

# A Guide to the William Cobbs Letters, 1827-1841

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 41683  
Library of Virginia  
2005

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## History

**Processed by:** Greg Crawford

## Title Statement

A Guide to the William Cobbs Letters, 1827-1841

**Subtitle:** Cobbs, William, Letters, 1827-1841

**Collection:** 41683

**Author:** Greg Crawford

## Publication Statement

**File size:** ca. 01 Kilobytes

**Date:** © 2005 By the Library of Virginia. All rights reserved.

**Publisher:** Library of Virginia

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Greg Crawford, 26 January 2004

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Revision Description

**2013-11-21** Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

## Descriptive Summary

**Accession number**

41683

**Language**

English

**Physical Characteristics**

21 pages [Photocopies]; Digital Images

**Repository**

Library of Virginia

## Administrative Information

### **Access Restrictions**

William Cobbs Letters, 1827-1841, are part of Lynchburg (Va.) Chancery Cause: John Motley & wife, Etc. vs. John P. Cobbs, Etc. [1848-002] and are digitized and available through the [Chancery Records Index](#) on the website of the Library of Virginia. The image range for the letters within the case is roughly image 111-153. Please use digital images.

### **Use Restrictions**

There are no restrictions.

### **Acquisition Information**

These items came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from the City of Lynchburg.

### **Processing Information**

The original chancery cause came in through a transfer of court records which was described and processed by the local record department as part of the Chancery digitization project. The identified letters were then photocopied and gifted to the private papers department where they were described as a personal papers collection.

Encoded by G. Crawford, 2005; edited by M. Mason, November 2023.

### **Preferred Citation**

William Cobbs Letters, 1827-1841. Accession 41683. Personal papers collection. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

## **Adjunct Descriptive Data**

### **Related Material**

The chancery suit, John Motley and wife and others versus John P. Cobbs and others, can be found in the Local Records Collection at the Library of Virginia. The index number is Chancery Cause 1848-002.

See also: [Lynchburg \(Va.\) Chancery Causes, 1805-1945](#)

See also: [Robert Lewis Cobbs letters, 1817](#)

### **Location of Originals**

[Lynchburg \(Va.\) Chancery Causes, 1805-1945](#) at the Library of Virginia.

### **Biographical/Historical Information**

William Cobbs was born March 2, 1792 in Campbell County, Virginia. He attended Hampden-Sydney College. After graduating, Cobbs managed his father's plantations in Campbell and Bedford Counties and his business activities in Kanawha Salines in present-day West Virginia. In 1828, he purchased Poplar Forest from Thomas Jefferson's grandson, Francis Eppes. Cobbs died September 6, 1852 in Bedford County, Virginia.

### **Scope and Content**

William Cobbs Letters, 1827-1841, consist of correspondence used as evidence in the Lynchburg, Va., Chancery cause styled John Motley & wife, Etc. vs. John P. Cobbs, Etc. which excuses William of inadequately fulfilling his role as executor to Robert Cobbs, his father's, estate.

The letters are primarily between William Cobbs and William R. Cox and concern Cox's management of his finances and primarily concern William Cobbs' affairs as an enslaver. The correspondence highlight white enslaver's treatment of enslaved Black individuals as chattel. Many of the letters concern the most advantageous hiring out agreements for Harry, George and Peter, three Black men enslaved by Cobbs. Additionally, there are mentions of Harry's poor mental health, the self-emancipation of Ned and Tom and their pursuit to flee to Ohio or Canada, death of Moses, and sale of Stephen.

### **Contents List**

Listed are the letters which include the correspondent and recipient; date; and image range for the letter in the Lynchburg (Va.) Chancery Causes: John Motley & wife, Etc. vs. John P. Cobbs, Etc. [1848-002] available digitally through the [Chancery Records Index](#)

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 6 January 1827 [Images 129-131]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns Cox's family sickness, his home burning down, loss of an enslaved individual [unnamed], conducting Cobbs' business and bringing suits before the court for unpaid notes

## **Letter - William Cobbs to William R. Cox: 7 March 1827 [Images 132-134]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns the transportation of an unnamed woman [possibly Harriet] Cobbs has enslaved

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 13 May 1827 [Images 135-136]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns Harriet and inability to transport her to Cobbs' homes, and the poor health of Moses

## **Letter - R.E. Putney to William Cobbs: 15 August 1827 [Images 137-138]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns Ned and Tom self-emancipating and believes they will make their way to Ohio or perhaps Canada and plans to pursue and advertise for their return

## **Letter - William Cobbs to William R. Cox: 28 September 1827 [Images 139-141]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns additional information about the pursuit of Ned and Tom and the belief that only a sufficient reward would ensure their apprehension. Notes Ned as being about 33 or 24 and Tom and 27 to 29. Believes the reward should be set to \$200-300.

## **Letter - Charles L. Cobbs to William Cobbs: 28 December 1827 [Images 142-144]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns ploughing and business, appeal from Harry to not be separated from his wife who is enslaved by Charles Cobb,

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 8 February 1829[Images 145-146]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns the death of Moses, and the drowning of a Peter Grant

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 27 January 1830 [Images 147-149]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns the hiring out of Stephen and his wife [unnamed], difficulty in hiring out Harry due to mental health difficulties

## **Letter - William Cobbs to William R. Cox: 25 December 1830 [Images 150-151]**

### **Scope and Content**

Inability to hire out Harry due to his mental health and willingness to sell Harry is the opportunity is available

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 9 January 1831 [Images 152- 153]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns hiring out of George to Lewis Ruffner and Harry to Putney

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 24 January 1832 [Images 111-112]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns the hiring out of Harry, Peter, George

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 6 January 1833 [Images 113-114]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns the hiring out of Harry, Peter, George. Unable to hire out Harry due to concerns about his mental health? Notes both George and Peter and in poor health.

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 27 January 1833 [Images 115-116]**

### **Scope and Content**

Again corresponds about the difficulty in hiring out Harry due to his anxiety about being away from home [Lynchburg, Va.]

## **Letter - William Cobbs to William R. Cox: 31 December 1835 [Images 117-118]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns poor health of his daughter and himself as well as the hiring out of Peter and George

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 28 January 1840 [Images 119-120]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns the purchase history of Steven, death of Moses, Ned and Tom as freedom seekers,

## **Letter - William R. Cox to William Cobbs: 7 January 1841 [Images 121-122]**

### **Scope and Content**

Concerns the purchase history of Steven, death of Moses, Ned and Tom as freedom seekers as well as George being badly scalded