

Sheffey, John P. Papers

John P. Sheffey Papers
1853-1989



Title Statement

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.2001.060

Unit Date

1853-1989

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

This collection includes the letters of a Confederate cavalry officer to his wife in Wytheville, Virginia, together with other Civil War and family correspondence, military documents, writings, printed material and ephemera.

Creator

Sheffey, John Preston

Extent

0.6 Linear Feet 1 box; 1 oversize folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open to research.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

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Processing Information

The processing, arrangement and description of the John P. Sheffey Papers commenced in December 2001 and was completed in March 2002. Additional materials, received from the same source in 2004, were added to the collection in April 2009.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], John P. Sheffey Papers, Ms2001-060, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

John Preston "Pres" Sheffey, Southwest Virginia attorney, judge and Confederate cavalry officer, was born in Marion, Virginia on December 12, 1837. The son of James W. and Eleanor F. Preston Sheffey, John Sheffey graduated from Emory and Henry College in 1857, then studied law at the University of Virginia. Admitted to the bar in 1859, Sheffey entered into law practice as a junior partner with his father.

In February 1861, the elder Sheffey was elected delegate to Virginia's secession convention; later, he served as captain of the Smyth County home guards, responsible largely for guarding the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad. John Sheffey, meanwhile, enlisted in the Smyth Dragoons on May 27, 1861. Initially incorporated into the 50th Virginia Infantry as a cavalry company, the dragoons in September were assigned to the 8th Virginia Cavalry as Company A, with Sheffey serving as first lieutenant. Company A served throughout much of the war in southwestern Virginia and the counties that later became West Virginia. The company was encamped near Lewisburg, (West) Virginia during the autumn of 1861 and in Mercer County the following spring.

Sheffey was elected captain of Company A on May 14, 1862. During that summer and autumn, his unit participated in Jenkins' cavalry raid, proceeding through northwestern Virginia to the Ohio River, then southward to the Kanawha Valley. They had returned to the New River Valley by November and established quarters in Montgomery County for the winter of 1862-63. Sheffey was granted leave in the summer of 1863, while the 8th Virginia was in the Shenandoah Valley. Traveling southward to Wytheville, Sheffey married Josephine Spiller on June 19. (The couple would have seven children: Eleanor F., Susan M., Margaret P., Josephine S., James W., Miriam and John P.).

During the winter of 1863-64, Sheffey took a brief medical leave and then served as judge advocate in a Lee County court-martial session, while the 8th Virginia remained in southwestern Virginia. On August 7, 1864, Company A participated in a battle at Moorefield, West Virginia. Sheffey was one of a number of Confederates captured by Union forces. Soon transferred to Camp Chase, Sheffey remained a prisoner until exchanged in February 1865. He apparently rejoined his regiment at Appomattox, just as the war was drawing to a close.

Returning to Marion, Sheffey continued as his father's law partner until the latter's death in June 1876. Sheffey's law practice remained his primary occupation until his election to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1893 and his subsequent appointment as judge of Virginia's sixteenth judicial circuit in 1895. Josephine S. Sheffey died November 19, 1904, and John P. Sheffey died the following year on August 20. He is buried in Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Virginia.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains the papers of John Preston Sheffey, an attorney, judge and Confederate cavalry officer from Smyth County, Virginia. Included are such items as correspondence, journals, military documents, printed materials and ephemera.

Comprising the majority of the collection, the correspondence consists mostly of letters written by Sheffey to his wife, Josephine Spiller Sheffey, during the Civil War. Sheffey's early letters are devoted largely to personal matters, particularly his courtship with Josephine. His war-time letters also chronicle the establishment of Company A of the 8th Virginia Cavalry and its role in the war. General observations on military matters and social conditions are included as well, as Sheffey writes from various camps in western Virginia and later from the military prison at Camp Chase, Ohio. Scattered throughout the correspondence are a few letters from other friends and relatives--particularly Sheffey's sisters Margaret and Ellen. Like Sheffey's correspondence, these letters (approximately 15 in number) also relate largely to personal matters and the war's progress. Together with the original correspondence are photocopies of selected letters.

The collection also contains the texts of three speeches, likely delivered by James W. Sheffey, on the 1848 presidential election and intemperance. Two bound volumes of John Sheffey's own writings are included as well. The first, available in the collection only as a photocopy, is a journal spanning three months in 1855. Recorded in its entries are weather conditions, book readings, sermons attended, and other daily activities. Sheffey also writes of local and state political affairs and mentions such incidents as the flogging of a local enslaved person for marrying without consent, the murder of W. H. Spiller in Wytheville, and a fire. Included also are three recipes and various newspaper clippings, largely relating to Reconstruction politics. The second volume is a copy book spanning the years 1855 to 1860 and containing various compositions penned by Sheffey on such diverse topics as "Spain, Her Chivalry and Shame," "America and Greece: the Living and the Dead," "Creation," and "Virtue: the Best National Safeguard." (Perhaps most significant among the essays is Sheffey's "Can the Union be Dissolved," in which the writer takes a very strong pro-Union position.) Included also are texts of speeches delivered at Emory & Henry College and the University of Virginia, together with a few poems.

