigrated to the area. Many of the earliest developments of the town were instigated by individual Trustees. By the close of 1780 Louisville’s first fire department was established, and the first street plan of Louisville was laid out by William Pope. Daniel Brodhead, another early Trustee, opened Louisville’s first general store in 1783. He was the first to reside and work outside of Louisville’s early fort structures. James John Floyd became the first town Judge in 1783, but was killed later that year. The first courthouse was completed in 1784.

When Kentucky became a state in 1792, the Kentucky legislature took over the responsibility of appointing the Trustees. This lasted only five years, as in 1797 the citizens were given home rule and the privilege of electing trustees themselves. By this period most important decisions were made at the state level, and the trustees were largely administrators rather than legislators. Nevertheless, the Trustees remained the primary local governing body of Louisville until 1828, when the population of Louisville surpassed 7,000 and it became Kentucky’s first city. The Trustees were replaced by a new, ten-member, common council and John Bucklin became the city’s first mayor.

Scope Note

Series I, Land Records, contains materials relating to the sale, distribution, and development of land during the years 1783-1825. The series is split into two subseries:

Subseries I, Indentures, contains land indenture deeds between the Board of Trustees and individual settlers, as well as an indenture between the Bank of the United States and the Board of Trustees, deeding public land for the development of streets. Materials are arranged chronologically.
Subseries II, Financial Records, contains lists of properties for sale, lists of property tax, correspondence concerning land purchases, and bills, receipts, and accounts for land survey. Materials are arranged chronologically.

Series II, Administration, contains materials pertaining to the running of the Board of Trustees, including resolutions and rules, two petitions, and two orders given by the Board. It also includes some meeting minutes from 1783-1786 in manuscript form, and a bound volume containing minutes from 1781-1791. Materials are arranged chronologically.

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. Joel Tanner Hart. Papers


Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Lewis Family. Papers

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. Richard Jouett Menefee Collection on Matthew Harris Jouett

Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Shelby Family. Papers

**Subject Headings**

- Durrett, Reuben T. (Reuben Thomas), 1824-1913
- Louisville (Ky.). Board of Trustees
- Louisville (Ky.)--History--18th century
- Louisville (Ky.)--History--19th century
- Public Lands – Virginia
- Public Lands – Kentucky

**INVENTORY**

**Series I: Land Records**

**Subseries 1: Indentures**

**Box 1**

**Folder 1**

Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to William Christy and James Macauley – Indentures – June 4, 1783 – A.D.S 4 p.

- Signed by William Pope, Isaac Cox, James Sullivan, Ben Pope, and Andrew Hynes.

**Box 1**

**Folder 2**

Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to Levin Powell – Indenture – June 4, 1783 – A.D.S 4 p.

- Signed by William Pope, Isaac Cox, James Sullivan, Ben Pope and Andrew Hynes, and William Oldham.

**Box 1**

**Folder 3**

Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to John Todd – Indenture – June 4, 1783 – A.D.S. 4 p.

- Signed by William Pope, Isaac Cox, James Sullivan, Ben Pope and Andrew Hynes, and William Oldham, Trustees.

**Box 1**

**Folder 4**

Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to Henry French – Indenture – August 18, 1783 – A.D.S. 2 p.
• Signed by William Pope, Marsham Brashear, James Sullivan, James Patton, George Wilson, and William Oldham, Trustees.

**Box 1**  
**Folder 5**  
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to Jacob Myers – Indentures – September 3, 1783 – A.D.S. 4 p.
• Signed by George Wilson, William Pope, James Patton, James Sullivan, and Andrew Hynes, Trustees.

**Box 1**  
**Folder 6**  
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to Jane Grant – Indenture – September 5, 1783 – A.D.S. 2 p.
• Signed by William Pope, Marsham Brashear, Benjamin Pope and James Patton, Trustees.

**Box 1**  
**Folder 7**  
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to Elisha L. Hall – Indenture – February 21, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.
• Signed by William Oldham, George Slaughter, James Sullivan, and Richard Taylor, Trustees.

**Box 1**  
**Folder 8**  
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to Daniel Brodhead - Indenture – May 14, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.

**Box 1**  
**Folder 9**  
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to John Dorrett – Indenture – October 7, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.
• Signed by William Pope, James Patton, George Wilson, William Johnston and Daniel Broadhead, Jr., Trustees.

**Box 1**  
**Folder 10**  

**Box 1**  
**Folder 11**  
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to James and Isaac Morrison – Indenture – December 10, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.

