

A Guide to the William Gray Papers, 1819-1875

William Gray Papers, 1793-1873

1793-1873



A Collection in the Virginia Historical Society Mss1 G7952 a FA2

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History

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Title Statement

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Descriptive Summary

Collection number

Mss1 G7952 a FA2

Language

English

Abstract

Collection contains letters, 1833-1873, written to William Gray as a director of the Bank of Virginia, officer of the Manchester Methodist Episcopal Church, trustee of the town of Manchester, Va., justice of the peace for Chesterfield County, Va., and owner of William Gray & Co. (a tobacco manufacturing and shipping firm). Correspondence in part concerns the tobacco trade and hiring out slaves to Richmond tobacco factories; fugitive slaves and free blacks; and the education of children. Also includes letters, 1833-1874, accounts, banking records, and other business records of William Gray & Co., in part concerning tobacco agents primarily in London, Eng., and New York City, the financial Panic of 1837, the murder of Gray's partner, Joseph H. Harris, by a slave in New Providence, Tenn. (who was subsequently lynched), and European reaction to secession and the American Civil War.

Size

4,000 (ca.) items

Repository

Virginia Historical Society

Administrative Information

Access

Collection open to all researchers.

Use Restrictions

None

Acquisition Information

Gift of Robert B. Mayo, Richmond, Va., in 1986. Accessioned 25 July 1988.

Preferred Citation

William Gray Papers, 1819-1874 (Mss1 G7952 a FA2), Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va.

Biographical/Historical Information

William Gray was a prominent tobacco shipper and manufacturer associated with several firms in Manchester, Va. Born in Prince Edward County, Gray moved to Manchester (part of Chesterfield County incorporated into the city of Richmond in 1910), around 1810. In 1821, Gray became a partner in Gray & Pankey and, twelve years later, established his own firm, Willima Gray & Co. He directed the company's operations until his death in 1863.

Scope and Content Information

Letters received by William Gray & Co. are typical of those written by factors; they acknowledge the receipt of tobacco shipments and of drafts on account and give the general market conditions as well as the status of the manufacturer's brands. Many 1837 letters, especially those of Cornelius DuBois & Co., describe the financial panic of that year. A letter from D. W. Kennedy of the Northern Bank of Tennessee on 2 February 1858 describes the murder of Gray's partner, Joseph H. Harris, and subsequent lynching of the accused slave. An 1859 letter from the New York firm of Sawyer, Wallace & Co. discusses northern reaction to the capture and execution of John Brown.

Through the Gilliat houses of London and Liverpool, Gray's tobacco reached markets in continental Europe and Africa. Because of this, Gilliat's letters often discuss the international climate and its effect on the tobacco market. These letters are especially noteworthy during the 1861-1863 period, when they give a good assessment of English merchant opinion and reaction to secession, Lincoln's call for troops, the blockade, and the Trent Affair. Occasionally, personal letters appear among this correspondence; in 1858, for example, Algernon Gilliat toured the United States and wrote Gray concerning his observations and reactions.

A 1 Jan. 1868 letter from Methodist minister James A. Riddick concerns Reconstruction and the Underwood convention. Another from Methodist minister, William B. Rowzie, describes conditions in Danville in the final days of the Civil War.

In 1821, William Gray entered into partnership with his brother, James Gray, and Loring Young Pankey, in operating a tobacco shipping and manufacturing firm under the name Gray & Pankey. The company's papers, filed in box 7, include letters, accounts, and miscellany. Several accounts pertain to the purchase of cotton. Miscellany includes shipping agreements and a power of attorney.

The papers of William Gray & Co., which constitute the bulk of this collection, consist of letters, accounts, checks, tobacco circulars, prices-current and cash and tobacco receipt books. Letters, which are arranged alphabetically by year, are primarily from northern and European tobacco agents (or "factors"). Major factors include: William H. Gilliat and its successor John K. Gilliat & Co. (London and Liverpool), Cornelius DuBois & Co. (New York), and John Wilson & Co. (New York). A more extensive, although by no means complete, index of Gray's correspondents appears below. Although primarily a shipper of tobacco, Gray was involved at various times in its manufacture, and there are some letters addressed to Samuel Hardgrove & Co., a manufacturing firm, during the 1837-1844 period. In 1856, Gray went into partnership with Joseph H. Harris to establish a tobacco stemmery in New Providence, Tennessee. Although Harris was killed two years later, Gray retained his ties to New Providence. There are letters addressed to Joseph H. Harris for the years 1856 to 1858.

