

A Guide to the Papers of the Virginia Military Institute Superintendent. Francis H. Smith, 1839-1889

Papers of the Virginia Military Institute Superintendent. Francis H. Smith 1839-1889
1839-1889

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Descriptive Summary

Accession Number

RG02.01.01

Language

English

Physical Characteristics

ca. 30 linear feet

Repository

Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

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Biographical Information

Francis H. Smith served for fifty years (1839-1889) as VMI's first Superintendent. Smith was born in 1812, graduated from West Point in 1833, and came to Lexington, Virginia in 1839 to lead the newly established Virginia Military Institute. He died in March 1890, a few months after his retirement as Superintendent. He was known as the builder and --after the Civil War-- rebuilder of VMI. His official correspondence spans the period 1839-1889, with few gaps. The Civil War era and earlier letters survived Gen. David Hunter's destruction of many Institute buildings in June 1864. Smith corresponded with the notable military, educational, and political leaders of his time, making the correspondence a rich resource for scholars.

Scope and Content

These files constitute the major record series generated by the office of Francis H. Smith, VMI's first Superintendent. He served from 1839-1889. The records, (ca. 30 linear feet) consist of incoming and outgoing correspondence, order books, speeches and publications, personal file, and subject files.

Index Terms

Smith, Francis H. -- (Francis Henney), -- 1812-1890.

Military schools -- Southern States.

Virginia Military Institute -- History -- 19th century.

Military education -- Virginia -- History -- 19th century.

Virginia Military Institute -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865.

Arrangement

The papers are arranged in 7 series:

Records Series

- Incoming Correspondence, 1839-1870; 1885-1889
- Outgoing Correspondence, 1839-1889
- Order Books, 1839-1889
- Annual Reports to the Board of Visitors
- Speeches, Addresses, Publications
- Subject Files
- Personal File, Papers, and related

Contents List

Incoming Correspondence 1839-1870; 1885-1889

Scope and Content

The incoming letters dated 1839-1870 are arranged according to a numbering system used by Smith's office. Within each year, each incoming letter was assigned a letter number and filed in numerical order; some years were broken down into alphabetical sections with a separate numerical sequence for each section. The later letters, 1885-1889, are arranged alphabetically within each year. There is no separate sequence for 1860, although a small number of 1860 letters appear in the 1861 file. No incoming letter file exists for the period 1870-1884.