**Box 1**  
**Folder 12**  

**Box 1**  
**Folder 13**  
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to James Grant – Indenture – February 21, 1786 – A.D.S. 2 p.
Box 1
Folder 14
Board of Trustees, Louisville to Daniel Mead – Indentures – May 3, 1786 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 15
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to James Smith – Indenture – August 7, 1798 – A.L.S. 2 p.
• Signed by Lewis Field, Thomas Winn, and Benjamin Johnston, Trustees

Box 1
Folder 16

Box 1
Folder 17

Box 1
Folder 18
• Signed by John D. Colmesnil, Coleman Daniel, Edward Tyler, James Rudd and James Ferguson, Trustees

Box 1
Folder 19
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to Matilda Gwathmey – Indenture – August 28, 1821 – D.S. 1 p.
• Signed by Robert Breckenridge, Samuel Fitzhugh and Robert Todd, Trustees

Box 1
Folder 20
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to James Guthrie – Indenture – February 28, 1824 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 21
• Deeding land for streets to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky; certified by Joseph Watson, Mayor of Philadelphia.

Subseries 2: Financial Records

Box 1
Folder 22
• Petitions for permission to remain on public land or to move on own land

Box 1
Folder 23
Donne, John to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Letter – August 27, 1785 – A.L.S. 4 p.
• Petitions to remain on land; offers to buy land

Box 1
Folder 24

Box 1
Folder 25
• Notice that he intends to sue Trustees for surveying fees

Box 1
Folder 26

Box 1
Folder 27
• For payment from the Board of Trustees

Box 1
Folder 28
Campbell, John, Louisville, Kentucky to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Statement of Account – December, 1785 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 29
Donne, John to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Letter – December 10, 1785 – A.L.S. 2 p
• Asks for opportunity of explaining right to land claimed by others.

Box 1
Folder 30

Box 1
Folder 31

Box 1
Folder 32

Box 1
Folder 33
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to William Leyton – Statement of Account – April 1, 1786 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 1
Folder 34

Box 1
Folder 35
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Statement of Expenses – April 1, 1786 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 1
Folder 36
Louisville, Kentucky – List of Lots – May 1, 1786 – A.D. 8 p.

Box 1
Folder 37

Box 1
Folder 38

Box 1
Folder 39

Box 1
Folder 40
• Asking Johnston to pay account of Benjamin Pope

Box 1
Folder 41

Box 1
Folder 42

Box 1
Folder 43
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – List of Taxes Owed – April 8, 1800 – A.D.S. 6 p.

Box 1
Folder 44
Todd, Robert, Simeon Goodwin and Thomas Prather, Commissioners to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Land Survey – June 9, 1817 – A.D.S. 1 p.

Box 1
Folder 45
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Memo – May 27, 1818 – A.D.S. 1 p.
• Resolution to pay Robert Breckenridge for surveying and extension of the town

Box 1
Folder 46
Berthoud, N. and O.M. Briggs to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Receipted Bill – March 5, 1821 – A.D.S. 1 p.

Box 1
Folder 47
Bulletts and Jones to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Receipted Bill – March 6, 1821 – A.D.S. 1 p.

Series II: Administration

Box 1
Folder 48
Trustees of the Town of Louisville – Resolution – April 24, 1779 – Copy of A.D.S. 1 p.
• Signed by William Harrod, Richard Chenoweth, Edward Bulger, James Patton, Henry French, Marsham Brashear, and Simon Moore, Trustees; regarding distribution of land plots

Box 1
Folder 49
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – September 5, 1783 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 1
Folder 50
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky to the Assembly of Virginia – Petition – November 22, 1783 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 51
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting minutes – November 22, 1783 – A.D.S. 6 p.

Box 1
Folder 52
• Signed by Will Pope, James Sullivan, James Patten, Will Oldham and James Morrison.

Box 1
Folder 53
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – September 13, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 1
Folder 54
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – October 6, 1785 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 55
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – October 7, 1785 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 56
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – October 8, 1785 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 57
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – October 10, 1785 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 58
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – November 3, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 2
Folder 1
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – November 5, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 2
Folder 2
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – November 19, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 2
Folder 3
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – December 7, 1785 – A.D.S. 4 p.

Box 2
Folder 4
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – December 9, 1785 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 2
Folder 5
Archer, Joshua to the Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Petition – December 30, 1785 – A.L.S. 2 p.

Box 2
Folder 6
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Meeting Minutes – February 21, 1786 – A.D.S. 2 p.

Box 2
Folder 7
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Statement – October 10, 1787 –A.D. 4 p.
• A statement to the new Board of Trustees; regarding repeal of act authorizing the old board.

Box 2
Folder 9
Board of Trustees, Louisville, Kentucky – Order – June 7, 1797 – A.D.S. 1 p.
• For clerk to appoint person to collect city papers and records

Box 2
Folder 10

Box 2
Folder 11
“Minutes of the trustees of Louisville” – Minutes – 1781-1791 – Codex Typescript transcript. 45p.
• Cdx 124; Also contains names of those who drew lots in 1779 and the number of the lots they drew, and a list of conveyances of lots in the town of Louisville.

Box 2
Folder 12
Board of Trustees, Louisville to F.W. Grayson – Commission – October 9, 1819 – A.D. 1 p.