Representing Sheffey's service in the 8th Virginia Cavalry is a small set of documents, including two muster rolls, a court-martial specification of charges against Private H. F. Gullion, a leave of absence granted to Sheffey, a letter of transfer for Private James P. Mantz, and a letter from Sheffey to General Echols, requesting a pass for his wife to Greenbrier.

Included among the printed materials are various newspaper articles about the Civil War in Southwest Virginia and a 1921 article about Betty Blount, a formerly enslaved person. Also included here is an 1868 invitation for a Calliopean Society program at Emory & College.

Completing the collection is a set of general materials, including a Civil War poem by Sheffey, certification of Sheffey's election as judge in 1894, and several calling cards.

Related Archival Material

Robertson, James I. Jr., ed., *Soldier of southwestern Virginia: the Civil War letters of Captain John Preston Sheffey* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004). E581.6 8th S54 2004 Civil War Spec

The [James I. Robertson Jr. Papers \(Ms94-021\)](#) contain materials compiled by Robertson in preparation for *Soldier of southwestern Virginia*. Included are transcripts of the letters, Sheffey genealogy notes and sources, and essays on Sheffey and various battles in which he participated. Many of these materials (transcripts and essays) were produced by Prof. Robert Seager II.

Keywords

Local/Regional History and Appalachian South
Civil War
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
Sheffey, John Preston
Blount, Betty (enslaved person)

Rights Statement for Archival Description

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Arrangement

This collection is arranged by document type, then chronologically.

Description of Subordinate Components

Correspondence

Unit Date 1853-1858

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Unit Date Jan-Jun 1861

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Unit Date Jul-Dec 1861

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

Unit Date 1862

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)

Unit Date Jan-Jun 1863

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 5 (folder)

Unit Date Jul-Dec 1863

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 6 (folder)

Unit Date 1864

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 7 (folder)

Unit Date 1865-1902, n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 8 (folder)

Photocopies of correspondence

Unit Date 1861

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 9 (folder)

Unit Date 1862

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 10 (folder)

Unit Date 1863

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 11 (folder)

Unit Date 1864-65

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 12 (folder)

Speeches

Unit Date 1848, n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 13 (folder)

Journal

Unit Date 1855

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 14 (folder)

Compositions Book

Unit Date 1855-1860

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 15 (folder)

Military Documents

Unit Date 1862-63

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 16 (folder)

General Physical Description note [See also Oversize Materials]

Printed Materials

Unit Date 1912-1989, n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 17 (folder)

Invitation to annual exercises of Calliopean Society of Emory & Henry College

Unit Date 1868

"A Chapter of Local War History In and Around the Town of Marion" (by Mrs. B. E. Copenhaver) - Richmond Times Dispatch

Unit Date Jul 7 1912

"Old Aunt Betty, 105, Primps for Picture" [re: former enslaved person Betty Blount of Southwest Virginia] - Richmond Times-Dispatch

Unit Date Oct 9 1921

"The Federal Raid Against Wytheville" (by Miriam Sheffey) - Marion Democrat

Unit Date Feb 4 1930

"The Civil War Made These Women Heroines and Victims" - Smyth County News

Unit Date Feb 28 1985

Flyer for re-enactment of the Battle of Carnifex Ferry

Unit Date 1989

"Leaders of the War Between the States" -

Unit Date n.d.

General Physical Description note [typescript, 47 pages]

Scope and Contents note

[biographical sketches of Civil War leaders]

General Materials

Unit Date 1862-1966, n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 18 (folder)

"The Downfall of Peace: a Christmas Reverie at Camp Chase, Ohio" by John P. Sheffey

Unit Date 1864

General Physical Description note [typescript, 5 pages]

Tax receipt: Josephine Spiller - Wytheville

Unit Date 1862

Bill of lading from Southern Express Company to Mrs. Sheffey for valise

Unit Date 1864

Certificate of election for John P. Sheffey as judge of 16th circuit

Unit Date 1864

Letter from S. B. Campbell to Virginia Historical Society

Unit Date 1966

General Physical Description note [phototocopies]

Scope and Contents note

[re: 1867 letter from Gen. W. H. Powell to Mrs. Spiller; accompanied by typescript of Powell's letter]

John Preston Sheffey II obituary

Unit Date n.d.

Extract from eulogy delivered by Goodridge A. Wilson Jr. at the funeral of John Preston Sheffey II

Unit Date n.d.

General Physical Description note [typescript]

Calling cards

James H. Buford

Unit Date n.d.

Mr. and Mrs. William W. Hanson

Unit Date n.d.

Mr. Huff

Unit Date n.d.

Julia A. Lynch

Unit Date n.d.

A. G. Pendleton

Unit Date Jul 4 1857

"Miss Radfords"

Unit Date n.d.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Sayers

Unit Date n.d.

John P. Sheffey

Unit Date Jun 14 1857

Mrs. Susan Spiller

Unit Date n.d.

Envelopes

Unit Date n.d.

General Physical Description note [10 items]

Oversize Materials

Unit Date 1862

oversize 1 (folder)

Muster rolls for Company A, 8th Virginia Cavalry

Unit Date Jun 30 1862

Unit Date Oct 31 1862