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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 651 WEIR Family Collection

1 box. 23 folders. 104 items. 1798-2001. Originals, photocopies, photographs, compact disc, typescripts.

SC2017.115.1; SC2019.12.1; SC2019.12.2

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In 1798, James Weir (1777-1845) emigrated from his home in South Carolina, and after a sojourn in Tennessee settled the following year in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky. He took an active role in the commercial development of the county and became the town of Greenville's first merchant and banker. Weir travelled regularly to Philadelphia to buy goods and have them shipped by wagon and boat to mercantile houses that he operated in western Kentucky and southern Illinois. In 1814, Weir married his first wife, Anna Cowman Rumsey (1792-1838), the daughter of Dr. Edward Rumsey (1765-1823) and the niece of steam navigation pioneer James W. Rumsey.

Among James and Anna Weir's five children was Edward Rumsey Weir, Sr. (1816-1891), who also became a prominent citizen of Greenville. In 1838, he married his cousin Harriet Rumsey Miller (1822-1913). Harriet was the daughter of Samuel Augustus Miller (1788-1823), who in 1818 had married Harriet Rumsey, the sister of Anna Cowman (Rumsey) Weir.

A lawyer, legislator, merchant and slaveholder, Edward Rumsey Weir, Sr. was also an abolitionist; he emancipated some of his slaves and assisted with their recolonization in Liberia. After the outbreak of the Civil War, he used his wealth and influence to advocate for the Union and to recruit and equip home guards and companies for the regular army. As Confederates moved through Muhlenberg and surrounding counties, Weir's wife Harriet removed with their children to Jacksonville, Illinois and returned home only after the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson in 1862. The Weirs' oldest son Edward Rumsey Weir, Jr. (1839-1906) served as an officer with the 11th and 35th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry and saw action at Shiloh, Tennessee, Corinth, Mississippi and elsewhere.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of correspondence and papers of the Weir family of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky and related members of the Rumsey and Miller families. An inventory is in Folder 1 together with genealogical notes, but the notes are intended to show relationships

among persons featured most prominently in the collection and should not be construed as a comprehensive genealogy.

Folder 2 contains a compact disc with digital images of most of the materials in this collection, selected typescripts, and a list of digitized materials.

Folder 3 contains biographical and genealogical data on the Weir and Rumsey families.

Folder 4 contains an 1816 letter from Dr. Edward Rumsey, written from Washington, D.C. to his daughter and son-in-law Anna Cowman (Rumsey) Weir and James Weir. He describes his efforts to obtain patents on behalf of his late brother James Rumsey for the latter's innovations in steam-powered navigation. He refers to the conflicting claims of rivals John Fitch and Robert Fulton and defends his brother's designs as superior to both.

Folder 5 contains two letters of Edward Rumsey, the son of Dr. Edward Rumsey, expressing condolences to his sister Harriet on the death of her husband Samuel A. Miller in 1823, and to his nieces Emily Weir and Harriet Rumsey after the death of his sister Anna Cowman (Rumsey) Weir.

Folder 6 contains a letter of Harriet Rumsey Miller to her cousin and future husband, Edward R. Weir, Sr.; Harriet's 1888 will (not her last, according to a notation on the back); and Harriet's note to her son Miller Weir declining his wife's invitation to visit until the "war question" (possibly the Spanish-American War) was settled, and remarking on the image of Robert Fulton on a U.S. two-dollar bill.

Folder 7 contains two letters of Samuel A. Miller to his wife Harriet, written before and shortly after their marriage. In the first, he displays his interest in women of history and attempts to explain his personality to her as he asks for her friendship; in the second, he writes from Philadelphia during a buying trip for his Hopkinsville, Kentucky merchant business. Also included is a lengthy memorandum by the physician who attended Samuel during his final illness in 1823 that describes Samuel's travails as he endures purgatives, poultices, bleedings, laudanum, castor oil, Epsom salts and opium to treat a painful intestinal disorder.

Folder 8 contains the journal of James Weir, the father of Edward R. Weir, Sr., written during his travel to Kentucky from South Carolina in 1798-1799. He describes crossing the Appalachian Mountains and the natural features of Tennessee; while he finds the countryside attractive and its people industrious, he is disappointed with the confusion, noise and irreligiosity of the "infant city" of Knoxville. He also praises the new settlements in Kentucky and predicts that the navigable Green River will attract much trade. While in Tennessee, Weir kept a school for several months to finance his travel, and also records in his journal several dramatic speeches that he composed for performance by the young men of a nearby dancing academy.

