

A Guide to the Coleman, Twigg, McEwen, and Houston Family Papers

Coleman, Twigg, McEwen, and Houston Family Papers 1814-1945
1814-1945

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Descriptive Summary

Collection number
1794

Language
English

Collector

Warren Coleman

Extent

290 items

Repository

University of Virginia. Library. Special Collections Dept.

Alderman Library
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
USA

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

See the [University of Virginia Library's use policy](#).

Acquisition Information

The material in this collection (# 1794) was given to Alderman Library by Warren Coleman, M.D., on November 24, 1943.

Funding Note

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Scope and Content

This collection of 290 items, 1814-1945, contains material pertaining to several Scotch-Irish families from which the donor Warren Coleman, M.D. is descended. The collection chiefly revolves around Robert Houston McEwen (1790-1868) and his wife Henrietta "Hetty" Montgomery Kennedy McEwen (1796-1881).

Robert H. McEwen's and Hetty Kennedy's families moved from Washington County, Virginia to the Tennessee territory in the late eighteenth century. His father, a surgeon in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, died when Robert was quite young, so that Robert was reared by his mother and became very close to her family, the Houston Family. Hetty was the daughter of Robert Campbell Kennedy, who pioneered in Tennessee's Lincoln County. Kennedy became a very prosperous farmer and miller, and a good friend of Andrew Jackson. Both Robert McEwen and Hetty Kennedy's older brother William Kennedy joined the United States Army to fight in the Creek War Campaign of the War of 1812. They participated in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, and McEwen, a lieutenant, drew a map of the battle the morning after their victory (the original is preserved in the Library of Congress).

After they were mustered out in May 1814, McEwen visited Kennedy at his family's home and there met his friend's younger sister Hetty. McEwen and Hetty Kennedy were married the next year and set up housekeeping in Fayetteville, Tennessee, where McEwen owned a dry goods store, among whose customers were many members of the Cherokee nation. In 1828 the McEwens moved to Nashville, Tennessee in order to provide their children with better schooling and more cultural activities. The couple had ten children, seven of whom lived past infancy. In Nashville, McEwen opened another dry goods store which proved very successful. In 1836 the Tennessee State Legislature elected him Superintendent of Public Schools, a position he held for four years. After he left government service, he ran the collection service for Eastern Merchants, Brokers, and Bankers for the rest of his working life.

The McEwens were a well-known and prosperous family; their sons went to college and their daughters married professional men. Their youngest daughter "Kitty" McEwen was sent on trips north and then to Europe for her health. She met a young physician, John Scott Coleman, from Augusta, Georgia, in the party on this tour; they were subsequently married in 1867. Dr. and Mrs. Coleman were the parents of Warren Coleman, the donor.

The family was also known for its piety and patriotism. They were devout Presbyterians, with McEwen serving as an elder for thirty years. Politically they were Whigs who despised the Democratic party. Although they had African-American servants they vehemently opposed the breakup of the Union in the 1860s. Throughout the war Hetty McEwen insisted on flying a hand-made Union flag from her roof. After Union troops captured the

city in 1862, her flag was replaced by a silk flag given by the Federal Commander in respect for her bravery. In the postwar period this incident became part of local legend and poems were written to commemorate "Hetty's brave deed."

The McEwen offspring grew up to found long-lived and similarly prosperous families who revered their ancestors and cared for the family heirlooms. Many of the family treasures had come to Kitty McEwen Coleman, who willed them to her son Warren when she died in 1929. At that time the McEwen descendants, led by Dr. Coleman, collectively decided that their family papers and heirlooms of historical interest should be made accessible to the public and donated them to various archives and museums. Among the most interesting were the original map of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, and several items pertaining to the War of Texas Independence (including General Santa Anna's jewelled saddle) given to Robert McEwen by his first cousin Sam Houston.

The collection is valuable for the light it sheds on pioneer and early nineteenth century life in the upper South. The folders of letters and memoirs are probably the most interesting and entertaining items, detailing domestic and social life, and the genealogical materials also record family and thus local history of Nashville and its residents. The travel journal kept by Kitty McEwen Coleman on her 1859 European tour is an excellent source for European as well as American social history, and the account of the voyage home is more harrowing than fiction could be.

[Series Description/Container List]

Correspondence of Warren Coleman, M.D.

Unit Date 1927-1941

Extent

(2 folders)

Scope and Content

All pertains to the distribution of McEwen family heirlooms; correspondence with Princeton University, William and Mary, Library of Congress, Tennessee Historical Society; two letters with signature of Archibald MacLeish, six letters from Andrew Jackson Houston, a U.S. Senator and son of Sam Houston.

Correspondence of the McEwen family

Unit Date 1814-1903, n.d.

Extent

(2 folders)

Scope and Content

Of interest are several letters from Robert McEwen to Hetty McEwen written during business trips in the 1810s and 1820s; letters from various relatives and friends to Hetty and her daughters during the 1820s and 1830s. A letter from A.E. McEwen to Robert McEwen in October 1856 discusses sale of a slave and the possible victory of James Buchanan in the upcoming election. Several letters between Kitty McEwen and her father Robert McEwen during her trip north in 1858; those of April 26 and 29, 1858 describe northern cities.

Letters from Hetty Montgomery Kennedy McEwen to her Children

Unit Date n.y.[1873] Jan-Dec

Extent

(2 folders)

Scope and Content

Most of the letters are probably addressed to Kitty McEwen Coleman. Hetty McEwen's great age have made her eyesight and dexterity deteriorate and letters are very difficult to decipher. They deal with general family and local Nashville news.

Composition Book kept by Hetty (Kitty) Kennedy McEwen Coleman

Unit Date 1855

Genealogical Material on the McEwen Family and Related Families

Unit Date 1861-1945, n.d.

Scope and Content

Several versions of the McEwen Family history, a history of the Edmestons, papers concerning other relatives; photostat copies of three letters to Brigadier General John Twiggs, an American officer in the Revolutionary War from other officers, including General Nathaniel Greene, and papers concerning the Twiggs family.

New England Primer belonging to Hetty M.K. McEwen

Unit Date ca. 1849

Newspaper clippings and materials relating to the McEwen Family

Unit Date 1849-1929, n.d.

Scope and Content

Articles referring to Mrs. Hetty McEwen and the Union flag episode in 1862, other family members, obituaries, the McEwen ancestors' actions in the Battle of King's Mountain; and original newspaper articles from several American cities and a newspaper from Paris bought during the 1859 European tour.

Pamphlets re Donations of Warren Coleman, M.D.

Unit Date 1935-1937

Scope and Content

Pamphlets from Princeton Library, the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and information on Samuel Houston.

Photographs of McEwen Family Members

Unit Date 1863-1875

Scope and Content

Photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Robert McEwen, Mrs. Robert (Hetty) McEwen alone, Kitty McEwen, Mary McEwen, and a group including Kitty McEwen.

Recipe Book, Travel Journal, and loose recipes

Unit Date ca. 1842-1867, n.d.

Scope and Content

Created by Mrs. James Lindsay Coleman, probably paternal grandmother of Warren Coleman. The journal holds an account of a trip to Great Britain in the 1850s, recipes and also records the births and ages of slaves.

Travel Journal of Great Britain kept by Kitty McEwen Coleman

Unit Date 1859 July-Sept

Scope and Content

Includes fascinating descriptions of London's Crystal Palace, Wales, Dublin, Edinburgh and Paris; and an account of an eventful sea voyage home.