

Deakins Family Papers and Surveying Compass A&M 0197

Deakins Family Papers and Surveying Compass
1778-1925



Title Statement

Deakins Family Papers and Surveying Compass A&M 0197

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

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Unit ID

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Unit Date

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Language

English

Abstract

Includes records from several generations of the Deakins family of Montgomery County, Maryland and north central West Virginia. William (1742-1798) and Francis (1739-1804) Deakins, among the first generation, were active as land speculators after the American Revolution, applying their skills as surveyors to leverage acquisition of western lands. From 1778 their activities are documented through deeds, agreements, surveys, plats, surveyors' field books, court papers, and letters related to land purchased in Harrison, Monongalia, Preston, Randolph, Tucker, and Upshur counties. Other papers concern Leonard M. Deakins (1747-1824) and his descendants. Of special significance in the collection is the compass used by Francis Deakins to survey the "Deakins Line" in 1787-1788, a north-south line separating western Maryland from (West) Virginia.

Creator

Deakins family

Extent

2.5 Linear Feet 2 ft. 6 1/4 in. (5 document cases, 5 in. each); (1 large flat storage box, 5 in.); (1 oversize folder, 1/4 in.)

Physical Location

West Virginia and Regional History Center / West Virginia University / 1549 University Avenue / P.O. Box 6069 / Morgantown, WV 26506-6069 / Phone: 304-293-3536 / URL: West Virginia & Regional History Center

Repository

West Virginia and Regional History Center

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

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Biographical / Historical

William and Francis Deakins

William and Francis Deakins played a prominent role in western land speculation after the Revolutionary War.

During the American Revolution many soldiers became aware of the magnitude of unclaimed lands beyond the east coast. This gave rise to visions of economic opportunities in land speculation. William and Francis Deakins from Montgomery County, Maryland, after serving as officers in the Maryland Militia, became two such speculators, applying their skills as surveyors to leverage land acquisitions.

From 1784 through 1800 the Deakins brothers were granted over 200,000 acres of western Virginia land by the state. This included 25, 551 acres in Monongalia County (part located in what is now Preston County). The brothers divided their lands into parcels and most were resold. They also tried to establish settlements, hoping to increase land values.

Land was bought jointly and in the name of each, but Francis Deakins seems to have been the more active in promoting their affairs. He had an agent, John Deakins, at Mount Carmel, Monongalia County, where he settled German indentured families.

The Deakins brothers had friends in high places. In 1787, the governor of Maryland appointed Francis

Deakins as surveyor for the Military District west of Fort Cumberland, laying out lots for Revolutionary War veterans. And in 1791, President Washington acquired the services of William Deakins as a land agent, purchasing private property within the surveyed district for the new capitol city (Washington, D.C.) on the banks of the Potomac River. Washington cautioned Deakins to make these purchases as if for Deakins himself and to keep "to the most perfect secrecy", preventing any suspicion the land deals were on behalf of the public and therefore stopping speculations.

Benjamin Rittenhouse

Benjamin Rittenhouse (1740-1825) was the most prolific compass maker working in America in the late 18th century, and some three dozen of his instruments are now known [2011]. He was born in Norriton, Pennsylvania, and probably learned to make clocks and compasses from his older brother, David Rittenhouse. He served as Superintendent of the American gunlock factory in Philadelphia during the Revolution, and returned to his house in Worcester Township after the war. Rittenhouse went bankrupt in 1801, and spent his latter years in Philadelphia.

Scope and Contents

Includes records from several generations of the Deakins family of Montgomery County, Maryland and north central West Virginia. William (1742-1798) and Francis (1739-1804) Deakins, among the first generation, were active as land speculators after the American Revolution, applying their skills as surveyors to leverage acquisition of western lands. From 1778 their activities are documented through deeds, agreements, surveys, plats, surveyors' field books, court papers, and letters related to land purchased in Harrison, Monongalia, Preston, Randolph, Tucker, and Upshur counties.

Other papers concern Leonard M. Deakins (1747-1824), including a copy of his will dated 1 August 1816, and papers of his sons William Francis (1799-1884) and Francis William (1803-1883). The last generation represented in the collection include George S. and Guy A. Deakins of Rowlesburg, West Virginia. Their papers date up through 1925.

Among the correspondents or persons mentioned in the collection are Salathiel and Thomas James Goff; Henry, George, and William Ashby; David and Philip Menear; John, Charles, and Augustine Friend; Henry Daring; William Petty John; Noah Haden; Thomas Parsons; Benjamin Harrison; Conrad and Joseph Hagmire; Frederick and Abraham Stair; John Evans; John Hoyer; and Samuel Hanway.

There is correspondence between Francis Deakins of Montgomery County, Maryland, Benjamin Reeder, and William McCleery of Morgantown, dating from 1790-1803.

There is also correspondence between George S. Deakins and the Hancock Cooperage Company, Hancock, Maryland, relative to working timber in Preston County owned by Deakins.

There is a plat of the town of Salem, Harrison County, dating from ca. 1792.

Topics include the Northwestern Turnpike Road of Virginia; the West Virginia Land and Mining Company; the West Virginia Oil and Mining Company; and the Preston Lumber and Coal Company.

Of special significance in the collection is the compass used by Francis Deakins to survey the "Deakins Line" in 1787-1788, a north-south line separating western Maryland from (West) Virginia. The line starts from the Fairfax Stone at the head of the Potomac River to the Mason and Dixon Line, and separates Garrett County, Maryland from Preston County, West Virginia. The compass, marked "B. Rittenhouse", was made by Benjamin Rittenhouse (1740-1825), an American compass maker, and dates from ca. 1785-1787.

Separated Materials

One land grant for Salathiel Goff signed by Virginia Governor Benjamin Harrison on 20 April 1784; separated to Rare Signatures, A&M 435 from A&M 197, Box 1. Document references 240 acres of land in Monongalia County located on Cheat River, adjoining lands claimed by Daniel Cammeron.

Related A&M Collections

197, 624

Keywords

Harrison County (W. Va.)

Monongalia County (W. Va.)

Morgantown (W. Va.)

Preston County (W. Va.)
Randolph County (W. Va.)
Salem (W. Va.)
Tucker County (W. Va.)
Upshur County (W. Va.)
Surveyors and surveying.
Ashby, George.
Ashby, Henry.
Ashby, William.
Deakins, Francis.
Deakins, Leonard M.
Evans, John
Goff, Salathiel, approximately 1748-1791
Goff, Thomas James.
Harrison, Benjamin, 1833-1901
McCleery, William.
Menear, David.
Menear, Philip.
Parsons, Thomas.
Reeder, Benjamin.
Deakins family