Folder 9 contains correspondence and papers of James Weir, created after he settled in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky: an 1806 statement of purchases of goods in Philadelphia, two business letters, a bill of sale for an enslaved African boy named Castor, and a letter to his son Edward written during another Philadelphia trip.

Folder 10 contains the will of James Weir, made in 1845 (the year of his death), when he was married to his third wife, who was then pregnant with their daughter. His bequests to his family provide evidence of his considerable wealth.

Folder 11 contains the handwritten recollections of James Weir's son Edward R. Weir, Sr., written in 1888 at the request of his son Miller to document Edward's activities during the Civil War. He details his anti-slavery stance; his attempts to hold Muhlenberg County and Kentucky loyal to the Union; his financing, equipping and drilling of Home Guard units and aid to the state in raising companies of soldiers; his son Edward, Jr.'s military service; his political

offices; his wife and daughter Anna's Union loyalties; his family's return to Muhlenberg County after removing to Jacksonville, Illinois, and the depredations they faced at the hands of roving Confederates; and his gratitude to his African American servants for watching over him and his family. He praises his slaves for their intelligence and remarks that the recolonization movement to Liberia, in which some participated and some "wisely declined," was a "failed experiment."

Folder 12 contains an adaptation of Edward R. Weir's reminiscence in Folder 11, written by his great-great grandson Douglas B. Brockhouse. Brockhouse uses Weir's reminiscence to create a first-person narrative that includes explanatory footnotes, illustrations, and excerpts from many of the letters in this collection.

Folder 13 chiefly contains letters of Edward R. Weir, Sr. An 1839 letter written to his wife Harriet in Owensboro provides news from Greenville, and an 1854 letter to Weir from a fellow lawyer (possibly a relative) in Jacksonville, Illinois asks for a business loan. Weir's letters to his wife and children written during the Civil War detail his attempts to defeat secessionism in Kentucky, his observations of Washington, D.C. at the approach of war, his procurement of guns for the Home Guard, and his fears over theft of his property by Confederates. At Calhoun, Kentucky with his son Edward, Jr. early in 1862, he reports on the massing of troops there and his arrangements to protect his household in Greenville. His 1864 letter to wife Harriet comments on George B. McClellan's nomination for President. Also included are Weir's remarks on "Sectionalism," delivered at Kentucky's state convention on secession in 1861, in which he derides Southern attempts to villainize the North.

Folder 14 contains a single letter to Edward Weir, Sr.'s wife Harriet, written in 1839 by a member of the Weir family. Having visited Philadelphia, he reports from Pittsburgh on his party's pleasant travel by canal boat and rail through Pennsylvania.

Folder 15 contains letters of Edward R. Weir, Jr., the son of Edward R. Weir, Sr. and Harriet Weir, written to his parents and sister Virginia ("Ginnie") during his Civil War service. They provide much detail of his life in camp at Calhoun, Kentucky with his servant Jesse, and his fears for the Weir home amid reports of Confederate theft. He reports on incidents such as the arrival of non-English speaking German "cannoniers," troop losses from illness, and a young Indiana wife who visits the camp, only to find her husband dead. He provides vivid descriptions of his actions at the Battle of Shiloh and of his regiment's advance on Corinth, Mississippi, including his arrival at the deserted town of Farmington, Mississippi. He tells of seeing Confederate general John Hunt Morgan approach the Union lines at Farmington under a flag of truce, and the doubts of the colonel in command that he was actually "Morgan of Kentucky." Illness compels Weir to resign from the 11th Kentucky Infantry in 1863, but later that year he receives a commission in the 35th Kentucky Mounted Volunteer Infantry, and writes of his march through Kentucky into Virginia and of the fighting at Saltville. Prior to being mustered out in 1864, Weir expresses regret at leaving the 11th Kentucky, whose men he thought superior to those of the 35th. He also alludes to wrongs committed by other officers of the 35th that could attract lawsuits.

Folder 16 contains two declarations relating to Edward R. Weir, Sr.'s work organizing support for the Union: 1863 resolutions of the Union Democracy of Muhlenberg County, and an undated "Louisville platform" urging defeat of the Confederacy in support of resolutions of the Kentucky General Assembly.

