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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 675 KNOTT Family Papers

1 box. 15 folders. 60 items. 1842-1974. Originals, photocopies, photographs, typescripts.

SC2019.81.1

Related collection: [MSS 53](#)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

James Proctor Knott, the son of Joseph Percy and Maria Irvine (McElroy) Knott, was born on 19 August 1830, near Lebanon, Marion County, Kentucky. He received his early education in Marion and Shelby counties. In 1846 he began the study of law, which he continued to pursue after moving to Memphis, Missouri in 1850. The following year Knott was admitted to the bar at Memphis, and he served in the ensuing years in the circuit and county clerk's offices. Knott married Mary E. Forman of Memphis on 17 November 1852; she died in childbirth in August 1853. In 1857, Knott was elected to the state legislature and in 1858 Governor Robert M. Stewart appointed him Attorney General to finish the unexpired term of Ephraim B. Ewing. On 14 June 1858, Knott married his first cousin Sarah "Sallie" Rosannah McElroy (1834-1915), the daughter of Philip Edward and Lydia (Gibbs) McElroy of Warren County, Kentucky. They had no children.

In 1860, Knott was elected Attorney General of Missouri in his own right. As the Civil War approached, he did not favor secession but believed that the Federal Government was acting in an oppressive manner. After Missouri came under the control of Unionists, an 1861 law required all state officers to take a loyalty oath to the United States. Knott's refusal to take the oath, which he regarded as superfluous, resulted in his arrest, brief imprisonment, and disbarment from law practice in Missouri. Shortly after his prison release, Knott and his wife Sallie left Missouri and returned to Kentucky. Late in 1862, they moved to Lebanon, Kentucky, where Knott opened a law office. Following the Civil War, Knott was the Democratic representative of Kentucky's 4th District in the U.S. House of Representatives, serving from 1867-1871 and from 1875-1883. He was elected Governor of Kentucky in 1883. After his gubernatorial term, Knott practiced law in Frankfort and served on the 1890-1891 Kentucky Constitutional Convention as representative from Marion County. Retiring from law practice in 1892, he taught civics and economics at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, and assisted in organizing Centre's law department in 1894. Ill health forced Knott to retire from Centre College in 1901, and he returned again to Lebanon. His homeplace, named "Lea Rigg," was destroyed by fire in August 1902. Knott donated the land for the use of the Proctor Knott

Chautauqua Association, but continued to live in Lebanon until his death on 18 June 1911. Sallie (McElroy) Knott died in Lebanon on 16 July 1915.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of papers and photographs of James Proctor Knott and his wife, Sarah “Sallie” (McElroy) Knott. A few miscellaneous papers relating to other family members, principally the Clark family, are also included. Of particular interest are two journals of Sallie (McElroy) Knott beginning in 1857, a year before her marriage to Proctor Knott, and continuing through their eighth anniversary. A collection inventory is in Folder 1.

Folder 2 contains a playful 1880 letter from Proctor Knott, then serving in Congress, to his Washington D.C. landlady advising her in verse and illustration of his intended return to the city. Folder 3 contains Knott’s 1890 letter to his “niece” (in reality his much-younger cousin) Lydia McElroy regretting his inability to attend her commencement ceremonies at Bowling Green, Kentucky’s Potter College. Folder 4 contains a printed commemorative copy of Knott’s famous “Duluth speech” given in Congress in 1871 mocking the economic aspirations of this small Minnesota city and contrasting the speech with Duluth’s rapid growth as a shipping hub for the upper Midwest. Also included is a clipping and notes on the speech by a relative of Knott’s, perhaps Lydia (McElroy) Clark. Folder 5 contains a scholarly article about Knott’s career in Missouri politics; it includes quotes from the journals of Sallie (McElroy) Knott, once held privately, that are now part of this collection. Photographs and postcards (Folders 6-8) are of Proctor Knott (including one made by Washington, D.C. photographer Mathew Brady), his Lebanon, Kentucky home “Lea Rigg,” and the Jefferson Davis Monument in Fairview, Kentucky.