Financial records (boxes 14-18) include both accounts receivable from tobacco purchasers and accounts payable for tobacco and factory expenses. These are arranged chronologically. Cash books list deposits and withdrawals from the Bank of Virginia, 1845-1853, and the National Exchange Bank, 1865-1868. The tobacco receipt books of Joseph H. Harris & Co. contain only several entries and are undated, although they would be from the 1856-1858 period. Listings of prices-current, mostly from Liverpool, Mobile and New Orleans, contain market information on tobacco and other commodities, particularly cotton. Circulars are mostly from Liverpool and New York and pertain primarily to tobacco and cotton.

The folder of miscellany (box 21) contains several items of note. These include: an 1825 petition to establish a boarding house in Manchester, an 1834 order to Richmond's City Sergeant, a bill of complaint for Howard & Lawrence v. Winchester's executors, an insurance policy and financial statements of the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, report cards for two of Gray's children from Randolph-Macon College (1859- 1861 and 1870-1871), and an order to E. H. Ripley from Richmond Provost Marshal Frederick L. Manning (USA) on April 3, 1865.

Index Terms

African Americans -- Virginia -- History -- 19th century.
Bank of Virginia.
Banks and banking -- Virginia -- Richmond -- History -- 19th century.
England -- Commerce -- History -- 19th century.
Fugitive slaves -- Virginia -- History -- 19th century.
Gray, William, 1793-1873.
Harris, Joseph H., d. 1858.
Lynching -- Tennessee -- History -- 19th century.
Manchester (Va.) -- History -- 19th century.
Manchester Methodist Episcopal Church (Va.)
New York (N.Y.) -- Commerce -- History -- 19th century.
Panic (Finance) -- Virginia -- 1837.
Richmond (Va.) -- Economic conditions -- 19th century.
Secession.
Slaves -- Employment.
Tobacco industry -- Virginia -- History -- 19th century.
Tobacco workers -- Virginia -- History -- 19th century.
United States -- Economic conditions -- 19th century.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Foreign public opinion.
Virginia -- Commerce -- History -- 19th century.
William Gray and Co. (Manchester, Va.)

Arrangement

Arranged in three series. The personal correspondence in Series 1 is arranged alphabetically by correspondent. The business correspondence in Series 2 and Series 3 is arranged alphabetically within year. Other materials grouped by material type (i.e., accounts, legal documents) and arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Series 1: Correspondence of William Gray, Manchester, Va. 1833-1873

Box 1-6

Scope and Content

Letters, 1833-1873.

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically.

Series 2: Gray and Pankey 1819-1832

Box 7

Scope and Content

Letters, 1819-1827; accounts, 1819-1832; agreements and powers of attorney, 1819-1827.

Series 3: William Gray and Co. 1833-1874

Letters, 1833-1874

Box 7 (cont.)-13

Arrangement

Alphabetical by year

Accounts, 1833-1874

Box 14-18

Arrangement

Chronological.

Checks, 1833-1875

Box 19

Arrangement

Chronological.

Account books, 1845-1868

Box 20

Scope and Content

Cash book, 1845-1853; cash book, 1856-1868; tobacco receipt books of Joseph H. Harris and Co. (2 v.).

Prices-current. 1833-1872

Box 20 (cont.)

Galveston, 1866

Glasgow, 1852

Liverpool, 1836-1837, 1848-1852, 1854, 1858

Mobile, 1848-1848, 1853-1856, 1858-1859, 1870

New Orleans, 1833, 1836, 1838, 1840-1843, 1845, 1851-1860, 1866-1867, 1870-1872

Petersburg, 1867

St. Louis, 1871

Circulars, 1825-1873

Box 21

Miscellany.

Box 21 (cont.)

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