

John Thomas Ricketts Collection Finding Aid MS071

John Thomas Ricketts Papers (MS071)
1787-1904



Title Statement

John Thomas Ricketts Collection Finding Aid MS071

Publication Statement

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MS071

Unit Date

1787-1904

Language

English .

Creator

Ricketts, John Thomas, 1805-1863

Creator

Cummings, Norris Stanley, 1834-1904

Creator

Cummings, Helen Norris, 1865-1949

Extent

4.5 Linear Feet 3 boxes

Repository

Local History and Special Collections Branch, Alexandria Library

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of the Esther Green Estate, 1982.

Preferred Citation

[Item identification], John Thomas Ricketts Papers, MS071, Alexandria Library, Local History and Special Collections, Alexandria, Virginia.

Biographical / Historical

William Ricketts (originally Ricard), an Englishman, was the first member of the Ricketts family to settle in the colonies. He chose Cecil County as his home. David Ricketts (1765-1831), a descendant of William, moved from Cecil County to Tuscarora Mill in Loudoun County, Virginia with his wife Elizabeth Barr Ricketts (1763-1829), sometime in the late 18th century. Their son, John Thomas (JT) Ricketts (1805-1863) was born at the Mill. Soon after, David and Elizabeth moved their family to Cameron Mill in Cameron, Virginia. Cameron was located just outside of Alexandria, Virginia. In 1833, JT Ricketts married Susan Wattson (1814-1843) and relocated to Philadelphia, her native city. Together they had six children. Susan's father, Thomas Wattson (1788-1874), brought JT into his baking business, T. Wattson & Sons. The company baked biscuits, crackers, and breads specially packaged for use on ships as well as cakes and breads for local consumption. In 1852, JT bought Thomas out of the business and formed Wattson & Co. with his brother-in-law, Edwin Wattson. Their partnership lasted until April of 1855 when a feud between Ricketts and Thomas Wattson caused a rift in the two family's relations. JT then created his own baking company, Ricketts and Wattson. JT Ricketts died in 1863. Norris Cummings (1834-1904), Ricketts' son-in-law, acted as executor of his estate. He ran Ricketts and Wattson until 1865, when the bakery was sold. Helen Cummings (1865-1949), the daughter of Emma Ricketts Cummings and Norris Cummings, became the custodian of JT Ricketts' papers upon her parents' deaths. She moved from Philadelphia to Alexandria in 1894, where she began researching and collecting Ricketts family genealogies. She died in Alexandria.

Content Description

This collection has three series: the papers of JT Ricketts, of Norris Cummings and of Helen Cummings. The Ricketts series makes up the bulk of the collection. Its main focus is on Ricketts' business records, but some personal documents are included. The business records contain financial, legal and administrative materials. They trace the rise of T. Wattson & Sons from a small bakery into an industrial "steam" bakery that supplied organizations such as the US Navy with packaged bread products. This development was made possible by the company's purchase of a cracker molding machine patent to mass produce bakery goods. Also found in the Ricketts' series is documentation of the divisive feud between Thomas Wattson and Ricketts and records relating to Ricketts' investments in Pennsylvania coal and timber lands. The Norris Cummings series consists of a few letters, accounts and printed materials. The Helen Cummings series is made up of Ricketts family genealogical materials including a family bible, correspondence to relatives and genealogical organizations and family trees.

Related Materials

[Helen Norris Cummings Papers \(MS072\)](#)

Keywords

Alexandria (Va.) -- Genealogy.

Ricketts family

Cummings family

Cameron Mills

Bakeries.

Letters.

Arrangement

Organized by series according to the creators and/or collectors of the materials.

The JT Ricketts series is then broken down by subseries and activity and/or form.