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Rowan Family Papers (MSS 418)

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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 418 ROWAN Family Papers

½ box. 9 folders. 88 items. 1808-1897. Originals, photocopies, typescripts.

1978.59.1

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Rowan, Sr., son of William and Sarah Elizabeth (Cooper) Rowan, was born in Pennsylvania on 12 July 1773. Following the Revolutionary War and the loss of the family fortune, the Rowans emigrated to Kentucky, arriving in Louisville in March 1783. The next spring, the Rowans and five other families established a settlement at the Long Falls of Green River.

A few years later, the family moved to Bardstown, where John Rowan entered Salem Academy. Upon completion of his work there, John studied law in Lexington and was admitted to the bar in 1795. The previous year, Rowan had married Ann Lytle (1774-1839), and they settled on a thirteen-hundred-acre tract of land east of Bardstown. A gift to Ann from her father, Revolutionary War veteran Captain William Lytle (1728-1797), the property became known as Federal Hill. John and Ann Rowan became the parents of nine children.

In 1804, Rowan was appointed as Kentucky's Secretary of State and served until 1806, when he was elected to Congress. After his congressional term expired, he returned to Federal Hill and practiced law until 1813. From 1813 to 1817, Rowan served in the state legislature, then in 1819 served as judge of the Court of Appeals. In 1823, the Rowan family moved to Louisville, but continued to spend part of each year at Federal Hill. Rowan was elected to two more terms in the state legislature, served in the U. S. Senate from 1825 to 1831, then practiced law in Kentucky until his appointment as Commissioner of Mexican Claims in 1839.

In July, 1833, the composition of the Rowan family was tragically altered when cholera swept through Federal Hill. Three of John Rowan Sr.'s children, Atkinson Hill Rowan, William Lytle Rowan and Mary Jane (Rowan) Steele, all died. The disease also claimed the lives of William Rowan's wife Eliza (Boyce) Rowan, Mary Jane Steele's husband William Steele and their daughter, and John Rowan, Sr.'s sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth (Rowan) Kelly and William Kelly.

John Rowan, Sr. died on 13 July 1843 and was buried at Federal Hill.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists almost completely of correspondence of John Rowan, Sr. and several members of his family. In addition to Rowan, the principal authors are his son Atkinson Hill Rowan; grandson John Rowan Steele; daughter Anne (Rowan) Buchanan (sometimes “Ann”); and Anne’s husband Joseph Rodes Buchanan. Incoming letters to family members, particularly to Rowan’s daughter Alice Douglass (Rowan) Shaw Wakefield, are also present. With the exception of some letters to John Rowan, Sr. from political and professional colleagues, most of the letters are between family members. All except one are originals, and a few have also been typescripted.

Folder 2 contains John Rowan Sr.’s letters to his wife and children, written from Washington while serving in the U.S. Senate or from Frankfort, Louisville or Federal Hill. Letters to his wife Ann (Lytle) Rowan (who he sometimes addresses as “Nancy”) give instructions for planting at Federal Hill, describe a boat trip along the east coast, and reflect on his advancing age. His letters to daughters Mary Jane, Josephine and Elizabeth contain much fatherly advice, urging them to improve their minds and holding forth at length on the conduct he considers desirable in young ladies and married women. An 1830 letter to Josephine describes his travels in Madrid, Spain, including an encounter with royalty. A letter to his son William also contains advice about conduct and character, and letters to his son Atkinson reflect upon marriage and discuss a possible patronage appointment for the young man in the administration of President Andrew Jackson.

Folder 3 contains letters to John Rowan, Sr. from family members and from several prominent contemporaries in public life. Of interest are letters (1812-1814) from U.S. Senator Humphrey Marshall referring to his legal battle with federal judge Harry Innes, who Marshall accused of promoting Kentucky’s withdrawal from the Union and alliance with Spain; an 1816 letter from Congressman Benjamin Hardin regarding his opposition to a direct tax for maintaining the military; and an 1826 letter from Frankfort editor Amos Kendall detailing the state of political affairs in Kentucky, including the “old court-new court” controversy. Family correspondence in this folder includes a letter to Rowan giving news of his daughter Josephine’s death, a letter from his nephew John Stahl Lytle concerning family legal business, and a letter from Elizabeth (Haines) Lytle, wife of his nephew Robert Todd Lytle, asking for Rowan’s counsel in protecting her family’s assets from the financial carelessness of her husband.

Folder 4 contains materials relating to Rowan’s son Atkinson Hill Rowan. His law license is included, and a letter written to his father comments on the turmoil in Washington in February 1831 over the widening political rift between President Andrew Jackson and Vice President John C. Calhoun. A partial letter to a sister appears to reflect on their father’s personality. Also of interest is a letter written to his mother while Atkinson was serving as President Jackson’s diplomatic envoy in Spain, reporting on the forthcoming birth of a child to the royal family and describing a bullfight.

