

A Guide to the White Family Papers

White Family Papers 1794-1921

1794-1921



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Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

9372, -b, -c

Language

English

Collector

William Young Conn White

Extent

ca. 1190 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

This collection was given to the Library by Mr. William Young Conn White of Abingdon, Virginia, on July 10, 1985.

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Genealogical Information re the White & Robertson families

Colonel James White(1770-1838) married Eliza Wilsonin 1798 and they had the following known children: 1) Jane C. (White) Humes; 2) James Lowry White(d. ca. 1838); 3) Eleanor White(d. 1852); 4) Ann Eliza (White) Hannum; 5) William Young Conn White(1812-1882); 6) Thomas W. White(1817-?); 7) Newton K. White; 8) Addison White; 9) Milton White.

William King(1769-1808), owner of the saltworks at Saltville, Virginia, married Mary Trigg in 1799. After his death in 1808, Mary Trigg King married Francis Smith and they produced at least one daughter, Mary Trigg Smith. Wyndham Robertson(1803-1888) married Mary Trigg Smith and had the following known children: 1) William Robertson(d. post 1859); 2) Mary Robertson(1831-1867) m. 1856 William Willis Blackford(1831-1905); 3) Frank Smith Robertson(1841?-1926) m. [ca. 1868] Stella Wheeler; 4) Catherine Robertson m. 1867 James L. White(1842-1914); 5) Pocahontas Robertson m. Connally F. Trigg(1847-?); 6) Wyndham Robertson, Jr. m. Flora Henderson.

Scope and Content

The White family papers contain 1,190 items (4 Hollinger boxes, ca. 1.5 linear feet), 1794-1921, chiefly the correspondence, business and legal papers of the White and Robertson families of Abingdon, Virginia. These closely related families were two of the leading participants in the business and political life of Southwest Virginia during the nineteenth century. The business papers of Col. James White(1770-1838), other papers concerning the settlement of his estate, and the business and correspondence of the White family, chiefly of William Young Conn White(1812-1882), all contain material relating to the development of business and industry in Southwest Virginia and its economic ties to Tennessee and Alabama before and after the Civil War.

The first two series of the White family papers contain Col. James White's own business papers, 1807-1838, and papers relating to the settlement of his vast estate, 1838-1878. Col. White was involved in a number of mercantile interests (up to some forty-five at one time) in addition to the saltworks at Saltville, Washington County. This included business interests in the states of Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia, and investments in lead mines in Wythe County, iron furnaces, cotton plantations, and slaves. His property was worth at least \$750,000 at the time of his death. Unfortunately, Col. White's business papers do not furnish a

complete picture of any of these interests.

Col. White moved to Abingdon, Virginia about 1795. Prior to his arrival there, White had worked for Talbot, Jones & Company, a Baltimore merchandising house, who supplied him with enough goods to set up his own business. He married Miss Eliza Wilson in 1798 and began expanding his business by becoming a partner of such men as Mr. Henderson in Abingdon and William Lynn in Alabama.

One of his most important business enterprises was the leasing of the saltworks at Saltville, Virginia, from the executors of the William King estate. Because the chain of ownership and control of the saltworks is somewhat confusing, the following short history of ownership will clarify White's own involvement in the property.

General Francis Preston and his family had owned the salt lick when William King (1769-1808) purchased the land west of their claim in 1795. By 1799, King had erected furnaces and began the manufacture of salt. He also rented the Preston Salines until his death in 1808. According to his will, the salt works were carried on by his brother, James King, William Trigg, and William King's wife, Mary Trigg King, and their executors until 1819, when it was leased to John Sanders. Sanders sold his lease rights to James White who leased the operations until 1833. Other individuals leased this property until the formation of the Holston Salt & Plaster Company in 1864. The King Saltworks produced from 90,000 to 100,000 bushels of salt per year. During the Civil War, it was the largest supplier of salt to the Confederacy.

The business papers of Col. White contain several items related to his salt interests including: papers concerning the estate of William King and the saltworks (October 27, 1820; May 14, 1821; April 3, June 7, & October 4, 1823; and September 1834); extracts from John Hardies' disposition concerning salt prices, 1824-1829 (April 7, 1829); and other legal papers regarding the saltworks (May 26, 1830; September 8, 1831; April 1833; November 7, 1834; March 12 & September 27, 1836; May 26, 1837; and August 15, 1838); a valuation of buildings at Saltville (undated) and a memorandum regarding the account books at Saltville (undated).

His business papers also include the balances on the Saltville books (1820-1835). Papers concerning cotton shipments (1837-1838) and his other mercantile interests (August 25, 1821 and April 16, 1835) are present but do not adequately represent the extent of his involvement.

