

University of Chicago Library

Guide to the Reuben T. Durrett Collection of Joel Tanner Hart Papers 1823-1876



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.HARTJ
Title	Durrett, Reuben T. Collection. Joel Tanner Hart Papers
Date	1823-1876
Size	6.5 linear feet (9 boxes)
Repository	Hanna Holborn Gray 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. Joel Tanner Hart (1810-1877) was an American sculptor, born in Kentucky. The collection contains correspondence, manuscripts of Hart's poetry, a diary (1846-1848), and miscellaneous notes. Correspondents include Horace Greeley, Henry Clay, Robert Browning, Andrew Jackson, and James Polk. Materials span the period 1823-1876.

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. Joel Tanner Hart Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Hanna Holborn Gray 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

Joel Tanner Hart was born in 1810 near Winchester, Kentucky. Although well-educated, Hart's parents suffered from financial difficulties during his childhood, and they could give their son only three months of formal schooling. Hart augmented his education informally with the help of his brothers and through his own reading before seeking work as a stonemason. He found he enjoyed working in stone, and when he met the sculptor Shobal Vail Clevenger in Lexington at the age of twenty-one, Hart discovered his life's work. Clevenger's bust of Henry Clay inspired Hart to attempt one of Cassius Marcellus Clay. The bust was a good one, and Hart next persuaded Andrew Jackson to sit for him at the Hermitage. This bust, too, was a success. Hart returned to Lexington and produced a number of busts of prominent members of the community.

In the early 1840's Hart left Kentucky on the first of a series of travels to study statuary. Except for brief visits, he was never again to return to his native state. Hart journeyed first to the eastern United States, studying sculpture in Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Richmond and New York. His reputation grew as he traveled, and in 1846 he received a commission from the Ladies' Clay Association in Richmond for a life-sized statue of Henry Clay, for which he was to be paid \$5,000. Hart spent three years perfecting the plaster model before shipping it to Italy where he planned to copy it in marble. Having shipped his model, Hart departed for Europe himself, planning to set up a permanent studio in Italy. He first visited Rome but decided to settle in Florence. This arranged, he left Italy for a tour of Western Europe, spending fourteen months studying anatomy in London, and visiting Paris to study the sculptures of the old masters at the Louvre before returning to Florence.

Hart's early work in Florence was interrupted by a bout of cholera and typhoid. During his convalescence he worked on an invention that aptly reflects his mechanical approach to the problem of capturing likenesses - a measuring-machine to increase accuracy in judging dimensions for portrait work. The machine was patented in France and in England, and the advertisements for it in London brought Hart a number of new commissions. While filling these orders, as well as several American ones, he gradually brought his statue of Henry Clay nearer completion. The latter project had been delayed for some years when a shipwreck destroyed the first plaster model. When it was finally finished in 1859, Hart returned to the United States for its unveiling. His reception during his eight months' stay was evidence of how much his reputation had grown since his departure for Europe. The Clay statue was extremely well-received, and Hart immediately received commissions for similar statues from Louisville and from New Orleans. Abandoning his plans to open a studio in New York, he returned to Florence to begin the commissioned work.

By now his portrait work had strengthened Hart's financial position sufficiently for him to begin work on an idea he had cherished for some time--a group entitled "The Triumph of Chastity" (later "Woman Triumphant") consisting of a life-sized female nude holding an arrow out of the reach of Cupid. He worked at this project for nearly thirty years, until his death in January, 1885, perfecting it through studies of numerous models and refusing several very attractive offers for its purchase.

In addition to his work as a sculptor, Hart wrote a number a poems - mostly on romantic subjects and written in a rather conventional style - and maintained an active social life. He never married. Despite his own attachment to his "Woman Triumphant," it seems generally agreed that he demonstrated greater ability at portrait work, in which his mechanical and anatomical approach to sculpting enhanced his flair for capturing likenesses. Hart's fine head of Henry Clay, as well as a bust of John J. Crittenden, may now be seen at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Hart died in Florence in 1877 and was buried in the English Cemetery. By Legislative Act, his remains were exhumed in 1884, and returned to his native state of Kentucky for reinterment in the Frankfort Cemetery in Frankfort, Kentucky.

Scope Note

Series I, Personal, is split into three subseries. Materials are arranged chronologically within subseries.