Folder 9 contains Sallie McElroy’s journal covering the period 7 September 1857 to 14 June 1858, the day of her wedding to J. Proctor Knott, and also includes an 1890 postscript. During this period, Sallie teaches at the Bowling Green Female Academy in Bowling Green, Kentucky, becomes engaged, and leaves her teaching job to prepare for her marriage and move to Memphis, Missouri. She is an observant and literate writer, and the journal shows her earnest and devout character, her depth of reading, and her love of nature. Some of the persons she writes about are difficult to identify, as she refers to them by first name or initial only; she refers affectionately to a correspondent who is also named Sallie, and makes frequent reference to a family named Graham and to a “Miss Moore,” who replaced her when she left her teaching position. The journal opens with some records (student names, subjects, and numerical notations) that appear to reference Sallie’s teaching duties. The proprietor of the Bowling Green Female Academy, Mary Kendall Jones, is revered for her intelligence and high moral character. Sallie boards at the school, sharing a room with fellow teacher Fannie L. Pierce. She writes of her students and other colleagues; of social occasions; of local acquaintances, including clergymen Archer Dickerson and Samuel Mutchmore, whose sermons she carefully evaluates; and of her extended family in Lebanon, Kentucky. Sallie’s own family—her mother, stepfather and half-siblings, and her sister Keturah and her husband—live nearby in the county and she frequently looks forward to seeing them. She deeply mourns a younger sister, Annie, who died a few years earlier. Although she enjoys teaching, Sallie plans her departure from Mrs. Jones’s school. Around the same time, she receives a visit from her cousin J. Proctor Knott, who she had last seen as a child. By the time

Proctor returns home to Missouri early in 1858, they have decided to marry. In the months between her engagement and marriage, Sallie's journal entries betray the characteristic anxiety of a bride-to-be as she disengages herself from the Bowling Green Female Academy and attempts to help her replacement; sews her wedding wardrobe; navigates obligatory social engagements and the clumsy attentions of local young men; eagerly awaits letters from Proctor; and tries to persuade her parents, who are hesitant about her union with a cousin, to support her marriage. Her last entry, an hour before her wedding, asks for God's guidance and closes "For the last time, Sallie Rose McElroy." Other incidents of interest in the journal include:

- Sallie's dramatic account of her embarrassment when an item of her underclothing drops down during a visit to the county fair (p. 25);
- Her amusement upon receiving a book on the Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy ("the Kentucky Tragedy") amid fears that reading this account of sexual transgression and murder would corrupt her. "I'm suspicious of the whole of 'em," she writes of men's insistence to women that "ignorance is bliss," declaring that she'd "rather have the wisdom than the bliss, as dear old mother Eve chose before me." (p. 33-34);
- A breach (later repaired) in her close friendship with teacher Fannie Pierce, caused when she urges Fannie to "throw off this rigid Puritanism she has allowed Mrs. [Mary Kendall] Jones to shackle her with, & be her own free, warm generous hearted self." (p. 63); and
- Her "three cheers" for Reverend Samuel Mutchmore for his interpretation of the Bible's creation story to emphasize the equality of women and men. From her seat in church beside Mrs. Jones, however, Sallie finds risible his claim that women are poorly educated (p. 82).

Folder 10 contains Sallie (McElroy) Knott's journal covering the period from 15 June 1858, the day after her marriage, to 14 June 1866. Several months often elapse between entries; additionally, some have been obscured, and a few pages that appear to have recorded especially unhappy periods in Sallie's married life have been entirely removed. The journal opens with the couple's journey to Memphis, Missouri and arrival at Proctor's family home "Melrose," where Sallie meets his mother and other relatives. With Proctor (who she calls "Dearie") frequently absent, she becomes homesick, lonely, and frustrated over his reluctance to purchase a home of their own. In 1859, they take lodgings in Jefferson City, the state capital, where Sallie makes some friends but continues to find life difficult as the wife of a public man. Her stay in Jefferson City is extended after Proctor earns another term as Attorney General, but she has little appetite for returning to Memphis and hopes they can now settle in their own home. She makes some amusing observations (pp. 31-32) about seeing the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) at the 1860 St. Louis Exposition. Upon Lincoln's inauguration in 1861 and the outbreak of the Civil War, Sallie is proud to "glory in the name of Rebel" (p. 33). She writes of Proctor's brief imprisonment, followed by his disbarment and expulsion from office when he declines to take a loyalty oath (pp. 34-35). In March 1862, they return to Bowling Green, Kentucky and, although their travel is disrupted by the war (p. 37), they soon reach Lebanon. Sallie hopes that Proctor will establish their home on a portion of a family farm, once her father's house and her childhood home (p. 37), but they again take up residence with family members. As Proctor develops his law practice, Sallie has only music lessons for enjoyment, and complains once more of neglect and of her unhappiness at having no home or children of her own. In one awkward incident, her discussion about the power of

