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## Cosby Family Papers (MSS 242)

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Manuscripts & Folklife Archives  
 Department of Library Special Collections  
 Kentucky Library & Museum  
 Western Kentucky University  
 Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092

*Descriptive Inventory*

**MSS 242      COSBY Family Collection**

1 box. 19 folders. 203 items. 1846-1938. Originals, photocopies, photograph.

1987.177.1

***BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE***

John Dudley Cosby was born in 1820 in Amelia County, Virginia, the son of Henry Cosby (1794-1874) and Elizabeth B. "Betsy" Cosby (1794-1879). In 1841, John D. Cosby married Mary L. Bellamy (1821-1849), and in 1842 they became the parents of a daughter, Cilicia Sarah Cosby. Within a few years thereafter, and to the apparent consternation of his family, John moved to Rumsey, Kentucky (now in McLean County, but at the time a part of Muhlenberg County), and then to Bremen (Muhlenberg County) to pursue his trade as a carpenter. After his wife Mary's death in 1849, John D. Cosby married Martha Jane Hinkle (1831-1906) in 1850. The oldest of their four children, Mary Elizabeth "Bettie" Cosby (1851-1928), married James Taylor Woodburn, Jr. (1848-1914). The Woodburns became the parents of Martha Verna Woodburn (1888-1985), who married James Albert Smith (1882-1950).

***COLLECTION NOTE***

Most of the collection consists of letters to John Dudley Cosby and his family from other family members living in Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas and Mississippi. Because the family was so widely dispersed and letters relatively infrequent, most correspondents took the opportunity to relay news not only of their own households – births, deaths, marriages, and changes of residence – but those of other relatives and friends, as well as local news of interest.

Best represented in the correspondence (Folder 4) is John Dudley Cosby's father, Henry Cosby, who writes to his son from Amelia County, Virginia. He regularly expresses concern about John's fortunes in Kentucky and urges him to return to Virginia. Henry Cosby also writes of local and family news, crop and commodity prices, and the general economic and labor situation in Virginia both before and after the Civil War. Another major correspondent (Folder 10) is John Dudley Cosby's sister Harriet E. (Cosby) Robertson. She, too, wishes for John's return to Virginia, referring to him in one letter as a "stray sheep." Harriet also writes of family news, the disposition of their father's estate following his death in 1874, and of her own relocation to Richmond, Virginia. Other correspondents include John Dudley Cosby's sister

Louisa (Cosby) Isaacs (Folder 8), his sister Mary Jane (Cosby) Meador (Folder 9), and his brother William H. Cosby (Folder 6).

Relatives of John Dudley Cosby's second wife, Martha Jane (Hinkle) Cosby, are also represented in the collection. Martha's brother Benjamin Hinkle (Folder 7) writes from Bowling Green, Kentucky, where he is encamped during the Civil War. Martha's sister Mariah (Hinkle) Shocklee and her husband John T. Shocklee (Folder 11) write from their new home in Randolph County, Arkansas, to which John Dudley Cosby himself once considered moving. Of particular interest are letters from Richard Shocklee, the husband of another of Martha's sisters, Ellen (Hinkle) Shocklee. Serving in the Union army during the Civil War, Shocklee, a strong supporter of the cause, writes from camp in Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, a month after the Battle of Shiloh; from Corinth, Mississippi; and from Russellville and Bowling Green, Kentucky (Folder 12).

Second-generation correspondents in the collection include John Dudley Cosby's daughter Mary Elizabeth "Bettie" Cosby (Folder 5) who married James Taylor Woodburn, Jr.; a niece, Annie R. Smith (Folder 13); nephews Sidney R. Cosby and Millard C. Robertson (Folder 17); and another nephew, John H. Traylor, who was involved in the settlement of Henry Cosby's estate (Folder 17).

Each folder of letters in this collection includes a list of the letters, their correspondents and dates, as well as a very brief note of each letter's contents. While the collection contains no letters of John Dudley Cosby himself, some miscellaneous business papers, as well as the inventory of his estate, are included (Folder 16). Genealogical data on the Cosby family (Folder 1), on John Dudley Cosby's granddaughter Martha Verna (Woodburn) Smith, and on the family of her husband James Albert Smith, are also included (Folders 2, 3). Only one photograph, of John Dudley Cosby's daughter, Mary Elizabeth (Cosby) Woodburn, is in the collection (Folder 18).

Variant spellings and phonetic spellings are frequent in this collection, and the processor was forced to make difficult decisions regarding which form of a name to use for this finding aid. This frustration will be shared by anyone using this collection for research purposes.

### ***SHELF LIST***

<b>BOX 1</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>203 items</b>
Folder 1	Inventory and genealogical information		2 items
Folder 2	Martha Verna (Woodburn) Smith – biographical and genealogical data sheet	n.d.	1 item
Folder 3	James A. Smith, Sr. and Martha V. Smith – Family record book; clippings	n.d.	1 item
Folder 4	Henry Cosby – Letters to John Dudley Cosby	1846-1874	37 items
Folder 5	Mary Elizabeth Cosby – Letters to John D. Cosby	1866-1874; n.d.	5 items

Folder 6	William H. Cosby and Elizabeth B. Cosby – Letters to John Dudley Cosby	1846-1871	5 items
Folder 7	Benjamin Hinkle – Letters to John Dudley Cosby, Martha Cosby and Mary E. Cosby	1863; 1905	5 items
Folder 8	Louisa F. (Cosby) Isaacs and John F. Isaacs – Letters to Cosby family	1856; 1875-1878; 1917	7 items
Folder 9	Mary Jane (Cosby) Meador – Letters to John D. Cosby and Martha D. Belymy	1848-1852	6 items
Folder 10	Harriet E. Robertson – Letters to John Dudley Cosby, Nancy Cosby, and nephew	1847; 1850-1899; n.d.	29 items
Folder 11	John T. Shocklee and Mariah S. Shocklee – Letters to John D. Cosby	1858-1860	11 items
Folder 12	Richard Shocklee and Ellen Shocklee – Letters to John D. Cosby and wife	1862-1863; 1870; 1878; n.d.	17 items
Folder 13	Annie Smith – Letters to Cilicia S. Cosby and John D. Cosby	1855-1860; n.d.	7 items
Folder 14	Martha/Matt Bellom, Martha Thomas – Letters to John Dudley Cosby, niece and parents	1849; 1854; 1858; 1859; 1868; n.d.	8 items
Folder 15	J. T. Woodburn – Masonic receipts and registry receipt	1881; 1886	3 items
Folder 16	John D. Cosby – Business and tax receipts, notes, estate inventory	1847-1884	35 items
Folder 17	Miscellaneous family correspondence	1846-1938	17 items
Folder 18	Miscellaneous clippings; photo of Mary Elizabeth Cosby	1872; [ca. 1930]; n.d.	6 items
Folder 19	Poem, “In Memory of Martha Hardy,” by Cosby A. Perry	n.d.	1 item

**BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD**

MSS COSBY Family Papers 1846-1938  
242

Letters to John Dudley Cosby, Muhlenberg County, and his family, from other family members in Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas and Mississippi. Includes genealogical data, some of Cosby's personal papers, and his estate inventory.

1 box. 19 folders. 203 items. Originals, photocopies, photograph.  
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