

A Guide to the William Ransom Johnson Papers

William Ransom Johnson Papers 1796-1896
1796-1896

A Collection in the Special Collections Department 38-203
Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library
1997

History

Processed by: Special Collections Department Staff
Date Completed: 1997
Encoded by: Elizabeth Slomba

Title Statement

A Guide to the William Ransom Johnson Papers

Subtitle: Johnson, William Ransom.

Collection: 38-203

Author: Processed by Special Collections Dept. staff; machine-readable finding aid created by Elizabeth Slomba

Sponsor: Funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Publication Statement

File size: 20 Kilobytes

Date: © 1997 By the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia. All rights reserved.

Publisher: University of Virginia Library

[Conditions of Use](#)

Funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from WordPerfect. [Date of source: 1997.]

Language Usage: Description is in English.

Revision Description

Feb 17, 2004 PUBLIC "-//University of Virginia::Library::Special Collections Dept.//TEXT (US::ViU::00773::William Ransom Johnson Papers)//EN" "ViU00773.sgm" converted from EAD 1.0 to 2002 by v1to02.xsl (sy2003-10-15).

Feb 27, 2004 converted to conform to eadVIVA.dtd by vivastrict.xsl

Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

38-203

Language

English

Collector

Warren E. Biggs

Extent

ca. 368 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 made a gift to the Library by Warren H. Biggs of Williamston, North Carolina, in June 1935.

Funding Note

Funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

Preferred Citation

William Ransom Johnson Papers, Accession 38-203, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library

Scope and Content

In this collection are ca. 368 items, 1796-1896, which consist of correspondence, business and legal papers, a lecture notebook, and miscellaneous papers pertaining to several families of Virginia. The material relates to the Johnsons of Petersburg, the Kagys of New Market, and the Logans of Salem, as well as other families.

Letters, 1838-January 1849, to William Ransom Johnson, are chiefly concerned with business matters. Colonel Johnson (1782-1849) was a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives from Warren County, 1807-1808 and 1810-1814; the House of Delegates from Petersburg, 1818-1820 and Chesterfield County, 1821-1822; the Virginia Senate, 1823-1826; and, the Virginia House of Representatives, 1828-1830 and 1833-1837. He married Mary Evans in 1803, and their sons included William Ransom Johnson, Jr., J. E. Johnson, and Marmaduke Johnson. Known as "The Napoleon of the Turf," he was the leading turfman of America for a generation. He established stables at Oakland, Chesterfield County, Virginia, beginning his career on Virginia turf. During 1808-1813, he raced "Sir Archy" and "Pacolet," and won \$30,000. He was the leader and manager for the South in the South-North Races, Washington, D.C. in 1823, and also in nearly all thirty contests until 1834. He died in Mobile, Alabama on February 10, 1849, and was buried at Oakland. Letters, February 26, 1845 and February 2, 1846, from William Yates Gholson (1807-1870), a lawyer practicing in Cincinnati, Ohio, concern a judgment against Mary A. Pugh and the collection of the payment in the U. S. District Court. There are several letters (March 30, April 20, October 4, December 3, 1845; and, January 27, March 24, 1846) from Eggleston Cheatham, the overseer for William Ransom Johnson's estate in Yazoo County, Mississippi. These letters discuss a dispute between Johnson and his estate manager, William Berry, and the latter's refusal to accompany Negroes to Johnson in New Orleans, Louisiana until they make a settlement; and, attempts to sell Johnson's property and estate in Yazoo County. One sale contract, a rent with the option to buy, fell through because of the purchaser's "bad luck with his negroes since he came to this neighborhood." After Cheatham's death in December 1848, there is a letter, July 23, 1849, from his brother William Cheatham to William Ransom Johnson, Jr., concerning the difficulty in selling the estate.

Letters, 1849-1871, to William Ransom Johnson, Jr., are concerned with his father's estate as well as his own business affairs. There are a few letters from his brothers, J. E. Johnson (October 26, 1849; December 16, 1850; and, February 22, 1851) and Marmaduke Johnson (January 28, December 11, 1850; and, February 26, 1852) mentioning such matters. In his letter of October 26, 1849, J. E. Johnson writes about their father's estate, including the sale of Bellegrove and a settlement with "Bruce," and asks if there is "any negro woman belonging to the estate worth from \$200 to \$500 who would make a good cook & has no family!" In his letter of January 28, 1850, Marmaduke Johnson expresses his wish to bid for the tract of land bought by their father from Branch Archer. There are also letters from associates which touch upon various business matters. A