Folder 5 contains letters written to John Rowan, Sr.’s daughter, Alice (Rowan) Shaw Wakefield, from her sister Anne and Anne’s husband Joseph Rodes Buchanan. Anne writes mostly of family matters and her continual anxieties over illness. Joseph Rodes Buchanan was a physician, author and highly original medical theorist who served on the faculty of Cincinnati’s Eclectic Medical Institute and coined the term “psychometry,” through which an individual’s health could purportedly be determined through extra-sensory perception. A believer in both mesmerism and spiritualism, Joseph writes to Alice of a séance (“spiritual communication”)

involving her deceased sister Josephine, and of other professional activities. Also of interest is an 1853 letter Joseph wrote to Alice from his home in Covington, Kentucky in which he argued for having paid white servants instead of slaves, given the likelihood that the latter would strike out across the Ohio River to freedom.

Folder 6 contains additional letters to Alice (Rowan) Shaw Wakefield from various other family members. Of interest is a letter from Margaret (Haines) Lytle, the mother of Elizabeth Lytle (see Folder 3), who assumed the care of her grandson William Haines Lytle after Elizabeth's death. She writes in 1847 of her extreme distress upon learning of William's decision to leave his law studies for service in the Mexican War, and blames the influence of his cousin John Rowan Steele, for whom she has little regard. John Rowan Steele himself writes to Alice and refers to his red-headed cousin, Eliza Cooper Rowan Harney. Nicknamed "Harney," Eliza was orphaned early in life and raised by her grandparents, Ann and John Rowan, Sr.

Folder 7 contains letters and papers of John Rowan's son-in-law, Joseph Rodes Buchanan. Eliza Cooper Rowan Harney's husband, William P. Boone, writes him in 1849 regarding the health of Ann (Lytle) Rowan, who died the next day of cholera. Joseph writes several letters from New York and Boston to his wife Anne and daughter Alice Wakefield (Buchanan) Wornall, giving news of his social and professional activities and his interactions with female mediums and others in the medical community. His indebtedness to Alice's aunt, Alice (Rowan) Shaw Wakefield, is evidenced by a pledge of household items as security for a loan.

Folder 8 contains miscellaneous letters exchanged between members of the Rowan family regarding personal and business matters. John Rowan Steele writes from Mexico in 1848 to Alice's husband, Henry M. Wakefield, of his and William Haines Lytle's activities. An 1861 letter to William Haines Lytle from a colleague of John Rowan, Sr. lovingly recalls both Rowan and his daughter Josephine. Letters to Alice Wakefield (Buchanan) Wornall from her aunt, Rebecca Carnes Rowan, the widow of John Rowan, Jr., congratulate her on the birth of her son Rowan and provide a few details of Rowan and Steele family history.

Folder 9 contains a scrapbook, apparently kept by Anne (Rowan) Buchanan, with clippings of poetry and etchings.

For other collections of Rowan correspondence, see MSS 69 – Rowan Family (finding aid at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_mss_fin_aid/203/) and MSS 71 – Rowan, Rebecca (Carnes) (finding aid at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_mss_fin_aid/211/)

SHELF LIST

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Folder 2	John Rowan, Sr. – Letters	1808-1841, n.d.	16 items
Folder 3	John Rowan, Sr. – Incoming letters	1812-1839, n.d.	16 items
Folder 4	Atkinson Hill Rowan – Correspondence and papers	1825-1831, n.d.	5 items

Folder 5	Alice (Rowan) Shaw Wakefield – Incoming letters from Joseph R. Buchanan and Anne (Rowan) Buchanan	1852-1854, n.d.	15 items
Folder 6	Alice (Rowan) Shaw Wakefield – Incoming letters from family members	1837-1853	5 items
Folder 7	Joseph Rodes Buchanan – Letters, papers	1848-1899, n.d.	15 items
Folder 8	Miscellaneous family letters	1815-1897, n.d.	10 items
Folder 9	Ann Rowan – Scrapbook	n.d.	1 item

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS ROWAN Family Papers 1808-1897
418

Correspondence and papers of Kentucky lawyer and politician John Rowan, Sr., and relatives in the Rowan, Lytle, Steele, Boone and Buchanan families.

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 Blair, James, 1762-1837 F3
 Boone, Eliza Cooper Rowan (Harney), 1815-1895 – Relating to F5,6
 Boone, William Pennebaker, 1813-1875 – Correspondence F6,7
 Boone, William Pennebaker, 1813-1875 – Relating to F5
 Buchanan, Anne (Rowan), 1812-1876 – Correspondence F5,7,8
 Buchanan, Joseph Rodes, 1814-1899 F5,7
 Buchanan, Rowan, 1843-1907 – Relating to F7
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 Rowan, Atkinson Hill, 1803-1833 – Relating to F2,4
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 Steele, John Rowan, 1818?-1849 – Relating to F6
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SEE or SEE ALSO

Boone, Harney
 See:
 Boone, Eliza Cooper Rowan (Harney)

Niedermeier/Jeffrey 07/16/2012