Subseries I, Ephemera, contains a phrenological chart, teaching contract, an obituary for Dr. Southwood Smith, a certified birth certificate (in Italian) and a small collection of playbills. The bulk of this subseries consists of miscellaneous personal and business documents, including bills, receipts, orders for sculpture work, and travel expenses.

Subseries II, Diaries, contains Hart's personal diaries from August 1845 - June 1848. These are compendiums of memoranda of expenses, commissions received, and of Hart's travels.

Subseries III, Notes, contains brief observations on miscellaneous topics related to personal business matters and to Hart's work in sculpture. Materials span the period 1832 – 1876.

Series II, Correspondence, contains the bulk of the Joel Tanner Hart Papers. Hart maintained an active correspondence with his family and friends in Kentucky, and also wrote to such notables as Horace Greeley, Henry Clay, Robert Browning, and Garibaldi. During his travels, Hart sought letters of introduction, and his correspondence contains recommendations from President Polk (introducing Hart to the historian George Bancroft), Henry Clay Andrew Jackson, and John Crittenden. Correspondence is arranged chronologically and spans the period 1823-1876.

Series III, poetry, contains a selection of drafts and manuscript copies of Hart's poems. Topics include love, beauty, and the deaths of Lincoln, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and various friends. Also included are a small collection of poems written by others. Materials are arranged chronologically and span the period 1832-1876.

Series IV, oversize contains a small collection of formal travel documents, including a passport and confirmations of citizenship. It also contains patent documents and diagrams relating to his invention of the 'pointing machine'.

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
- Hart, Joel Tanner, 1810-1877
- Polk, James K. (James Knox), 1795-1849
- Greeley, Horace, 1811-1872
- Clay, Henry, 1777-1852
- Browning, Robert, 1812-1889
- Jackson, Andrew, 1767-1845
- Artists -- Kentucky
- Artists -- United States
- Sculptors
- Sculptors -- Kentucky
- Sculptors -- United States