January 8, 1851 letter from George Nicholson Johnson, an attorney, discusses problems with General [John] Pegram's estate due to its being advertised for sale by W. R. Johnson, Jr. without the consent of Will Carter. A September 14, 1853 letter from Tazewell Taylor, Bursar of William and Mary College, brings up the matter of some property for sale. There is an interesting letter, January 18, 1852, from Thomas B. Poindexter, Louisville, Kentucky, which discusses a racehorse, "Sally Morgan." The writer relates that it was the wish of Johnson's father to have the horse sent to Boston, where she is now a successful runner, and also to give the horse to himself. There are two letters, December 9, 1868 and February 20, 1869, from Meador and Brothers, Tobacco Commission Merchants, Atlanta, Georgia, which discuss tobacco stock and the forced lowering of prices. Other correspondents include attorneys and legislators, such as John Mercer Patton (1797-1858), George Washington Jones (1806-1884), Samuel McDowell Moore (1796-1875), James A. Seddon (1815-1880), and John Minor Botts (1802-1869). In his March 31, 1849 letter, Patton discusses the suit of King vs. Johnson. In his letters of April 22 and July 17, 1849, Jones writes about his financial troubles and inability to pay the Johnson estate, his position in office being in jeopardy, and his having no property beyond his salary. Moore writes on August 3, 1849 concerning a settlement made two years earlier; and, Botts writes on June 12, 1850 about an account against himself at Oakland. In his October 14, 1849 letter, Seddon responds to Johnson's offer of his mountain estate, and mentions his own estate in Mecklenburg. Letters, August-September 1850, are concerned with the impending sale of Oakland and the slaves on September 25.

Correspondence of the Kagy and related families, 1803-1896, covers a wide variety of subjects. In his March 16, 1803 letter to an unknown recipient, William Armistead Burwell (1780-1821) discusses the management of his claim upon "W.C.N." A December 12, 1865 letter from Francis J. Smith to Joseph B. Gentry discusses his election to the Office of Treasurer and his connection to the Richmond and Fredericksburg Rail Road. There are several personal letters from Thomas A. Ayre to his friend Baxter W. Logan. In a June 2, 1873 letter from Norfolk, Ayre relates the effect of the Civil War on his family, and the loss of his father's wealth which he had in the form of property such as slaves. A letter, April 2, 1874, from J. B. Jackson in Washington, D.C. to Baxter W. Logan, describes a visit to the Capitol where he heard Senator [Allen Granberry] Thurman of Ohio, mentions a few other individuals being there from the Indian Nation, refers to seeing Vice-President [Henry] Wilson and Senator [James Winright] Flanagan, and also mentions a stop at the University of Virginia. Another interesting letter, May 26, 1875, from Terrell and Walthall to J. P. M. Sanders, describes an enclosed rough draft of a four passenger rockaway. Letters of May 1890 are concerned with the unveiling of the Lee Monument in Richmond.

Business and legal papers, 1796-1875, relate to various Virginia families. There are papers relative to the estates of Edwin Burwell (ca. 1798-1800), Joseph Selden (ca. 1802-1804), James W. Pegram (ca. 1844-1845), and William Ransom Johnson (ca. 1845-1850); and, the Richmond firm of Caperton and Crump (1830s-1840s). Miscellaneous items of interest include: Sale of 105 barrels flour, December 10, 1827; Invoice of 289 hogsheads sugar purchased by Carroll Hoy and Company, 1861-1862; and, Tobacco sales to William Ransom Johnson from Branch, Scott, and Company, February 23, June 9, 1868 and January 31, February 23, 1869.

There are several references to blacks among the business and legal papers. An account of the Estate of Joseph Selden with Dr. Joseph Trent, 1803-1804, includes a reference to "visiting negro woman in the Measles..." There are several promissory notes and receipts for the hire of Negroes by the names of "Jim & Jerry" (July 15, 1840), "Jim Lumpkin" (January 4, 1841), "Kelly" (January 2, 1849), "Frederick" (January 1, 1850), and "Robin & Richard" (January 2, 1850). Among the legal papers is an agreement between Rubin and Byrd George and Joseph Selden to purchase a Negro man slave by the name of Ned.

Container List

Correspondence

Letters to Colonel William Ransom Johnson

Unit Date 1838-1849 Jan

Letters to William Ransom Johnson, Jr.

Unit Date 1849 Mar-1871

Extent (4 folders)

Correspondence of the Kagy and Related Families

Unit Date 1803-1896, n.d.

Extent (3 folders)

Business and Legal Papers

Business Papers

Unit Date 1796-1875, n.d.

Extent (4 folders)

Legal Papers

Unit Date 1798-1850

Miscellaneous

Lecture Notes kept by [University of Virginia] Student A. B. Guignon, Jr.

Unit Date 1878-1879

Miscellaneous

Unit Date 1835, n.d.

Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, #38-203