

A Guide to the Cocke and related families Papers

Cocke and related families Papers 1853 and 1860
1853 and 1860

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Descriptive Summary

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English

Collector

John Page Elliott

Extent

2 items

Repository

University of Virginia. Library. Special Collections Dept.

Alderman Library
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
USA

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

See the [University of Virginia Library's use policy](#).

Acquisition Information

This collection was a gift to the Library from John Page Elliott of Charlottesville, Virginia on April 18, 1988.

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Scope and Content

These two pocket diaries, 1853 and 1860, were kept by Philip St. George Cocke of Belmead, Powhatan County, Virginia. The 1853 diary discusses matters of a personal nature while the 1860 diary discusses his involvement with the Virginia Military Institute as President of its Board of Visitors and as Chairman of the Armory Commission.

The first diary contains entries from August 11-18, 1853, which discuss a journey from Belmead to Warm Springs, Bath County, Virginia with stops at Bremo, Fluvanna County and Lexington. During his visit at Lexington and tour of the Virginia Military Institute, Cocke saw John B[owdoin Cocke] who had entered V.M.I. as a cadet two weeks earlier. He mentions the many improvements shown to him by Superintendent Francis H. Smith, such as the new society rooms of the cadets, the new wing of the barracks, and the design of the new mess hall. Upon leaving Lexington, he travelled on to Warm Springs, where he mentions meeting his old West Point instructor, Edward H. Courteney, currently a professor at the University of Virginia, along with James L. Cabell, another University professor. He mentions the arrival of servants with a carriage buggy and four horses. The next few entries contain brief notes about the weather. The beginning of this diary also contains notes on Warm Springs property, the Warm Springs Company (incorporated in 1815), and touches on the subject of slaves owned by the Company, capitol, and acreage, and mentions Brockenbrough, Taylor, and Patterson.

The 1860 diary contains entries from April 25 through May 3, and discusses a meeting in Richmond of the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute and subsequent plans and courses of action. The April 26 meeting was held in the office of Adjunct-General William H. Richardson, and was also attended by Col. William McLaughlin, Col. Samuel Downing, and Col. Francis H. Smith. During the meeting, they adopted a resolution authorizing Superintendent Smith to proceed with recommendations outlined in his report to the Board on ["Scientific Education in Europe"] and later submitted to the General Assembly. The Act of March 28, 1860, increased the annuity to V.M.I., and the sum of \$20,000 was specifically appropriated for building purposes. Another meeting that afternoon was attended by Gen. George Blow and Col. William H. Payne in addition to the others. There is some discussion of meetings of the Armory Commission consisting of Cocke, Col. Francis H. Smith, and Capt. George W. Randolph. Randolph reported that [James T.] Ames responded favorably to their proposition and offered to furnish weapons machinery used for rolling [musket barrels?]. On April 27, the Commission discussed plans for organizing and operating an armory, a decision to examine the Springfield Armory and visit Ames' works at Chicopee, Massachusetts, and the reorganization of the State Armory. [Henry A.] du Pont furnished a plan and specification for building a powder magazine, and the Commission resolved to purchase \$10,000 worth of powder. On April 30, the subjects of the patented breech loading rifle, a new English pistol, and the Massachusetts Fire Arm Company at Chicopee are mentioned. On

May 1, the Commission toured the Frankfort Arsenal in Pennsylvania where machinery for making musket and pistol percussion caps was seen. The discussion includes costs and operation by steam-engine. Cocke also mentions the "Pyrotechny & Military Laboratory" at V.M.I., and the amount of gunpowder contracted and to be deposited to the magazines at Richmond and Lexington. He also notes that du Pont was a classmate of Smith's at West Point, and that he met one of his own classmates, Tench Tilghman of Maryland. On May 3, the Commission travelled to Springfield to see Ames in connection with the manufacture of sabers at Chicopee. They met with Major [William Anderson?] Thornton of the United States Army, who had just completed his inspection of 1,000 cavalry sabers made by Ames for Virginia. Ames agreed to meet them at his works at Chicopee, where the Commission had a tour during which they saw the operation of machinery by water and the machine shops with wrought iron and specimens of hinge castings. Cocke mentions that Ames makes many crossfield guns and howitzers for the United States Government, and is manufacturing the rifle-musket for the Queen of Spain. The end of the diary contains an expense account for this period as well as a few newspaper clippings about armories and weapons.