The settlement of the estate of Col. James White was not completed until 1878 and the records in the second series show the extent of White's assets at his death, especially the slave and land inventories (ca. 1838), a notebook regarding the estate of James White, 1843-1863, and a commonplace book record of the division of his property (ca. 1851).

An inventory entitled "Inventory and appraisement of the personal property belonging to the estate of Col. James White deceased" is an especially useful summation of Col. White's economic status at the time of his death. It contains entries for: merchandise (pp. 1-18); small notes (pp. 19-37); salt due bills (p. 38); appraisements of property in Clay County, Kentucky, and the Limestone and Bellefonte Plantations in Alabama (pp. 39-44); sales of personal property (pp. 45-46); dividends, cash received and notes (p. 47); various agreements (pp. 60-121); and settlement of the estate (pp. 126-129). The volume also has notes regarding the periodic examination of the accounts by the commissioner which were recorded by the court, 1839-1871.

The correspondence of the White family includes many letters concerning business matters; of special note are the letters of Thomas Wilson White (1817-?) to his brother William Young Conn White (1812-1882), both sons of Col. James White. Thomas White was the manager of the family's plantation "Bellefonte," near Huntsville, Alabama, and his letters give a detailed account of its affairs (Feb., Nov., and Dec. 1843; Jan. 1844; Sep., Nov., and Dec. 1845; Feb., Apr., and Dec. 1846; Jun. 1847; Jul. 1848; Mar. and May 1849; Mar. and Jul. 1851; Feb.-Apr. 1852; Apr. 1854; Oct. 1857; Jan., Apr., & Jun. 1858; Jul., & Sep.-Oct. 1859; Nov. 1862; Jul. 1874; Mar., Apr., and Dec. 1876; Feb. and Jun. 1877; and Mar. 1878).

Other topics of interest in the White family correspondence include: slavery (January 1, 1840; August 26, 1841; April 25 & November 29, 1846; January 23, 1858 and July 16, 1859); the salt merchandising business (November 28, 1842), banking and financial difficulties (February 9, 1843; June 1, 1847; and October 13, & 16, 1857); and cotton prices (January 21, 1844; November 23, 1845; February 28, 1846; and April 29, 1854).

The fourth group of papers include the legal, miscellaneous, and business papers of the White family. Of note in the legal papers are the following: an inventory and appraisement of the estates of Eliza White and Eleanor W. White (1851-1880); an indenture regarding the saltworks between James White and William King (August 4, 1823); and land grants signed by various governors of Virginia, including James Pleasants, James Wood, and John Tyler, Sr.

Miscellaneous papers include a copy of a talk concerning Judge Peter Johnson (1763-1831) who grew up at "Longwood" near Farmville, Virginia (undated) and a copy of The Daily Express of Petersburg, Virginia (April 18, 1864).

The business papers of the White family show their widespread business interests, especially those of the Saltville saltworks and their lead mines in Wythe County, Virginia. The account of Dr. Alexander Preston with

Eliza White(December 1839), containing fees for medicines and doctor visits, sheds light on the types of treatment occurring on a large plantation with many slaves. A list of articles bought at a sale (August 22- 26, 1842) includes livestock and slave prices.

Several of these papers deal with the White family's continued interest in the King Saltworks, which later became the Holston Salt and Plaster Company(Dec., 1855; Sep., 1862; Jan., 1866; Apr., 1872; Sep., 1874; Jun., and Oct., 1875; Feb., and May 1876; and Apr., 1877). There is also other material concerning the Holston Salt and Plaster Companyin the years, 1872-1881.

A large amount of material in the business papers concerns the lead mines in Wythe Countyunder the company names of Austinville Lead Mining Company, Union Lead Mines Company, and Wythe Lead and Zinc Mine Company(Feb. and May 1856; Nov. 1857; Nov. 1864; Nov. 1865; Jul. and Dec. 1866; Mar., May, Jul.-Dec. 1874; Jan. 1875; Dec. 1876; and Jan.-Apr. 1877). The bulk of the material on the lead mines is located within the years 1874-1880.

The collection also contains a small group of papers concerning the Campell family, 1853-1882. One letter, August 23, 1862, describes some of the economic difficulties resulting from the Civil War.

The next series consists of the Robertson familypapers. James Lowry White(1842-1914), son of William Young Conn White, married Catherine Markham Robertson, daughter of Governor Wyndham Robertson(1803-1883), who resided at the " Meadows, " near Abingdon, Virginia.

