

A Guide to the Charles A. Derby Papers, 1844-1867

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Descriptive Summary

Accession number

mss 00030

Language

English

Physical Characteristics

The papers consist of approximately 60 items and are filed in one manuscript box.

Repository

Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute

Administrative Information

Access

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

The Charles A. Derby Papers were donated to the Virginia Military Institute in 1976-1977 by Mrs. Margaret S. Clark.

Preferred Citation

Charles A. Derby Papers, mss 00030, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

Biographical/Historical Information

Charles A. Derby, the son of Perry L. Derby and Martha [maiden name not known] was born in Dinwiddie County, Virginia on September 12, 1828. His early years were spent on his father's plantation and as a student at Winfield Academy in Dinwiddie County. He entered the Virginia Military Institute on August 8, 1845 and graduated on July 4, 1848, standing 5th in a class of 24.

Following his graduation from VMI, Derby began a teaching career that continued through the late 1850's. His various positions included work as a private tutor for a family in Northumberland County, Virginia; head of the Fairfax (VA) Academy; head of an academy in Sumterville, Alabama; professor of mathematics at military schools in Kentucky and Georgia; and as principal of a private academy in Eutaw, Alabama.

In 1856-1857 Derby began the study of theology and was ordained in the Episcopal ministry. He was named deacon at St. Stephens's Church in Eutaw, while also continuing his private school there. He subsequently gave up teaching as his primary interest and served at a church in Camden, Alabama, and then at St. Peter's Church, Lowndes County, Alabama.

Derby married twice during the 1850's. His first wife, Clara J. Hunt of Marietta, Georgia, died within a year of her marriage. On December 28, 1859, he married Charlotte Basset of Cahaba, Alabama. The couple had two daughters, Martha (b. October 1860) and Harriet (b. April 1862 d. February 1927).

A year after the outbreak of the Civil War, Derby joined the Confederate Army. He was elected Lt. Colonel of the 44th Alabama Infantry Regiment on May 16, 1862 and entered service at Selma, AL circa June 5, 1862. He was killed in action at the Battle of Antietam (Maryland) on September 17, 1862. His body was not recovered.

Scope and Content Information

The bulk of the collection consists of Derby family correspondence. Approximately twenty-eight letters were written by Charles Derby. The Charles Derby letters, 1844-1862, cover the period from late boyhood up to his death in battle in 1862. Included are letters (1846-1847) written while he was a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, as well as correspondence dating from his careers as teacher and Episcopal clergyman. Two items were written during his brief service in the Confederate Army.

The papers also include fourteen letters written by other members of the Derby Family, primarily Mary Derby Stancell ("Mollie") and her husband, Samuel.

Other items in the papers are clippings, wedding announcements, poetry, and other family miscellany.

Contents List

Charles Derby Outgoing Correspondence, 1844-1862

Scope and Content

All letters were written by Charles Derby unless noted otherwise.

Pre-college

To his father, 1844 May 15

Scope and Content

Written from Petersburg, where he is in school; topics include his health, finances, misc. personal news.

W. Maghee to Perry Derby 1845 June 27

Scope and Content

Written by Charles's teacher to his father, Perry. Regarding Charles's chances for an appointment at the Virginia Military Institute, and obtaining letters of recommendation.

Virginia Military Institute cadet years

To his father. 1846 May 9

Scope and Content

Regarding the difficult extraction of a tooth; disturbance in VMI Barracks in which cadets threw "missiles."

To his father. 1846 October 24

Scope and Content

Regarding the arrival of new faculty member William Gilham; disciplinary action against cadets; health.

To his father. 1847 January 19

Scope and Content

Regarding results of mid-year examinations; cadet Christmas celebration; severe snowstorm.

