

# A Guide to the Giles Gunn Papers, 1848-1854

Giles Gunn Papers 1848-1854

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A Collection in Virginia Military Institute Archives mss 00292

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## History

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## Title Statement

A Guide to the Giles Gunn Papers, 1848-1854

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## Profile Description

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## Descriptive Summary

**Collection number**

mss 00292

**Language**

English

**Physical Characteristics**

The papers consist of five items filed in one folder.

## Repository

Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute

# Administrative Information

## Access

There are no restrictions.

## Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

The Giles Gunn Papers were donated to the Virginia Military Institute in 1933 by Mary Maigret, Gunn's niece.

## Preferred Citation

Giles Gunn Papers, mss 00292, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

# Biographical/Historical Information

Giles Gunn was born in Connecticut on December 19, 1825, most likely at Washington, Litchfield County. He was the son of John Northrup Gunn, Jr. (1798-1883) and Lora Smith (1800-1841), who were married on June 16, 1819. By 1848, Giles Gunn was working as a teacher in Lexington, Rockbridge County, Virginia, where he married Virginia W. Morrison of Rockbridge County on December 19, 1859. Virginia, the daughter of William and Mary Morrison, was twenty-four years old at the time of her marriage. Birth records indicate that the couple had several children, all born in Rockbridge: Lora (b. 1860), Johnella (b. 1871), Effa or Effie (b. 1875), Fred (b. 187?). This listing of children may not be complete. Giles Gunn died on November 24, 1892. No other biographical information was available at the time the collection was processed.

# Scope and Content Information

The papers consist of five letters (1848-1854) written by Giles Gunn, a native of Connecticut, while he was a schoolteacher in Lexington, Rockbridge County, Virginia. The letters, addressed primarily to his sister Mary (living at the Gunn home in Washington, Litchfield County, Connecticut), include discussions of interesting local events as well as references to family. Topics include commencement at the Virginia Military Institute; a detailed description of his school and his methods of instruction; a description of the communion service at a local church, including references to black communicants; references to the townspeople's reaction to a rumored slave insurrection; and a discussion of the murder of VMI Cadet Thomas Blackburn.

# Contents List

## Letter to Mary Gunn, 1848 July 8

### Scope and Content

Written at Lexington, Virginia to his sister in Washington, Litchfield County, Connecticut. Topics include commencement at the Virginia Military Institute and a speech by the governor of Virginia.

"This was my first sight of a real Gov. and it did not give me a very good opinion of the race."

## Letter to Mary Gunn, 1848 August 13

### Scope and Content

Written at Lexington, Virginia to his sister in Washington, Litchfield County, Connecticut. Topics include description of communion at a local church

"You would like to see them partake. A table is made in front of the pulpit and all that can get round it set down, then the minister at the head of the table cuts the bread, and blesses it, and gives it to another priest who takes it on one side of the table and passes it to each person and says 'may this emblem of the dying savior be blessed to your sanctification.' Thus a minister on each side of the table goes through with his ceremony and the same motions over the blood, or wine, then the head priest gives a short exhortation and a prayers and these rise and make room for another table full. Thus they go it till all have had a bite. Then they call upon the colored brethren, or part of the ministers do, to come down out of the gallery. In some of the churches they climb up to the gallery by a ladder on the outside and go in a the window."

## **Letter to his Mary Gunn and Susan (Gunn?), 1848 July 8**

### **Scope and Content**

Written at Lexington, Virginia. Topics include a detailed description of teaching at the local school, including a discussion of the curriculum and his discipline methods.

"Mary if you go into teaching begin right at first. Make them know that you are the master. If any thing comes up that you don't know never let the scholars see that you are at a loss. Give your opinion freely and if they show you a book different declare that you are right and the book wrong."

## **Letter to Mary Gunn, 1851 January 6**

### **Scope and Content**

Written at Lexington, Virginia. Topics include description of the town's response to rumors of a slave insurrection.

"You had better believe that it made some stir. The militia was called out and they now parade the streets from night to morning. It is curious how quick the people of this country can be roused to a state of watchfulness for their all depends upon this."

## **Letter to "Molly" (Mary Gunn?), 1854 February 1**

### **Scope and Content**

Written at Lexington, Virginia. Topics include the murder of Virginia Military Cadet Thomas Blackburn by Charles Christian, a local law student.

"You see how nice a sense of honor the southerners have. In law here if one man calls another a liar and he beats him almost to death for it the law does nothing with him for it is considered sufficient provocation."