

James River and Kanawha Company

James River and Kanawha Company Records
1834-1868

Title Statement

James River and Kanawha CompanyGuide to the James River and Kanawha Company Records SC 00628

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SC 00628

Unit ID

/repositories/2/resources/1256

Unit Date

1834-1868

Language

English

Creator

James River & Kanawha Company

Creator

Cocke, John Hartwell, 1780-1866

Extent

0.01 Linear Foot

Repository

Special Collections Research Center

Administrative Information

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Historical Note:

The James River and Kanawha Company: The creation of Virginia's canal system was begun in 1746, spurred on by the support of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The goal was to create an economical and reliable way for farmers living in the interior of the state to transport their goods to market. To achieve this, existing rivers were widened, dams were created to control water levels, bridges and aqueducts were erected, and a lock system established.

The James River Company was created to raise capital for this venture. For a time, the venture was very successful, producing significant returns for its investors. However, the citizens of Virginia demanded that the company also maintain and/or improve the canal structure. When the company was unable or unwilling to comply, the state bought the charter in 1820. The state intended to further improve the Kanawha River and to connect the existing canal to the western part of the country, via the Ohio River. The invention of the railroad, however, cast doubt upon the wisdom of this scheme.

Joseph Carrington Cabell became the leading proponent of the canal system. He, along with his long time friend John Hartwell Cocke, was able to convince the state to consider a joint public/private charter in 1832. The charter was conditioned upon the procurement of five million dollars in private capital. It took Cabell and his supporters nearly three years to interest enough investors in the project. Finally in 1835 the General Assembly officially granted a charter to the James River and Kanawha Company. Joseph Cabell was elected as its first president.

Canal construction was divided into three divisions. Ultimately, the plan was to connect Richmond to Covington. Further, railroad lines were to be added after the final division was completed in order to link towns to the waterways. Unfortunately, the company was faced with a myriad of technical and economic problems; subscribers refused to pay, flooding was continual, working conditions were deplorable creating severe labor shortages, and early work on the canal proved to be defective requiring nearly continuous repair work.

The demise of the James River Company was further hastened by the Civil War. In 1863, General Sheridan and his troops razed many of the bridges and canals and most of the company papers were destroyed during the burning of Richmond. This alone wasn't fatal, but without the funds for repairs the problems worsened. The combination of these difficulties, coupled with increasing competition from the railroads finally became too great and The James River and Kanawha Company was terminated by the General Assembly in 1880. Its assets were subsequently sold to the Richmond & Allegheny Railway Company.

John Hartwell Cocke was born in Surry County, Virginia in 1780. He attended the College of William and Mary from 1794-1799. After serving in the War of 1812, he returned to his home, Bremo, a plantation in Fluvanna County, Virginia, to pursue an agrarian career. Known for his agricultural experimentation with crops and livestock, he maintained several estates and plantations in Virginia and Alabama. He helped found the University of Virginia, and set up a boy's seminary on Bremo. Although he owned many slaves, he encouraged their education, set up systems for them to buy their freedom, and supported their colonization in Africa.

Being a deeply religious man, John Hartwell Cocke held strong views against drinking and tobacco. In order to combat these "evils," he was elected president of the American Temperance Union in 1836, and stopped all production of tobacco on his land. These views also led him to support and become a member of the James River and Kanawha Company board of directors. He believed that many poor farmers in Virginia were forced to turn their grain into whiskey because there was no profitable way to transport the grain to market.

He felt that with the creation of the canal, farmers would turn to other occupations, thereby lessening the supply of alcohol and with it the desire to drink. He married Ann Blaus Barraud in 1802 and fathered several children. He died in 1866.

Scope and Contents

The collection relates to the James River Canal and Kanawha Company, which officially gained a charter in 1835. Included are a list of subscriptions sold to private individuals, a letter to the auditors office discussing current and previous subscriptions, a letter from a prospective surveyor and a list of tollage rates along the canal. Individuals mentioned are John Hartwell Cocke, and his son John Hartwell Cocke Jr.

Keywords

Correspondence
Financial records
Agriculture--Virginia--History--18th century
American Temperance Union
Anti-slavery movements
Slavery--Virginia--18th century
Slavery--Virginia--19th century
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865
James River and Kanawha Canal (Va.)
University of Virginia
Cocke, John Hartwell

Arrangement of Materials:

This collection is arranged chronologically by date.

Description of Subordinate Components

Records

Unit ID id180513

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/123425

Unit Date 1834-1868

Mixed materials Small Collections Box 21 (Box)

Container 1 (folder)

J. Brown, Jr., Second Auditor's Office, Fluvanna County, [Virginia] to Genl. John H. Cocke, Comm[issioner] of Ag.[?] to J[ames] River & Kan[awha] Co. Subscriptions, Wimm's Tavern, Fluvanna County, [Virginia]

Unit ID id180511

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/123426

Unit Date January 11, 1835

Scope and Contents

3 pages.Enclosure. Autographed letter and Printed letter. Printed section of the letter contains resolutions adopted by the president and directors of the James River Company at a meeting held on 10 February, 1835. Resolved matters relate to the recording and collecting of money from subscribers. Also, mentions the transference of stock from the holdings of the James River Company to the newly created James River and Kanawha Company. Handwritten letter at bottom of first page, concerns the enclosure of a copy of the "Return of Gen. John H. Cocke and John Timberlake Esq." subscriptions for use in correcting any mistakes in the "Books of the Commissioners," signed "The Comm[issioner] of the Ja[me]s River & Kan[awha] Co." For enclosure see letter below of 3 September - 19 December 1834.

List of subscribers in Fluvanna and Columbia counties, Virginia for stock in the James River and Kanawha Company

Unit ID id180516

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/123427

Unit Date September 3 - December 19, 1834

Scope and Contents

1 page. Enclosure from above letter. PDS. Includes names, place of residence, amount of shares subscribed to, amount paid, and date paid. Payment was made to John H. Cocke, Jr. and John Timberlake, who were the appointed James River Company Agents for Fluvanna County. Document signed by John H. Cocke, Sen. and J[ohn] Timberlake, 19 December 1834. Note at bottom of page added in pencil and signed J. B[rown], Jr.

A. B. Trener, Dublin Depot, Pulaski County, [Virginia] to "Sir," no place.

Unit ID id180518

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/123428

Unit Date December 17, [18]68

Scope and Contents

2 pages. Autographed letter signed. Received the "memorial" and chief canal engineer Lorraine's Report from him [Sir], disagrees with findings of the report because it was based solely on a 1819 Report given by [Thomas] Moore to the Board of Public Works and "gives no observations of his [Lorraine's] own," opposes Sinking Creek, John's Creek and Catamba[?] as places to support a canal, and proposes digging a tunnel to connect New River with Craig's Creek instead, is afraid that he is a "bungler in conveying" his ideas but would like to survey the land for him [Sir], has lost everything except wife and children and has no "necessary interest in the matter," talks about leaving the states.

Printed advertisement concerning the James River Canal rates of tollage for various crops and commodities

Unit ID id180520

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/123429

Unit Date undated

Scope and Contents

1 page. Printed manuscript. Printed by T. W. White, Market-Bridge, Richmond, Virginia.