The papers of Powhatan Robertson, a brother of Wyndham Robertson, include: reports on his college work (1815-1816) and essays written by him at William and Mary(undated); three small travel diaries describing his European Tour through France, Italy, and Switzerland(October 12-November 25, 1818, November 26-December 22, 1818, and January 3-May 2, 1819); and letters describing the government and people of Switzerlandand predicting that the growth of Russian power and influence would continue into the next century (June 9, 1819), and a speech by John Randolphduring the Missouri Compromise debate (February 22, 1820).

The correspondence of the Robertson familycontains several Civil War letters of interest: Frank Robertson's description of Major John Pelham(1838-1863) who fell at Kelly's Ford(March 19, 1863); bands of men pillaging the country (April 1865); and reconstruction politics and settlement (June 6, 1865).

The letters to Kate (Robertson) Whitecontain several Civil War letters from her brother Frank, who served as a captain under J. E. B. Stuart, about his life as an officer and skirmishes ([ca. 1860 ?]; August 25, 1861; May 7, July 26, and August 3, 1862; April 5 & 18, 1863; and an attempt by Federal forces to capture the saltworks at Abingdon(October 17, [1864]). There are also many letters from Wyndham Robertsonand Mary Frances Trigg Robertsonto their children, especially Kate.

Organization

The White family papers are arranged in seven series: 1) business papers of Colonel James White; 2) papers regarding the settlement of the James White estate; 3) correspondence of the White family; 4) legal, business & miscellaneous papers of the White & related families; 5) papers of the Campbell family; 6) papers of the Robertson family; 7) oversize items.

This arrangement has retained as much of the organization imposed by a former departmental field archivist as possible.

Container List

Series I: Colonel James White's Business Papers

Business Papers of Col. James White

Unit Date 1807-1838, n.d.

Container Box 1

Extent

(4 folders)

Balances on the Saltville Books

Unit Date ca. 1820-1835

Container Box 1

Series II: Papers re the settlement of James White's estate

Slave and Land Inventories

Unit Date ca. 1838

Container Box 1

Papers re the Settlement of the James WhiteEstate

Unit Date 1838-1878, n.d.

Container Box 1

Extent

(3 folders)

Notebook re the Estate of James Whiteand a Suit Brought by John R. Humesagainst Eliza White

Unit Date 1843-1863

Container Box 2

Commonplace Book Record of the Division of James White's Property Among his Heirs

Unit Date ca. 1851

Container Box 2

Series III: Correspondence of the White Family

Letters to William Young Conn White

Unit Date 1840-1849

Container Box 2

Letters to William Young Conn White& White family

Unit Date 1850-1859

Container Box 2

Correspondence of the White family

Unit Date 1860-1910

Container Box 2

Series IV: Legal, Business & Miscellaneous Papers of the White Family

Letters of Wyndham R. Whiteto James L. White

Unit Date 1901-1902, n.d.

Container Box 2

Legal Papers of the White& Related Families

Unit Date 1794-1876

Container Box 2

Inventory and Appraisement of the Estates of Eliza Whiteand Eleanor W. White

Unit Date 1851-1880

Container Box 2

Miscellaneous Papers of the White Family

Unit Date 1851-1876

Container Box 2

Business Papers of the White Family

Unit Date 1836-1921, n.d.

Container Box 3

Extent

(7 folders)

Bank Books and a Plantation Book

Unit Date 1849-1890

Container Box 3

Papers re the Law Practice of White and Buchanan, Attorneys-at-Law

Unit Date 1888-1906

Container Box 4

Memorandum Book of White and Buchanan, Attorneys-at-Law

Unit Date 1894-1911

Container Box 4

Series V: Papers of the Campbell Family

Papers of the Campbell Family

Unit Date 1853-1882

Container Box 4

Series VI: Papers of the Robertson Family

Papers of Powhatan Robertson

Unit Date 1815-1820, n.d.

Container Box 4

Correspondence of the Robertson Family

Unit Date 1822, 1857-1894, n.d.

Container Box 4

Letters to Catherine (Robertson) White

Unit Date 1858-1874, n.d.

Container Box 4

Extent

(2 folders)

Papers of Wyndham Robertson re the Trigg Estate

Unit Date 1862-1878

Container Box 4

Series VII: Oversize

1) A map of Southwest Virginia, Norfolk & Western Railroad Company, North Carolina Extension, 1890, with ore deposits shown

Container Oversize (Box)

2) Blueprint of Abingdon, Virginia, Hume Tract of the Abingdon Development Company

Container Oversize (Box)

3) Map, 1880, of Abingdon, Virginia, engraved by O.W. Gray & Son

Container Oversize (Box)

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