

A Guide to the Cocke Family Papers, 1794-1981

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A Collection in the Virginia Historical Society Mss1 C6458 d FA2

Virginia Historical Society

2002

History

Processed by: Virginia Historical Society Staff

Funding: Web version of the finding aid funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Title Statement

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Collection: Mss1 C6458 d FA2

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Publication Statement

File size: ca. 22 Kilobytes

Date: © 2002 By Virginia Historical Society. All rights reserved.

Publisher: Virginia Historical Society

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from typescript by rekeying.

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

Feb 17, 2004 PUBLIC "-//Virginia Historical Society//TEXT (US::ViH::vih00005::A Guide to the Cocke Family Papers)//EN" "vih00005.xml" converted from EAD 1.0 to 2002 by v1to02.xml (sy2003-10-15).

Feb 25, 2004 converted to conform to eadVIVA.dtd by vivastrict.xml

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

Descriptive Summary

Collection number

Mss1 C6458 d FA2

Language

English

Creators

Thomas Lewis Preston, Elizabeth Randolph (Preston) Cocke, John Preston Cocke, Elizabeth Preston Cocke.

Extent

2,950 (ca.) items.

Repository

Virginia Historical Society

Administrative Information

Access

Collection is open to all researchers

Use Restrictions

Permission to cite, quote or reproduce for publication must be obtained in writing from the Senior Archivist.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Mrs. James E. Heslep, Richmond, Va., and others, in 1981.

Preferred Citation

Cocke Family Papers, 1794-1981 (Mss1 C6458 d FA2), Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va.

Biographical/Historical Information

Represented are Thomas Lewis Preston (1781-1812), of Rockbridge County, Va. ; his daughter, Elizabeth Randolph (Preston) Cocke (1808-1889), of Powhatan County, Va.; her son, John Preston Cocke (1845-1917), of Richmond, Va.; and his daughter, Elizabeth Preston Cocke (1891-1981), of Richmond.

Scope and Content Information

Papers, 1794-1812, of Thomas Lewis Preston include correspondence with siblings and information on the Ann Smith Academy (for girls). Papers, 1893-1914, of Elizabeth Randolph (Preston) Cocke concern the sale of land in Kentucky by her children. Papers of John Preston Cocke, attorney, include memoranda books, personal correspondence, and information on the history of Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, Va. Papers, 1903-1981, of Elizabeth Preston Cocke, include publications, personal correspondence, and administrative records documenting her various social and charitable activities.

Arrangement

Arranged into twelve sections by individual creator and subdivided by document type.

Contents List

Series 1: Thomas Lewis Preston (1781-1812), Lexington, Va. 1794-1812

Box 1**Biographical Information**

Thomas Lewis Preston was born on the family estate "Smithfield," in Montgomery County. He attended Rockbridge Academy, Washington College and the College of William and Mary before reading law in Richmond in 1804. He returned to Montgomery but settled in Lexington after his marriage to Edmonia Madison Randolph, daughter of Edmund Randolph, in 1806. TLP was a major in the Virginia militia as well as a member of the Virginia General Assembly from 1806-1811. In 1807 he was appointed by the assembly to act as agent in recovering funds due Virginia land warrant holders from surveyors in Kentucky. He was also a trustee of Ann Smith Academy in Rockbridge County, one of the earliest incorporated female academies in the South.

The papers of Thomas Lewis Preston consist of correspondence, legal documents, accounts and estate materials. Much of the correspondence deals with the affairs of Ann Smith Academy, state and national politics and family matters. Although there are only about forty items of correspondence, a good deal of this comes from prominent Virginians. Among these correspondents are: Peter Vivian Daniel, associate justice of the Supreme Court; John Floyd, governor of Virginia and brother-in-law of TLP; Thomas Gholson, Virginia congressman; Andrew Moore, Virginia senator; James Pleasants, Virginia senator; General John Preston, treasurer of Virginia and brother of TLP; Benjamin Howard, first territorial governor of Missouri and congressman from Kentucky; Edward Coles, second governor of Illinois and secretary to President James

Madison; and John Coalter, judge of the Court of Appeals and delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829-30.

Scope and Content

General correspondence, 1803-1812; loose accounts, 1794-1805; legal records; estate materials.

Series 2: Elizabeth Randolph (Preston) Cocke (1808-1889), "Oakland," Cumberland County, Va. 1864-1914

Box 2-3

Biographical Information

Elizabeth Randolph Preston married William Armistead Cocke of "Oakland," Cumberland and Powhatan counties, where the couple lived. After the Civil War, ERPC offered "Derwent," a small house on the Powhatan section of the "Oakland" estate, to General Robert E. Lee. Lee and his family lived at "Derwent" from June-September, 1865, when he assumed the presidency of Washington College.

