

A Guide to the Governor Gilbert Carlton Walker Executive Papers, 1869-1873

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Descriptive Summary

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Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

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Acquired prior to 1905.

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Biographical/Historical Information

Gilbert Carlton Walker, the son of Sabinus and Matilda Galloway Walker, was born on 1 August 1832, near Binghamton, New York. An 1854 graduate of Hamilton College in New York, Walker was admitted to the bar in September 1855 and commenced the practice of law in Oswego. He married Olive Evans, also of Binghamton, in April 1857, and the two relocated to Chicago in 1859, where Walker continued practicing the law. Health problems compelled Walker to relocate to a warmer climate, and in 1864 he and his wife moved to Norfolk, Va., where he soon had interests in the Exchange National Bank and American Iron-Works and Dock Company. Walker was elected governor of Virginia in 1869 as a "True Republican," and he oversaw changes to the administration of Virginia's fiscal debt and took a lead role in having Virginia readmitted to the Union. After serving as governor, Walker was elected to two terms in the United States House of Representatives from the Richmond district and then became president of the Granite Insurance Company of Richmond. Walker and his wife returned to Binghamton in 1879, and then relocated to New York City in 1881, where he practiced law until his death from tuberculosis on 11 May 1885.

Scope and Content

Governor Walker's Executive papers are organized chronologically and primarily consist of incoming correspondence dated between September 1869 and December 1873, with additional undated material at the end of the collection. Requests for appointments to all manner of public office, including Inspector of Hides and Leather, Notaries Public, local judgeships, and the Commissioner of the Virginia-West Virginia Boundary Line Commission, are included, as are letters from individuals asking to be part of Virginia's delegations to both the Centennial Celebration of Independence scheduled for Philadelphia in 1876 and the 1873 Vienna Exposition.

There are a considerable number of letters from Virginia citizens seeking assistance finding employment, educational training or money, many claiming to have suffered severely since the end of the Civil War, as well as numerous requests for pardons for convicted criminals and removals of political disabilities. There are also letters of support and financial contributions to Virginians suffering from the April 1870 disaster at the Capitol, in which the third floor of the building collapsed, killing over 60 people, and the massive flooding of the James River in the fall of 1870.

Of note is also correspondence between Walker and United States Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, regarding Virginia's readmission to the Union (26 January 1870); between Walker and the Auditor of Public Accounts regarding the repayment of the public debt; statistical returns from Virginia localities regarding taxes and court cases (fall 1871); an undated joint resolution of the Senate and House of Delegates asking the United States State Department for the return of the Ordinance of Secession to the Virginia State Library as part of the official history of the state; and a letter from W. C. Newberry, Superintendent of Public Buildings, regarding money for repairs to various buildings in the capital (9 October 1873).

There is also correspondence regarding the University of Virginia, including a letter from mathematics professor Charles Venable asking the governor to appropriate \$5000 per year for the maintenance of a proposed observatory to house the world's largest refracting telescope, donated to the University by Leander J. McCormick (11 August 1870), a letter regarding the financial condition of the University (spring 1872), and a letter from William Pope Dabney, in which he asks to be elected to the University's Board of Visitors (18 December 1873).

There are also numerous pieces of correspondence from 1872 regarding the appointment of a state Fish Commissioner, as well as issues surrounding stocking state streams with salmon. Correspondents of note include Spencer F. Baird, United States Commissioner of Fisheries, and Seth Green, pioneering fish culturist from New York.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged chronologically by date of endorsement, where available, with additional undated material at the end of the collection

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