Folder 17 contains two letters written to Edward R. Weir, Sr. by Lewis Ware [Weir] and E. Weir, emancipated slaves recolonized to Liberia. Lewis recounts his struggle with illness and

his difficulties providing for his family because of drought, limited agriculture, lack of markets for crops, and expensive foreign imports. He asks to be sent aid in the form of clothing, shoes and foodstuffs. E. Weir's letter is shorter but more cheerful, as he reports building a house and an "edifice," perhaps for business.

Folder 18 contains United States Colored Troops enlistment forms for Elisha, Moses and Wilson Weir, three slaves of Edward R. Weir, Sr., who enlist at Owensboro, Kentucky in 1864.

Folder 19 contains miscellaneous items: an 1861 bond signed by 18 citizens at Greenville to secure the return of muskets to the U.S. government; a roster of veterans, apparently members of a Jacksonville, Illinois post of the Grand Army of the Republic, that also indicates their former regiments; and receipts, 1861-1864, to Edward R. Weir, Sr. for guns, horses, corn, oats and hay for use by the U.S. Army.

Folders 20-22 contain photographs of members of the Weir family and related Wing and Rumsey families. A list of all photographs is in Folder 1. Of interest are photographs of enslaved African-American women who were members of Edward R. Weir, Sr.'s household, and photographs of the exterior and interior of his Greenville, Kentucky home. Also included are Civil War photographs of men in uniform, and (Folder 21) a cloth bookmark presented as a gift to Edward R. Weir in 1888.

Folder 23 contains two Masonic membership certificates for: James Weir, 1809, Philadelphia; and S.A. Miller, 1819, Hopkinsville. Also included is a short narrative by Miller Weir about James Weir's settling near the Green River and a news clipping about the Masonic certificates and a Masonic apron that was given to the Kentucky Museum.

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Weir Family Collection	1798-2001	104 items
Folder 1	Inventory and associated data; list of photographs		5 items
Folder 2	Compact disc of digitized collection documents; document list	n.d.	2 items
Folder 3	Biographical and genealogical data	1891, n.d.	6 items
Folder 4	Edward Rumsey (1765-1823) – Letter regarding brother James Rumsey's steamboat designs and patent claims	1816	1 item
Folder 5	Edward Rumsey (1796-1868) – Letters	1823-1838	2 items
Folder 6	Harriet (Rumsey) Miller – Letters and will	1835-1888	3 items
Folder 7	Samuel A. Miller – Letters; doctor's memorandum regarding his death	1818-1823	3 items

Folder 8	James Weir – Journal; typescript of journal, edited by Douglas B. Brockhouse	1798-1799	2 items
Folder 9	James Weir – Correspondence and papers	1806-1830	5 items
Folder 10	James Weir – Will	1845	1 item
Folder 11	Recollections of Edward R. Weir, Sr.	1888	1 item
Folder 12	“The Recollections of Edward R. Weir, Sr., written 1888,” edited by Douglas B. Brockhouse	2001	1 item
Folder 13	Edward R. Weir, Sr. – Correspondence; speech on “Sectionalism”	1839-1866, n.d.	13 items
Folder 14	Harriet (Miller) Weir – Letter to	1839	1 item
Folder 15	Edward R. Weir, Jr. – Letters	1861-1864	20 items
Folder 16	Pro-Union declarations – Union Democracy of Muhlenberg County; Louisville platform	1863, n.d.	2 items
Folder 17	E. Weir and Lewis Ware [Weir] – Letters from Liberia of emancipated slaves	1858-1859	2 items
Folder 18	United States Colored Troops enlistment forms – Elisha Weir, Moses Weir, and Wilson Weir	1864	3 items
Folder 19	Miscellaneous	1861-1864, n.d.	4 items
Folder 20	Photographs	1860s-1942	11 items
Folder 21	Photographs	1840s-1901	6 items
Folder 22	Photographs	n.d.	6 items
Folder 23	Masonic certificates (2) and a news clipping describing them and a Masonic apron given to the Kentucky Museum, a short narrative about James Weir’s settling near the Green River	1809-1916	4 items

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

- MSS WEIR Family Collection 1798-2001
651
C1,D6, Letters, papers and photographs of the Weir family
#18 of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, and related members of
the Rumsey and Miller families. Well-to-do merchants and
farmers, the Weirs were leading supporters of the Union
during the Civil War, providing advocacy, financial support,
and military service. Also includes a letter from the brother
of steamboat pioneer James Rumsey defending his legacy
as an innovator.
1 box. 23 folders. 104 items. Originals, photocopies,
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