

McBryde, John M. and Cora Bolton, Family Papers

John M. and Cora Bolton McBryde Family Papers

1862-2018



Title Statement

McBryde, John M. and Cora Bolton, Family Papers | John M. and Cora Bolton McBryde Family Papers, 1862-2018
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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.2023.069

Unit Date

1862-2018

Language

The material in this collection is in English.

Abstract

This collection contains copies of photographs, genealogy materials, lectures, and newspaper clippings related to the family of John McLaren McBryde (1841-1923) and Cora Bolton McBryde (1839-1920), the fifth president and first lady of Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Extent

0.2 Cubic Feet 1 box

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

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Source of Acquisition

The John M. and Cora Bolton McBryde Family Papers was donated to Special Collections and University Archives in November 2018.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the John M. and Cora Bolton McBryde Family Papers was completed in July 2023.

Preferred Citation

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Biographical Note - John M. McBryde

Known as the "father of VPI," John McLaren McBryde (January 1, 1841-March 20, 1923) was the fifth president of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute (VPI, or Virginia Tech). He was born in Abbeville, South Carolina, to Susan McLaren and John McBryde, a Scottish cotton merchant. In December of 1858, John McLaren McBryde enrolled in South Carolina College (later the University of South Carolina) in Columbia, South Carolina. He later transferred to the University of Virginia in 1859, leaving in 1861 to fight in the American Civil War for the Confederacy. Having joined the military, McBryde was stationed on both Sullivan and Morris Islands, reportedly seeing the first shot fired on Fort Sumter. In 1862, McBryde contracted typhus fever and was forced to leave the army, but went on to work for the Treasury Department of the Confederate States of America in Richmond, Virginia.

Following the end of the Civil War, McBryde ran a large farm named Branchland in Charlottesville, Virginia. During this time, he published numerous articles on the subject of agriculture, gaining him the attention that eventually led to his appointment as a Professor of Agriculture and Botany at the University of Tennessee in 1879. In 1882, McBryde was offered a chair at the South Carolina College, where he remained until 1891, expanding it into a university after becoming president. In 1891, South Carolina University was again reduced to a college and its agricultural department moved to Clemson, leading to McBryde's acceptance of the Presidency at the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (VAMC).

During his time at Virginia Tech, McBryde divided the college into separate departments, expanded the curriculum, oversaw the installation of an infirmary and a new water system, added dormitories and faculty housing, and increased enrollment from 135 students in 1891 to 727 by 1903. After his retirement in 1907, McBryde was the first person elected president emeritus for the college, eventually becoming known as "the father of VPI."

On November 18, 1863, McBryde married Cora Bolton. They had eight children, six of whom lived to adulthood: Janet (1864-1869), James (1866-1925), Anna (1868-1948; later Mrs. Robert J. Davidson), John McLaren, Jr. (1870-1956), Charles (1872-1962), Susan (1874-1951), Meade (1877-1959), and Waid (abt. 1878-?). In 1923, McBryde died at his son's home in New Orleans but was returned to Blacksburg, Virginia for burial.

Biographical Note - Cora Bolton McBryde

Cora Bolton was born to James (1812-1869) and Anna Maria Harrison (1813-1873) Bolton in Richmond, Virginia, on August 4, 1839. She was the eldest of six children. Her father was a physician who worked in the Richmond area, including during the American Civil War. In 1860, Cora, then 19, was living with her family there.

Cora married John McLaren McBryde on November 18, 1863. They had eight children, six of whom lived to adulthood: Janet (1864-1869), James (1866-1925), Anna (1868-1948), John McLaren, Jr. (1870-1956), Charles Neil (1872-1962), Susan (1874-1951), Meade (1877-1959), and Waid (abt. 1878-?). Anna McBryde married

Robert J. Davidson. They had a daughter Anna Cora Davidson, who married John Wilbur Watson, and they had several children, including John Wilbur, Jr.

The 1880 census places the McBryde family in Knoxville, Tennessee, where John McBryde was teaching at the time. By 1891, they had settled in Blacksburg, where John McBryde became the fifth president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Cora died in Blacksburg, Virginia, in 1920 at the age of 80. She is buried in Westview Cemetery.

Scope and Content

This collection contains photocopies and computer print outs of photographs, genealogy materials, newspaper clippings, and other materials related to the family of John McLaren McBryde and Cora Bolton McBryde, the president and first lady of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Family members referenced in the collection include John M. McBryde, Jr., Charles McBryde, Anna McBryde Davidson, Robert J. Davidson, John Wilbur Watson, Sr., and John Wilbur Watson, Jr.

Related Archival Materials

See also the following collections at Virginia Tech Special Collections and University Archives:

Records of the Office of the President, John McLaren McBryde, RG 2/5

J. Bolton McBryde Collection, Ms1992-059

McBryde House Specification Records, Ms1999-010

Larry McBryde Collection on the John McLaren McBryde Family, Ms2013-024

Janet Barnhill Collection on Cora Bolton McBryde, Ms2016-019

Polly Ashelman Collection on the John McLaren McBryde Family, Ms2019-017

Midhurst, J.M. McBryde Estate, Blacksburg, Va., Map-0276

Photographs of McBryde are in the Faculty/Staff Photograph Collection

Keywords

Faculty and staff

University History

Local/Regional History and Appalachian South

McBryde, Cora Bolton, 1839-1920

McBryde family

McBryde, John McLaren, 1841-1923

Watson, John Wilbur, Jr.

McBryde, Charles Neil, Dr., 1872-1962

McLaren family

Watson, John Wilbur, Sr.

Rights Statement for Archival Description

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Arrangement

The material in this collection is arranged by material type.

Description of Subordinate Components

Newspaper Clippings about John M. and Cora Bolton McBryda, Anna McBryde Davidson, and Charles McBryde

Unit Date 1911-1962

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Article about John M. McBryde, Jr.

Unit Date 1946

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Obituaries for John Wilbur Watson, Sr.

Unit Date 1962

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

Letter to John Wilbur Watson, Jr.,

Unit Date 1949-04-02

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)

Genealogies and Family Histories for the McBryde, McLaren, and Davidson Families

Unit Date 2003, 2018, undated

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 5 (folder)

Copies of Photographs

Unit Date [ca. 1890s-1950s]

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 6 (folder)

Photocopies of Photographs

Unit Date [ca. 1890s-1950s]

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 7 (folder)