This collection contains several items of correspondence and obituaries concerning ERPC. There is also a great deal of estate material, particularly concerning the disposition of land she owned in Louisville, Kentucky. This correspondence is among her sons, John Preston Cocke (executor) and Edmund Randolph Cocke and their attorneys and agents in Louisville. George Washington Custis Lee is also an occasional correspondent in this material.

Scope and Content

General correspondence, 1864-1870; obituaries; estate materials (arranged chronologically), 1893-1914.

Series 3: John Alexander Meredith (1814-1882), Richmond, Va. 1869-1870

Box 4

Biographical Information

On November 15, 1870, John Preston Cocke, youngest son of William Armistead Cocke and Elizabeth Randolph Preston Cocke, married Eliza Bernard Meredith, daughter of Judge John Alexander Meredith and thus several items from the Meredith family are included in the collection. Judge Meredith (1814-1882) was a lawyer and delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1850-51, commonwealth's attorney from Hanover County, and judge of the Circuit Court of Richmond from 1852-1869. He along with Richmond mayor Joseph Mayo and Judge William Henry Lyons surrendered the city to Union forces on April 3, 1865. Judge Meredith was also counsel for mayor-elect Henry K. Ellyson in the Richmond Mayoralty Case of 1870 and witnessed the "Capitol Disaster," the collapse of the galleries in the capitol.

Items pertaining to Judge Meredith include several letters, diplomas, a license to practice law and a certificate to practice before the Supreme Court. There is a pardon signed by President Andrew Johnson as well as commissions in the Virginia militia signed by governor James McDowell, Littleton Waller Tazewell and David Campbell. The collection also includes commissions signed by Governor John Letcher and diplomas belonging to Judge Meredith's son, William Bernard Meredith (1839-1862), as well as miscellaneous materials concerning other Meredith and Bernard family members.

Scope and Content

General correspondence, 1869-1870; license; certificate; commissions; pardon; diplomas; miscellany.

Series 4: William Bernard Meredith (1839-1861), Richmond, Va.

Box 4 (cont.)

Scope and Content

Commissions; diplomas.

Series 5: Bernard-Meredith families

Box 4 (cont.)

Scope and Content

Miscellaneous materials concerning Sarah Ann Bernard (1799-1860); Sarah Ann (Bernard) Meredith (1817-1889); Eliza Frances Bernard) Semmes (1815-1889); and Mary Ella Meredith (1843-1864).

Series 6: William Fautleroy Cocke (1836-1863), "Oakland," Cumberland County, Va. 1861

Box 5

Biographical Information

William Fautleroy Cocke (1836-1863), son of William Armistead Cocke and Elizabeth Randolph (Preston) Cocke, attended both Washington College and the University of Virginia. On April 23, 1861, he enlisted in Company E, 18th Virginia Infantry, CSA. He was killed at the battle of Gettysburg. The collection includes a letter to his brother, John Preston, describing army life, as well as several diplomas and class reports from the University of Virginia.

Scope and Content

Correspondence, 1861; education; diplomas.

Series 7: John Preston Cocke (1845-1917), Richmond, Va. 1874-1916

Box 5 (cont.)-8

Biographical Information

John Preston Cocke is the major figure in the collection. He attended Virginia Military Institute in 1863-64 where, as a cadet, participated in the battle of New Market. After the war, he attended both Washington College and the University of Virginia. After the latter he received a law degree in 1870. That year he moved to Richmond to practice law under the guidance of his father-in-law, Judge John A. Meredith. The firm of Meredith and Cocke was a highly respected one and JPC, although seldom appearing in court as an advocate, was widely sought for his knowledge of equity and probate law. He also served for many years on the vestry of St. James Episcopal Church, Richmond.

This collection deals with the personal affairs and not the legal ones of JPC. Personal materials include diaries of a trip to England and Scotland, memoranda books, correspondence, and a series of biographical sketches written by JPC on notable persons buried in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond. Educational materials include diplomas and class reports from the University of Virginia as well as six class reports from Washington College signed by General Robert E. Lee. There is also a letter from Woodrow Wilson, thanking JPC for his support. Materials for the guardianship of Elizabeth Randolph Preston Cocke (b. 1866) from 1873- 1887 include accounts, vouchers and reports to the Cumberland County Court. The last box of JPC material contains obituaries, resolution and sympathy letters directed to his wife.