Letters, Numbered 1839-1844

Box 1

Letters, Numbered 1845-1846

Box 2

Letters, Numbered 1847-1848

Box 3

Letters, Numbered 1849-1850

Box 4

Letters, Numbered 1851

Box 5

Letters, Numbered 1852

Box 6

Letters, Numbered 1853

Box 7

Letters, Numbered 1854

Box 8

Letters, Numbered 1855 1855

Box 9

Letters, Numbered, 1-599 1856

Box 10

1856, Letters 600-863

Box 11

Letters, Numbered 1857

Box 12

Letters, Numbered, A-L 1858

Box 13

Letters, Numbered, M-Y 1858

Box 14

Letters, Numbered, A-K 1859

Box 15

Letters, Numbered, L-Z 1859

Box 16

Letters, Numbered, A-D 1861

Box 17

Letters, Numbered, E-L 1861

Box 18

Letters, Numbered, M-R 1861

Box 19

Letters, Numbered, S-Z 1861

Box 20

Letters, Numbered, S-Z 1862 1862

Box 21

Letters, Numbered, H-P 1862

Box 22

Letters, Numbered, Q-Z 1862

Box 23

Letters, Numbered, A-E 1863

Box 24

Letters, Numbered, F-L 1863

Box 25

Letters, Numbered, M-R 1863

Box 26

Letters, Numbered, R-Z 1863

Box 27

Letters, Numbered, A-J 1864

Box 28

Letters, Numbered, K-R 1864

Box 29

Letters, Numbered, S-Z 1864

Box 30

Letters, Numbered, A-Z 1865

Box 31

Letters, Numbered, A-G 1866

Box 32

Letters, Numbered, H-Q 1866

Box 33

Letters, Numbered, R-Z 1866

Box 34

Letters, Numbered, A-F 1867

Box 35

Letters, Numbered, G-M 1867

Box 36

Letters, Numbered, N-T 1867

Box 37

Letters, Numbered, U-Z 1867

Box 38

Letters, Numbered, A-D 1868

Box 39

Letters, Numbered, E-L 1868

Box 40

Letters, Numbered, M-R 1868

Box 41

Letters, Numbered, S-Z 1868

Box 42

Letters, Numbered, A-Z 1869

Box 43

Letters, Numbered, A-D 1870

Box 44

Letters, Numbered, E-K 1870

Box 45

Letters, Numbered, C-Y 1870

Box 46

Letters, Numbered, L-P 1870

Box 47

Letters, Numbered, R-Z 1870

Box 48

1885, A-Z 1885

Box 49

1886, A-Z 1886

Box 50

1887, A-N 1887

Box 51

1887, O-Z 1887

Box 52

1888, A-O 1888

Box 53

1888, P-Z 1888

Box 54

1889, A-O 1889

Box 55

1889, P-Z 1889

Box 56

Outgoing Correspondence 1839-1889

Extent

Bound volumes in boxes. Letterpress copybooks from 1860-1889, 79 volumes; vols. from 1860-1869 contain some sections that are very difficult to decipher. Internal indexes in each volume beginning 1849.

Letterbook 1840 JUL 25-1844 FEB 8

Volume 1

Letterbook 1840 FEB 10-1848 DEC 30

Volume 2

Letterbook 1849 JAN 1-1851 AUG 9

Volume 3

Letterbook 1851 AUG 11-1854 NOV 22

Volume 4

Letterbook 1854 NOV 29-1857 JUN 11

Volume 5

Letterbook 1857 JUN 11-1859 DEC 30

Volume 6

Letterbook 1860 JAN 2-1860 JUN 7

Volume 7

Letterbook 1860 JUN 7-1860 OCT 1

Volume 8

Letterbook 1860 OCT 1-1861 FEB 13

Volume 9

Letterbook 1861 FEB 13-1861 SEP 24

Volume 10

Letterbook 1861 SEP 25-1862 AUG 27

Volume 11

Letterbook 1862 AUG 28-1863 JUL 17

Volume 12

Letterbook 1863 JUL 17-1863 DEC 31

Volume 13

Letterbook 1864 JAN 1-1864 AUG 8

Volume 14

Gap - no extant records 1864 AUG 9- 1865 OCT 30

Volume 0

Letterbook 1865 OCT 31-1866 AUG 15

Volume 15

Letterbooks, multiple volumes 1866 AUG 15-1889 DEC 31

Volume 16-79

Order Books 1839-1889

Extent

bound volumes

Scope and Content

Order Books, containing General and Special Orders, document all aspects of Institute life during the Smith Administration. They contain information about everyday cadet life, academics, training, and individual cadets. Some boxes contain multiple volumes; the box label date is inclusive for all volumes within a box.

Order Book 1839 NOV 11-1852 JAN 14

Volume 1

Order Book, Summer Camp 1842-1846

Volume 2

Order Book 1852 JAN 5-1857 JUL 17

Volume 3

Order Book 1857 JUL 31-1860 DEC 31

Volume 4

Order Book 1861 JAN 1-1863 AUG 31

Volume 5

Order Book 1862 JAN 17-1864 MAY 7

Volume 6

Scope and Content

This volume was carried away by a Union soldier, Private J. O. Humphreys of the 1st Ohio Artillery, after Hunter's Raid in June 1864. He used the empty pages in the back of the volume to record this account of his unit's activities from late April through early July, 1864. The diary has been transcribed and is also available on the VMI Archives website.

1863 SEP 1-1865 MAR 31

Volume 7

Scope and Content

This volume also contains a portion of a demerit book for 1866-1867, and a fragment of a matriculation book. The latter includes a copy of entries from 1839-August 1856, and original signatures from August 1856 through June 1861.

No Order Book for this period 1865 APR-NOV

Volume 0

Order Book 1865 DEC 9-1867 JUL 25

Volume 8

Order Book, multiple volumes 1867 SEP 3-1889 DEC 31

Volume 9-22

Annual Reports to the Board of Visitors 1840-1889

Scope and Content

Smith submitted annual reports to the VMI Board of Visitors in which he discussed in detail the operations of the Institute during the completed academic year. These were typically presented at the July Board

meetings and appear in the Board of Visitors Minutes in manuscript form. Beginning in the mid-1840's they were also published in pamphlet form. These reports provide an excellent account of life at the Institute for each academic year. Topics include significant events, cadet life, academics, and finances.

Speeches, Addresses, Publications 1841-1879

Box 1

Lecture on the History of Mathematics 1841

Folder 1

Elimination between two unknown equations with two unknown quantities... 1842

Folder 2

Regulations of Military Institutions applied to the Conduct of Common Schools. 1849

Folder 3

College Reform 1851

Folder 4

Memoir of Dr. Thomas Henderson of the United State Army by his son-in-law 1854

Folder 5

Introductory Address to the Corps of Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute on the Resumption of Academic Duties, September 2, 1856. 1856

Folder 6

Scientific Education in Europe 1859

Folder 7

Discourse on the Life and Character of Lt. Gen. Thoms. J. Jackson 1863

Folder 8

Introductory Lecture Read Before the Corps of Cadets on the Resumption of Academic Duties of the Virginia Military Institute at the Alms House, Richmond, Va., December 28, 1864 1864

Folder 9

The Inner Life of the VMI Cadet. Its Responsibilities and its Privileges. An Introductory address to the Corps of Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute on the Resumption of the Academic Exercises, September 10, 1866. 1866

Folder 10

Gymnastic and Technical Education in the Virginia Military Institute 1871

Folder 11

Synopsis of Argument of Gen. Smith in Behalf of the Claims of the Virginia Military Institute 1871

Folder 12

The Schools and Schoomasters of Virginia in the Olden Time. An Address 1874

Folder 13

Synopsis of Argument of Gen. F. H. Smith...before the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Delegates of Virginia, January 25, 1876 1876

Folder 14

Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Male Orphan Society of Richmond, with an Address by Prof. Francis H. Smith 1876

Folder 15

West Point Fifty Years Ago. An Address delivered before the Association of Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy at the Annual Reunion, June 12, 1879 1879

Folder 16

Subject Files 1839-1889

Cadet Letters of Application and Recommendation 1839-1864 (gaps)

Extent

5 boxes

Scope and Content

In the 19th century, students applying for admission to VMI submitted letters from parents and others in support of the application. This subject file consists of these letters, and includes both matriculating and non-matriculating students. Students who ultimately enrolled at VMI will have a more complete file in the alumni biographical files collection. However, students who did not enroll may have no other information on file.

Arrangement

Alphabetical

Faculty Applications, incomplete, 19th century. 1839-1860; 1884

Extent

Folders in 1 box

Scope and Content

Faculty applications, historical. Letters of application and supporting letters of recommendation submitted for several faculty & staff positions. Includes positions of Professor of Modern Languages, Physical Sciences, Steward, Quartermaster. This file only relates to a few specific positions.

Washington College (now Washington & Lee University). 1845-1860

Extent

Folders in 1 box

Scope and Content

Several items, 1845, concerning a complaint lodged by Washington College against VMI, which ultimately led to a severance of academic ties between the two institutions. Prof. George Dodd Armstrong represented the College on this issue. For a full account, see *100 Years at VMI* (William Couper), vol. 1, pps. 139-147. One unrelated document from 1860.

Arrangement

Alphabetical

George Washington Statue 1856-1866

Extent

Folders in 1 box

Scope and Content

Includes letter from Francis H. Smith to Dr. Galt inviting him to the statue dedication; original manuscript of remarks made at the Washington Statue dedication on July 3, 1856 by William B. Taliaferro, Revd. John H. Bowcock, Francis H. Smith. Information (photocopies, 1864-1866) concerning the confiscation of the

statue by Gen. Hunter's troops and its return from West Virginia in 1866, including copies of letters from David H. Strother of Gen. Hunter's staff.

Academic Departments Annual Reports to Superintendent Smith 1843-1848;1865-1889

Extent

Folders in 1 box

Scope and Content

Examples of academic department annual reports from the 19th century. These reports from the various academic departments were submitted to the Superintendent and help to document the early academic history of the Institute. This file includes early reports by John T. L. Preston (Languages), and Thomas H. Williamson (Engineering), as well as reports by other early faculty members. The series has many gaps; for example, none from the 1850's. The reports reflect some subjects that are no longer taught, e.g., Latin, drawing, mineralogy.

Financial Claims Against Cadets 1871-1873

Extent

Folders in 1 box

Scope and Content

19th century legal documents. Records of VMI attorneys Letcher, Maury and Letcher relating to collection of cadet debts after Civil War, 1871-1873

Frederick Volck Document 1870

Extent

1 item

Scope and Content

Three page memorandum of agreement (July 13, 1870) between sculptor Frederick Volck and VMI Superintendent Francis H. Smith. Volck was to complete a bronze equestrian statue of Gen. Thomas J. Jackson, but the project was never finished. (See the book "One Hundred Years at VMI" by William Couper, vol 3, p. 212, for an account of Volck's relationship with VMI).

Court Martial and Board of Inquiry Records 1848-1854; 1881-1898

Extent

Bound volume; documents in box/folders

Scope and Content

19th century historical court martial and board of inquiry records. Includes bound volume, 1848-1854, containing early VMI Courts Martial proceedings, including trial of Cadet James Walker for disrespectful behavior toward Major Thomas Jackson (Stonewall), May 1852. One box, misc. cases, 1881-1898. Records of other cases are located in the Order Books.

Biographical Material, Personal Papers, and Related Research Notes. 1858-ongoing

Scope and Content

Miscellaneous personal papers, biographical and genealogical information; and research notes compiled by historians

Biographical File 1890-ongoing

Scope and Content

Biographical, genealogical, printed material and other related information compiled over decades. This material is used as a reference file.

Personal Papers, Miscellaneous 1858-1890

Scope and Content

These miscellaneous Francis H. Smith and Smith family personal papers were once held by a Smith

These miscellaneous Francis H. Smith and Smith family personal papers were once held by a Smith descendant and subsequently donated to VMI. Much of the material is in poor condition. The most significant items are 2 volumes of personal letters written while on his trip to Europe in 1858, along with a scrapbook containing engravings of places visited. The material also contains misc. personal correspondence, including one letter from Scott Shipp thanking Smith for his condolences upon the death of Shipp's wife. Two items were transferred to the VMI Museum: a pair of Smith's eyeglasses; and a small oil portrait of Sarah (Sara) Henderson Smith, his wife.

"Old Spex of the VMI", unpublished biography ca. 1940

Scope and Content

Unpublished typescript by Francis H. Smith III. This is the only full length biography of Francis H. Smith and is a useful source for information not found elsewhere.

Edwin L. Dooley Research Notes 1990-2013

Scope and Content

Edwin L. Dooley, Jr., former Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and Secretary to the Board of Visitors, is also a historian who has studied Francis H. Smith in depth. This material comprises his research material relating to Smith's personal and professional life.