“first love” with Proctor raises painful memories of his first wife (p. 50). Sallie records the comings and goings of family members in Lebanon as well as Springfield and Bowling Green, Kentucky; her chronic headaches and dyspepsia; the tensions that develop with her host family; marriages, births and deaths (including those of her mother and mother-in-law); and the aftermath of the Civil War, including the departure of now-freed slaves and the developing split in the Presbyterian Church. News of President Lincoln’s assassination leads her to speculate that the “awful but righteous deed” was a prelude to a seizure of power by Ulysses S. Grant, and she mocks the displays of mourning over “Abe Linkhorn” (pp. 61-63). In 1866, she again finds her hopes for her own home bitterly dashed when Proctor and his brother Edward agree to assume the management of widowed brother William’s farm and leave her and Edward’s wife in care of the domestic duties and children. Despite her unhappiness, she is always concerned whenever Proctor falls ill, and expresses her fear of having to live without him (p. 68). The journal ends on Sallie’s eighth wedding anniversary. In an 1890 postscript, she describes some of her entries as “weak and foolish” and the “misunderstandings” as long past, and declares that “no wife ever had a better, kinder, truer husband.” The journal also includes a letter Sallie apparently wrote in 1858 to “Lizzie,” one of her favorite students.

Folder 11 contains two photographs of Sallie (McElroy) Knott, one made by the Brady Gallery in Washington, D.C. Folder 12 contains an unidentified recipe book, possibly belonging to Sallie. Folder 13 contains miscellaneous documents relating mainly to proposed legislation in the Kentucky General Assembly; also included is 1842 correspondence seeking relief for a man indicted for illegally transporting slaves into the state. Folder 14 contains miscellaneous papers and printed matter probably collected by George T. Clark, the son of Sallie (McElroy) Knott’s cousin Lydia K. (McElroy) Clark. Folder 15 contains photographs of street scenes, some identified, of Louisville, Kentucky during the 1937 Ohio River flood.

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Knott Family Papers	1842-1974	60 items
Folder 1	Inventory		1 item
Folder 2	J. Proctor Knott letter to Amelia J. Purrington	1880	1 item
Folder 3	J. Proctor Knott letter to Lydia K. McElroy	1890	1 item
Folder 4	J. Proctor Knott – “Duluth speech” reprint and related material	1925	3 items
Folder 5	“J. Proctor Knott’s Education in Missouri Politics,” article by Helen Bartter Crocker in Missouri Historical Society <i>Bulletin</i>	1974	1 item
Folder 6	J. Proctor Knott – Photographs	n.d.	5 items
Folder 7	Lea Rigg (J. Proctor Knott home) – Photographs	n.d.	4 items

Folder 8	Miscellaneous photographs and postcards	1911, n.d.	3 items
Folder 9	Sarah "Sallie" (McElroy) Knott – Journal 9a – Typescript of journal	1857-1858	1 item
Folder 10	Sarah "Sallie" (McElroy) Knott – Journal and letter to student 10a – Typescript of journal	1858-1866, 1890	2 items
Folder 11	Sarah "Sallie" (McElroy) Knott – Photographs	n.d.	2 items
Folder 12	Recipe book	1879, n.d.	1 item
Folder 13	Miscellaneous papers	1842-1844	5 items
Folder 14	Miscellaneous Clark family papers	1932-1941	9 items
Folder 15	Louisville flood, 1937 – Photographs	1937	21 items

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS KNOTT Family Papers 1842-1974
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Papers and photographs of James Proctor Knott, Lebanon, Kentucky, and his wife Sarah "Sallie" (McElroy) Knott. Includes two journals of Sallie Knott covering the first eight years of their marriage, and miscellaneous papers of a related family, the Clarks.

1 box. 15 folders. 60 items. Originals, photocopies, photographs, typescripts.

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SEE and SEE ALSO

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See

Pierce, Fannie L.

McElroy, Lydia Ann (Gibbs), 1812-1865

See

Chapman, Lydia Ann (Gibbs) McElroy

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