Scope and Content

Diaries, June 24, 1912-August 10, 1912, August 10, 1912-August 31, 1912; memoranda books, 1883-1887, 1888, 1890, 1895-1916 (7 vols.); correspondence with individuals, 1864-1916; correspondence with institutions, 1890-1905; education materials; diplomas; Battle of New Market; "Hollywood" sketches; guardianship of Elizabeth Randolph Preston Cocke (b. 1866), 1874-1887; obituaries; resolutions; sympathy letters.

Series 8: Eliza Bernard (Meredith) Cocke (1848-1922), Richmond, Va. 1864-1922

Box 9

Biographical Information

Materials pertaining to Eliza Bernard (Meredith) Cocke, wife of John Preston Cocke, include correspondence, obituaries and miscellany. Among the correspondents are: Nancy Astor, author Mary Johnston and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, wrote to thank EBMC for her participation in a Navy Department program where citizens lent binoculars, spy-glasses and similar items to the Navy to aid in the war effort.

Scope and Content

General correspondence, 1864-1922; miscellany; obituaries.

Series 9: Ella Meredith Cocke (1873-1966), Richmond, Va. 1892-1960

Box 10

Scope and Content

Correspondence with individuals, 1892-1957; correspondence with institutions, 1931-1960; miscellany; obituaries.

Series 10: Sarah Bernard (Cocke) Nash(1885-1974), Richmond, Va. 1957-1960

Box 10 (cont.)

Scope and Content

General correspondence, 1957-1960; clippings; obituaries.

Series 11: Elizabeth Preston Cocke (1891-1981), Richmond, Va. 1903-1981

Box 11-17

Biographical Information

The major figure in the Cocke Family Papers is Elizabeth Preston Cocke. She was involved in numerous civic, religious and benevolent activities in Richmond throughout her life and these are documented in the collection. She attended Sweet Briar College from 1909-1912. She was trained as a nurse and in 1913 became president of the Girls' Auxiliary of the Instructive Visiting Nurses Association. The IVNA sponsored a summer camp for underprivileged children from Richmond. Although too frail to serve overseas, Elizabeth Preston Cocke joined the Army in 1917 as a reconstruction aide in Boston. Her work entailed the care and rehabilitation of handicapped soldiers. After the war, she was active in the organization of children's nurseries and was second president of the Richmond Junior League. In this capacity she was involved in the restoration of Williamsburg, Va. During World War II, Elizabeth Preston Cocke was active in Richmond's Volunteer Service Bureau in helping to train interviewers to screen and place prospective volunteers. She performed the same task for Richmond's aircraft filter system, which was part of a network of volunteer women that identified and tracked all aircraft that flew over the eastern seaboard. She was coordinator of the nurse's aid program for McGuire Hospital and was also active in overseas relief work from 1944-1946. After the war, Elizabeth Preston Cocke was active in the United World Federalists movement, which was dedicated to international understanding and cooperation. She was a life-long member of St. James Episcopal Church.

This collection contains correspondence, reports, bulletins, printed materials and clippings concerning these activities as well as personal and institutional correspondence and diaries detailing travel abroad. Some of this correspondence deals with her father's participation in the battle of New Market, its centennial celebration and its commemoration with a bronze plaque in St. James Church. Other correspondents include Alexander Wilbourne Weddell, former U. S. ambassador to Argentina and Spain, and Dugold Stewart Walker, artist and illustrator.

Scope and Content

Diaries, 1903, May 14-August 10, 1912, August 12-August 23, 1912, September 21-October 15, 1912, 1920, 1921, 1953, 1957, 1969, 1970; commonplace book, 1929.; correspondence with individuals, unidentified and A- W, 1905-1981; correspondence with institutions, 1924-1981; educational materials; lines of verse; Cocke Trust, 1933-1963; Girls' Auxiliary, IVNA, 1913-1924; reconstruction aide, 1917-1919; children's nurseries, 1924-1932; Junior League, 1925-1925; Richmond Volunteer Service Bureau, 1941-1946; Richmond Aircraft Warning Filter System, 1942-1945; Nurse's aide, 1944-1946; United World Federalism, 1948-1956; St. James Church, bronze tablets, 1961-1964; V.M.I., Battle of New Market, 1964; miscellany.

Series 12: Family and Genealogical Material

Box 17 (cont.)-19

Scope and Content

Houses, "Smithfield," "Bremono," "Oakland," and "Derwent"; clippings; genealogical notes and correspondence, Bernard-Meredith; bound volume, Meredith/Manning line; genealogical notes and correspondence, Preston- Walker; genealogical societies; miscellany.