To his father. 1847 February 26

Scope and Content

Regarding future teaching positions; controversy in Lexington Presbyterian Church- the pastor, Dr. Skinner, is "on trial" before the presbytery; graduating class has chosen speakers;

To his father. 1847 December 27

Scope and Content

Discusses perseverance and value of hard work; problems with Chemistry and sciences; Christmas celebration by cadets

Teaching Career

To his father. 1849 January 16

Scope and Content

From Northumberland County, Virginia. Derby is a private instructor in the home of Mr. Harding, a wealthy landowner. Mentions family Christmas celebration; contrasts people of Dinwiddie and Northumberland; misc. news.

To his father. 1852 August 23

Arrangement

From Sumterville, Alabama. Regarding comfort of his lodgings with wealthy planter; social life; has become a Mason; misc. personal news.

Resolution from Board of Trustees, Georgia Military Institute (Marietta, GA). 1854 December 22

Arrangement

Accepting Derby's resignation.

Extracts from Derby-Willis Crenshaw correspondence 1855 July-August

Arrangement

Regarding business arrangements for the Eutaw (AL) Academy

Eutaw Institute Announcement 1855 September 24**Arrangement**

Announcing the opening of the Eutaw Institute.

To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell. 1855 October 17**Arrangement**

From Eutaw, Alabama. Talks of his sadness and despair after the death of his wife Clara J. Hunt ("Jeanie"); was betrayed by Board of Trustees of Eutaw Institute and has had to open a private school on his own.

To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1855 October 17**Arrangement**

From Eutaw, Alabama. Talks of his sadness and despair after the death of his wife Clara J. Hunt ("Jeanie"); was betrayed by Board of Trustees of Eutaw Institute and has had to open a private school on his own.

To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1856 July 17**Arrangement**

From Eutaw, Alabama. His school is a success and he hopes to make more money in the next session; Eutaw is an area of wealthy planters where "grand parties and weddings come off at great expense;" money is plentiful, but "moral truth is below par here."

Episcopal Ministry**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1857 May 27****Arrangement**

From Eutaw, Alabama. Has been ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church on April 23 and has been given charge of St. Stephen's Church in Eutaw; is a deacon, and will be fully ordained after further study; is still busy with a school of "nearly sixty boys;" grieves for his wife.

To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1857 August 22**Arrangement**

From Dinwiddie, Virginia. Traveled to Philadelphia and Boston; preached at Christ Church in Norfolk; family news.

To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1858 January 20**Arrangement**

From Eutaw, Alabama. Congregation at St. Stephen's has grown; has friends; his school is prosperous; railroad is coming to Eutaw.

To his father. 1859 December 27**Arrangement**

From Camden, Alabama. Married Miss Charlotte Basset of Cahaba, AL on December 28; general news.

To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1860 January 10**Arrangement**

From Camden, Alabama. Announces his marriage to Charlotte Basset of Cahaba, AL (b. England);

discusses his new wife and his happiness with the marriage.

**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1860
February 28**

Arrangement

From Camden, Alabama. Discusses the success of his new church; since giving up teaching has time to prepare sermons and preach twice per week; reviews his teaching career; praises his wife.

**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1860 April
17**

Arrangement

From Camden, Alabama. Has just returned from visiting his wife's family in Cahaba.

**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1860
December 19**

Arrangement

From St. Peter's Church, Lowndes County, AL. He and Charlotte are setting up housekeeping in new home; baby is well, eight weeks old;

**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1861 April
2**

Arrangement

From St. Peter's Church, Lowndes County, AL. Regarding the murder of their cousin Edward Cousins

**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1861 May
14**

Arrangement

From St. Peter's Church, Lowndes County, AL. Regarding family members joining the Confederate Army; Derby's frustration-

"My position as an Episcopal Clergyman prevents me from carrying my scanty fund of military knowledge into effect and all that I can do is to drill a company now and then. The preachers in the various denominations can fill offices both civil and military. Not so the clergymen of the Episcopal Church. However, if the worst comes to the worst, I may break over the prescribed limits at the risk of being deposed. I feel like a man with his hands tied. The war has begun. Where it will end the Great Creator alone knows."

**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1862 April
15**

Arrangement

From St. Peter's Church, Lowndes County, AL.

