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## Gates Family Letters (MSS 398)

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### Recommended Citation

Folklife Archives, Manuscripts &, "Gates Family Letters (MSS 398)" (2020). *Manuscript Collection Finding Aids*. Paper 4880.

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

*Descriptive Inventory*

**MSS 398 GATES Family Letters**

½ box. 7 folders. 75 items. 1864-1939. Originals, photocopies.

SC2019.59.3

**COLLECTION NOTE**

This collection consists of correspondence and a few miscellaneous papers of the Gates family of Calhoun, McLean County, Kentucky. Dr. Thomas Minor Gates (1820-1860), the son of Cyrus Gates and Patty (Hewitt) Gates, was born in New London, Connecticut and emigrated to Kentucky as a young man. His siblings included Mary Eliza Gates (1822-1907), who married John C. Coats; Rev. Oliver Wolcott Gates (1830-1891), who married Mary Paine; and Isaac Edwin Gates (1833-1916).

In 1846, Thomas Minor Gates married Nancy Wright (1828-1903), the daughter of James B. Wright and Jane (Allen) Wright. Their children included Martha Jane Gates (1847-1929), who married J. C. Harl; Cyrus Gates (1851-1888); Emily (or Emma) Powers Gates (1853-1894), who married James M. Nicholls; and Nellie Gertrude Gates (1856-1950), who never married. A collection inventory is in Folder 1 along with genealogical notes, but the notes are intended to show relationships among the correspondents featured most prominently in this collection and should not be construed as a comprehensive genealogy.

Folder 2 contains correspondence and papers of Nancy (Wright) Gates. Included is a letter to her young children written as she is about to leave home temporarily for an undisclosed reason. Also included are letters from her brother-in-law, New York railroad executive Isaac E. Gates, enclosing monetary gifts for Christmas and relaying brief family news.

Folder 3 contains letters to Nancy's daughter Nellie Gates from Josiah "Joe" Noe, a young attorney in Calhoun. Most are written to Nellie while she visits her married sister Sally in Mississippi. Joe relates local news and his social activities, and asks for her company when she returns. He offers comments on a former sweetheart who became engaged to an older man, a cousin of Nellie's father.

Folders 4 and 5 contain letters to Nellie from Robert Coleman Duncan, who she first met in 1880. His courtship letters are written during his frequent travel in southcentral Kentucky, usually by river steamer, while working for a wholesale grocery business. He writes of his travel destinations, social activities, reading, mutual friends, and possible rivals for Nellie's affection. As their intimacy develops, "Coley" remarks regularly on the rumors it has engendered among friends and family. He complains that such talk is facilitated by the gossipy crew of the Evansville and Green River Packet steamboat line, who not only exchange information with other passengers but know from the mail they carry who is corresponding with whom. After he

and Nellie become engaged early in 1881, his letters show the strain of continuing to keep their relationship secret. Duncan becomes increasingly ardent about marrying Nellie, but grows unhappy with the infrequency of her letters and with their apparent differences in temperament. In May 1882, citing his fear that Nellie cannot love him “as much as I want one to love me that I marry,” he breaks off their engagement. Also relevant is a letter to Nellie from Coleman’s sister Lizzie Yarbrough (Folder 6), written in 1883 as he is about to marry another woman. Lizzie accuses her brother of “ungentlemanly” conduct and reaffirms her friendship with Nellie.

Folder 6 contains miscellaneous letters to Nellie Gates from friends, family members and a few male admirers. Her aunt Mary (Paine) Gates writes to her during Nellie’s schooldays, a cousin “Grace” writes of her family’s travel to Washington state, her uncle Isaac Gates writes while traveling in England, and a widowed cousin, Allison Drury, writes of her life in North Stonington, Connecticut as she grows older.

Box 7 contains miscellaneous letters, notes and papers of the Gates family. Nellie’s father Thomas Gates writes to his brother in Connecticut upon the birth of Nellie’s sister Emma; another sister, Martha “Mattie,” writes to their mother while traveling in the west; and “Joe” Noe writes to “Emma” (probably his future wife Emma Chappell) while she is teaching school. Also included are a typescripted letter detailing at length the illness and death of Nellie’s aunt Mary (Paine) Gates during a missionary trip to Burma, and funeral instructions of Nellie’s niece Mary (Nicholls) Brooks.

### ***SHELF LIST***

<b>BOX 1</b>	<b>Gates Family Letters</b>	<b>1864-1939</b>	<b>76 items</b>
Folder 1	Inventory and genealogical notes		2 items
Folder 2	Nancy Gates – Correspondence and papers	1864-1902	7 items
Folder 3	Josiah “Joe” