

Barrow and Davey family papers

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1898; 1902-1977; 1993

Title Statement

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MSS 16125

Unit ID

[Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

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Unit Date

1898; 1902-1977; 1993

Language

English

Extent

1.5 Cubic Feet 3 document boxes

Repository

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research use.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

This collection was a gift from Chris McLean to the Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia Library on 23 December, 2015.

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Biographical / Historical

William James Barrow (December 11, 1904 – August 25, 1967) was an American document restorer and former director of the W. J. Barrow Research Laboratory located in Richmond, Virginia. He also worked in paper conservation at the Mariner's Museum in Newport News, Virginia, and the Virginia State Library. He developed a process of preserving documents by lamination (placing a deacidified document between two sheets of reinforced cellulose acetate). Motivated by a desire to preserve his family books and records, he began a career in paper conservation. The collection is mostly about his family which includes his father, Dr. Bernard Barrow (1874-1954), his mother Sallie Archer Barrow (1877-1968), and his sister Sarah Barrow Davey and her husband, Philip Davey.

The Barrow family has had a long past in Virginia, beginning with Thomas Barrow who immigrated to America from Lancashire, England, in the early eighteenth century. A family descendant, John Barrow, living in Prince George County, was granted land patents in 1745 in Brunswick County, totaling 1,012 acres. He deeded 200 acres of the Brunswick County property to each of his two sons, William and John, in 1746. Brunswick County covers 529 square miles in the southern part of Virginia in the rolling hills of the eastern edge of the Piedmont region. According to a contemporary local history, the county population in 1904, the year Barrow was born, was 18,217, made up of the following groups: White, 7,375; Black, 10,842; and foreign born, 21 (Gannett 1980 [1904], 30).

Brunswick County borders on North Carolina and has more in common with rural areas in the Deep South. The county was agricultural with

crops of cotton, and moonshine whiskey accounting for a large part of the economy. Local histories of Brunswick County abound with landmarks, stores, and banks that bear the Barrow name, giving testimony to the social position and influence of the extended family that had flourished within the county (Neale 1975, 256-257).

William "Bill" Barrow's (1904-1967) direct family line can be traced back in Brunswick County to his great-great-grandfather, John Barrow, who married Jane (Jincy) Johnson in 1803. Their son, William Johnson Barrow, was Bill's great-grandfather. Bill's grandfather, William Henry Barrow, was born in 1830. He and his wife, Lucy Ann Elizabeth Hawthorne, had a son, Dr. Bernard Barrow (Bill's father) in 1874.

Dr. Bernard Barrow had nine siblings, six boys and three girls. He was raised on a plantation, which later became Poale, Virginia. He attended preparatory school at Randolph-Macon Academy, a military academy, in Bedford, Virginia. When Bernard graduated, his father gave him a house and land to help establish him as a plantation owner. Bernard, who wanted to study medicine rather than farm, sold the land in order to go to the University of Maryland Medical School (Davey 1990). Thus Bernard chose what was the more "modest life" of a country doctor. He graduated medical school in 1898. He interned in Pennsylvania, specializing in the study of ear, nose, and throat diseases. He did research during his internship to develop sanitary standards for barbershops, which at the time still practiced a few forms of medical treatment.

Bernard married Sallie Virginia Archer in 1898. She was raised in Petersburg, Virginia. Her father, Alfred Archer, while in the Confederate Army was wounded and taken prisoner at the age of 16 in 1864 during the siege of Petersburg. Her father died at a relatively young age because of his war wounds. Sallie had wanted to attend Wellesley College, but her family could not afford it. Instead she graduated in 1895, from Davis College, a women's college in Petersburg. After their marriage, Bernard and Sallie lived in an ordinary, country house in eastern Brunswick County outside the small town of Dundas, where he was the local doctor. Their home was about 12 miles from Blackstone, the nearest town of any size. Sarah, their first child was born in 1901. Their son, Bill was born three years later (Davey 1990).

According to Bill's widow, Ruth Gibb Barrow, "Everyone who worked for the family lived on the Barrow property." Ruth Barrow, pointed to a house in the background of a photograph, "that place in the back always had a [Black] family in it. Usually one [person] would work in the kitchen for Bill's mother.... Each one [of the Barrow children] had a [Black] child given to them at birth." Sarah, Bill's older sister, further explained that this arrangement insured that she and Bill each had a "[Black] playmate. Bill's playmate was named "Leme Call You" and Sarah's was "Virgie Lee." Obviously not their given names, this naming is indicative of plantation owners who had enslaved people. Bernard followed the plantation tradition of private tutorial education and, during Sarah and Bill's elementary school years, allowed only live-in governesses or tutors to teach his children. Their first governess was from Alabama. Bill spoke as if he were from the Deep South (R. G. Barrow 1987). Bernard Barrow was a captain in the Signal Corps in the army during World War I at age 45 in 1917.

Bill attended Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia, from 1923 to 1925 and was interested primarily in the laboratory classes in the sciences of physics and chemistry. He left school after two years, possibly (according to his wife) because he felt his years at public school did not offer Latin and did not prepare him well for college. He continued throughout his life to self-educate, learning French, and book binding. His father's love of rare books and chemistry inspired him to study document restoration. Even as a boy, Bill loved making newspapers with small sheets of paper. He could do fine printing and would copy news items from the daily paper.

From 1925 to 1931, Bill worked for his cousin Albert in the Barrow Corporation that manufactured overalls and other work clothes. (Red Diamond Pants and were sold by retailers including Montgomery Ward and J.C. Penney Company). He trained initially in Lynchburg, Virginia in the factory nearest Mount Saint Angelo. By 1931, he was manager of the Barrow Corporation "Unit #2" factory of 75 workers (mostly women) in Oakland, California. The clothing factories went bankrupt early in the Great Depression. In 1931, Bill left Oakland, California without a job, but not without resources, since he made his way back home to Brunswick County initially travelling by boat through the Panama Canal, where he started his career of conservation.

Sources: https://www.chemeurope.com/en/encyclopedia/William_Barrow.html

<https://virginiahistory.org/research/research-resources/finding-aids/william-james-barrow>

Church, John A. "A Remembrance and Appreciation" The American Archivist. JStor. 2005. Accessed 8/23/23

Rogia, Sallie. "William James Barrow: A Biographical Study of His Formative Years and His Role in the History of Library and Archives Conservation From 1931 to 1941." Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Library Science in the Graduate School of Library Service COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY. 1999

<https://cool.culturalheritage.org/byauth/roggia/barrow/chap02.html#:~:text=Bernard%20Barrow%2C%20Bill%27s,of%20medical%20treatment.>

Scope and Contents

The Barrow and Davey collection contains over 500 family letters about early twentieth century life in Brunswick County, Virginia (1902-1977), (3 document boxes, 1.5 cubic feet) and family records including military records of Dr. Bernard Barrow (1874-1954), who served in World War I (1917-1918); business receipts, prohibition permits, scrapbooks and other personal ephemera.

The Barrow family were plantation owners and had the social position and influence of the extended family that had flourished within Brunswick County, Virginia, which has its borders on Virginia and North Carolina and has more in common with rural areas in the Deep South. As such they owned enslaved persons, although further research is needed to identify specific African Americans that were enslaved and lived in houses on the Barrow property.

Topics include African Americans, Indigenous children (child named Eddie King), World War I, Smallpox, agriculture, moonshine, politics (Harry S. Truman and Republican Administration, and labor and transportation strikes) and brief mention of alcohol abuse and divorce. Many of these topics are in the family letters of Sallie Barrow where she shared news with her daughter Sarah Barrow Davey. Sarah Barrow married Philip Davey and his letters are included in the collection.

The family letters contain some descriptions of indigenous persons and many descriptions of African Americans. There is language involving racism. The purpose of this note is to give users the opportunity to decide whether they need or want to view these materials, or at least, to mentally or emotionally prepare themselves to view the materials.

General

Content Warning: There is language involving racism. The purpose of this note is to give users the opportunity to decide whether they need or want to view these materials, or at least, to mentally or emotionally prepare themselves to view the materials.

Description of Subordinate Components

Series 5. Personal Ephemera

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID [/repositories/3/archival_objects/244601](#)

Advertisements (including a broadside about vaccinations for Smallpox)

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244628

Unit Date 1908-1954, undated

Mixed Materials [X032669328] 2 (box)

Container 6 (folder)

Commencement invitations

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244629

Unit Date 1924

Mixed Materials [X032669328] 2 (box)

Container 7 (folder)

Business cards and empty envelopes

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244630

Unit Date undated

Mixed Materials [X032669328] 2 (box)

Container 8 (folder)

Funeral register book and dance cards

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244631

Unit Date undated

Mixed Materials [X032669328] 2 (box)

Container 9 (folder)

"Physicians Daily Visiting List and Record" of Bernard Barrow

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244632

Unit Date 1927

Mixed Materials [X032669328] 2 (box)

Container 10 (folder)

Sallie Archer Barrow scrapbook

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244635

Unit Date undated

Mixed Materials [X032669329] 3 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Sarah Barrow Davey journal with first and only page filled out (92nd Birthday)

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244634

Unit Date 1993

Mixed Materials [X032669329] 3 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

"Anna Hyatt Huntington" book owned by Sallie Barrow

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244633

Unit Date 1967

Mixed Materials [X032669329] 3 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

"Fred Markham in Russia" book

Unit ID [Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/244636

Unit Date undated

Mixed Materials [X032669329] 3 (box)

Container 4 (folder)