Congregation smaller due to the war; call for troops from Lowndes, but the Governor countermanded the order;

"In four hours I would have been Captain of a company ready to set out for Mobile. I had made all my arrangements to go, when the countermand was received....But few Confederate soldiers are left in Ala to protect her. She is consequently dependent upon her militia for her defense. Contrary to my expectation and very much to my surprise I was recently elected Captain of the Militia of Benton. Although the militia was not to my taste, yet I did not feel at liberty to decline the office which I was so pressingly urged to accept. Accordingly I am regularly engaged with drilling new men."

Civil War-Confederate Army Service.

**To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1862 May
27**

Scope and Content

From Benton, Alabama. "I find myself very busy preparing for the war and have but two days to make the preparation. On the 15th inst. I was elected Lieut. Colonel of Kent's Regiment." (44th Alabama Infantry).

To his sister, Mary Derby Stancell, in Margarettsville, North Carolina. 1862 July 15

Scope and Content

From Camp near Falling Creek, Chesterfield, VA. Is with his regiment seven miles from Richmond; family news; speaks of wartime devastation- "My intimate friends and neighbors have suffered dreadfully. Many of them have been killed and many are dangerously wounded. It makes my heart sick to think of it."

Derby Family Correspondence, 1852-1867

Samuel Stancell to Mary "Mollie" Derby. 1852 January 9.

Scope and Content

From Northampton Co., NC. Regarding problems on his [family's?] plantation; illness among slaves; contract for railroad sills (Raleigh and Gaston Railroad) should be very profitable; longs to visit her; has had a daguerreotype made for her.

Samuel Stancell to Mary "Mollie" Derby. 1852 January 10.

Scope and Content

From Northampton Co., NC. Misc. news; regarding their marriage date.

Samuel Stancell to Mary "Mollie" Derby. 1852 February 25.

Scope and Content

From Northampton Co., NC. Worries about her health; expresses his love for her; wedding to be March 31- discusses plans.

Samuel Stancell to Mary ("Mollie"), his wife. 1852 November 6.

Scope and Content

From Lawrenceville, Arkansas. Samuel is traveling on business gives general news of his trip.

Samuel Stancell to Mary ("Mollie"), his wife, in Somerville, Tennessee. 1852 November 11.

Scope and Content

From Marlbrook, Hemstead Co., Arkansas. Short letter to let her know that he is well.

Samuel Stancell to Mary ("Mollie"), his wife. 1853 April 7.

Scope and Content

From Margarettsville, NC. Short note to Mollie, who is visiting her family; wants her to come home soon.

Samuel Stancell to Mary ("Mollie"), his wife. 1853 April 12.

Scope and Content

From Jackson, NC. Short note to Mollie- sorry to hear she is unwell; mentions business.

Mollie Stancell to her husband, Samuel. 1854 July 21.

Scope and Content

From Darvills (Dinwiddie County), Virginia. Misses him; family news.

Janie Hunt Derby (Charles's wife) to Mollie. 1855 February 6.

Scope and Content

From Marietta, Georgia. Gives news about her and Charles's life in Marietta;

Col. William F. Perry to Charlotte Basset Derby (Mrs. Charles Derby). 1863

January 1.

Scope and Content

Perry was the commander of Derby's Regiment. This was written after Derby's death and offers condolences. (Original and one contemporary copy).

Francis H. Smith to Perry L. Derby. 1863 June 20.

Scope and Content

Francis H. Smith was Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute. This letter is in reply to Mr. Derby's notification that Charles has died in battle.

From Charlotte Derby (Charles's widow) to her sister-in-law Mary Derby Stancell. 1864 March 13.

Scope and Content

From Cahaba, Alabama. The children have been ill; severe winter; general news.

To Mary Derby Stancell from Anna [name unknown]. 1867 December 1.

Scope and Content

From Southampton Co., Virginia. Personal news.

Printed Material and Clippings

Miscellaneous Family Documents