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Guide to the Alexander H. Stephens Collection 1870-1876



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.STEPHENSAH
Title	Stephens, Alexander H. Collection
Date	1870-1876
Size	0.25 linear feet (1 box)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract Alexander Hamilton Stephens (1812 –1883) was an American politician, best known for occupying the position of Vice President of the Confederate States of America throughout the American Civil War. The Collection contains correspondence written by Stephens between 1870 and 1876, and a Bryant, Stratton & Co.’s International College Bank note.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Stephens, Alexander H. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Biographical Note

Alexander Hamilton Stephens was born in Crawfordville, Georgia, to Andrew Baskins Stephens and Margaret Grier on February 11, 1812. Grier died when Stephens was only three months old, but it is said that his character was a “marked blending of parental traits.” Shortly after, in 1814, Stephens’ father remarried to Matilda Lindsay. In 1826, Andrew Stephens and Matilda died only days apart.

Following the death of his parents, Stephens lived with his uncle, General Aaron W. Grier. Grier had inherited his father’s library, “the largest library in all that part of the country,” which no doubt fueled Stephens love of reading, even as a youth. Stephens attended Franklin College in Athens, Georgia, and graduated at the top of his class in 1832. After teaching for a few years, Stephens took up law and passed the bar in 1834. For the next 32 years, he practiced law and gained a reputation as a very capable defender.

Stephens served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1843-1859 as a member of the Whig party, followed by the Unionist, and finally as a Democrat in the mid-1850s. Stephens rose to prominence as a Democrat, serving as President James Buchanan's floor manager in the House. In 1858, Stephens did not seek re-election to the Congress, and became increasingly critical of southern extremists.

In 1861, Stephens was elevated as a delegate to the Georgia Secession Convention, convened to decide Georgia's response to the election of Abraham Lincoln. By February, he had been elected Vice President of the Confederacy, despite calling for the South to remain loyal to the north, and attempting to remind his fellow delegates that Republicans were a minority in Congress. Stephens' role as Vice President was marked by increasingly disillusionment with the Confederacy. In March of 1861, he gave his famous Cornerstone Speech in which he argued that slavery was a natural condition and served as the foundation of the Confederacy. However, by 1862, Stephens was publically expressing his opposition to Confederate President Jefferson Davis' administration. In 1864, he gave a speech to the Georgia Legislature which strongly criticized the Davis administrations support of conscription and the suspension of habeas corpus. Until the end of the war, Stephens continued to act with the aim of bringing peace between the North and the South.

After the war, Stephens was arrested and imprisoned in Fort Warren for five months until October 1865. IN 1866, he was elected to the US Senate, but was not allowed to take his position because of a restriction on former Confederates. From 1873-1882, Stephens served once again as a US Representative for Georgia's 8th district. In 1882, Stephens was elected Governor of Georgia. He died on March 4, 1883, only four months after taking office.

Scope Note

The Alexander H. Stephens Collection includes three letters written between 1870 and 1876 and a banknote. Two letters also are stored with envelopes addressed to D. Sweeny Stute. The letters relate to the publication of Stephen's "The War Between the States," among other topics. A short note written by Stute identifying the context of the letter is written on the back of the only undated letter. Also included is a Bryant, Stratton & Co.'s International College Bank note.

The collection was previously part of the Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection.

Related Resources

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

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/topics.php>

Subject Headings

- Stephens, Alexander H, (Alexander Hamilton), 1812-1883
- Stute, D. Sweeny
-
- Authors and publishers -- United States -- History -- 19th century

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

Correspondence, 1870-1876

- Alexander H. Stephens to Sweeny Stute, with envelope, June 30, 1870
- Alexander H. Stephens to D.S. Stute, November 28, 1876
- Alexander H. Stephens to D.S. Stute, with envelope, undated

Box 1

Folder 2

Bryant, Stratton & Co.'s International College Bank note, 1870