INVENTORY

Series I: Personal

Subseries 1: Ephemera

Box 1

Folder 1

Teaching Contract – April, 1831

Box 1

Folder 2

Phrenological Chart and Pamphlet – circa 1844-1859

Box 1

Folder 3

Obituary – Dr. Southwood Smith – December, 1861

Box 1

Folder 4

Playbills, 1863-1869

Box 1

Folder 5

Certified Birth Certificate (Italian) – undated

Box 1

Folder 6

Bills, Receipts, and Money Orders – 1841-1859

Box 1

Folder 7

Bills, Receipts, and Money Orders – 1860-1876

Subseries 2: Diaries

Box 1

Folder 8

August, 1845 - January, 1846

Box 1

Folder 9

February, 1846 - October, 1846

Box 1

Folder 10

November, 1846 - June, 1848

Subseries 3: Notes

Box 1

Folder 11

1834 - 1838

Box 1

Folder 12

1845 - 1848

Box 1

Folder 13

1849

Box 1

Folder 14

1850 - 1855

Box 1

Folder 15

1856 - 1859

Box 1

Folder 16

1860 - 1866

Box 1

Folder 17

1872 - 1876

Box 1

Folder 18

undated

Series II: Correspondence

Box 2

Folder 1

1823-1844

Box 2

Folder 2

1845

Box 2

Folder 3

1846

Box 2

Folder 4

1847

Box 2

Folder 5

1848

Box 2

Folder 6

1849

Box 2

Folder 7

1850

Box 2

Folder 8

1851

Box 2

Folder 9

1852

Box 2

Folder 10

January - March, 1853

Box 2

Folder 11

April - June, 1853

Box 2

Folder 12

July – December, 1853

Box 2

Folder 13

January – March, 1854

Box 2

Folder 14

April – June, 1854

Box 2

Folder 15

July – September, 1854

Box 2

Folder 16

October – December, 1854

Box 3

Folder 1

January - April, 1855

Box 3

Folder 2

May – July, 1855

Box 3

Folder 3

August – December, 1855

Box 3

Folder 4

January – April, 1856

Box 3

Folder 5

May – August, 1856

Box 3

Folder 6

September – October, 1856

Box 3

Folder 7

November- December 1856

Box 3

Folder 8

January, 1857

Box 3

Folder 9

February, 1857

Box 3

Folder 10

March, 1857

Box 3

Folder 11

April, 1857

Box 3

Folder 12

May, 1857

Box 3

Folder 13

June, 1857

Box 3

Folder 14

July, 1857

Box 3

Folder 15

August, 1857

Box 3

Folder 16

September – December, 1857

Box 4

Folder 1

January - March, 1858

Box 4

Folder 2

April - June, 1858

Box 4

Folder 3

July – September, 1858

Box 4

Folder 4

October – December, 1858

Box 4

Folder 5

January - February, 1859

Box 4

Folder 6

March – April, 1859

Box 4

Folder 7

May – June, 1859

Box 4

Folder 8

July – August, 1859

Box 4

Folder 9

September – October, 1859

Box 4

Folder 10

November – December, 1859

Box 4

Folder 11

January – February, 1860

Box 4

Folder 12

March – April, 1860

Box 4

Folder 13

May – June, 1860

Box 4

Folder 14

July - August, 1860

Box 4

Folder 15

September - December, 1860

Box 4

Folder 16

January - June, 1861

Box 4

Folder 17

July - December, 1861

Box 5

Folder 1

1862

Box 5

Folder 2

1863

Box 5

Folder 3

1864

Box 5

Folder 4

January – June, 1865

Box 5

Folder 5

July – December, 1865

Box 5

Folder 6

January – June, 1866

Box 5

Folder 7

July – December, 1866

Box 5

Folder 8

January – June, 1867

Box 5

Folder 9

July – December, 1867

Box 5

Folder 10

January - June, 1868

Box 5

Folder 11

June – September, 1868

Box 5

Folder 12

January- June, 1869

Box 5

Folder 13

July- December, 1869

Box 5

Folder 14

January- June, 1870

Box 5

Folder 15

July- December, 1870

Box 6

Folder 1

January – June, 1871

Box 6

Folder 2

July - December, 1871

Box 6

Folder 3

January – June, 1872

Box 6

Folder 4

July – December, 1872

Box 6

Folder 5

January - February, 1873

Box 6

Folder 6

March - April, 1873

Box 6

Folder 7

May - June, 1873

Box 6

Folder 8

July - August, 1873

Box 6

Folder 9

September – October, 1873

Box 6

Folder 10

November – December, 1873

Box 6

Folder 11

January – March, 1874

Box 6

Folder 12

April – June, 1874

Box 6

Folder 13

July – September, 1874

Box 6

Folder 14

October - December, 1874

Box 6

Folder 15

January - April, 1875

Box 6

Folder 16

May - August, 1875

Box 6

Folder 17

September – December, 1875

Box 6

Folder 18

January – June, 1876

Box 6

Folder 19

July - December, 1876

Box 6

Folder 20

undated

Series III: Poetry

Box 7

Folder 1

1832 - 1833

Box 7

Folder 2

1834 - 1835

Box 7

Folder 3

1836 - 1839

Box 7

Folder 4

1840 - 1841

Box 7

Folder 5

1842 - 1845

Box 7

Folder 6

1846

Box 7

Folder 7

1847 - 1848

Box 7

Folder 8

1849

Box 7

Folder 9

1850

Box 7

Folder 10

1851

Box 7

Folder 11

1852

Box 7

Folder 12

1853

Box 7

Folder 13

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Box 7

Folder 14

1855

Box 7

Folder 15

1856

Box 7

Folder 16

1857

Box 7

Folder 17

1858

Box 8

Folder 1

1859

Box 8

Folder 2

1860 - 1861

Box 8

Folder 3

1862 - 1863

Box 8

Folder 4

1864 - 1866

Box 8

Folder 5

1867

Box 8

Folder 6

1868

Box 8

Folder 7

1869

Box 8

Folder 8

1870

Box 8

Folder 9

1871 - 1872

Box 8
Folder 10
1873

Box 8
Folder 11
1874

Box 8
Folder 12
1875

Box 8
Folder 13
1876

Box 8
Folder 14
undated

Series IV: Oversize

Box 9
Folder 1
Sculpting Equipment Sketches and Patent Documents – circa 1852-1855

Box 9
Folder 2
Passports and Travel Documents – 1837-1861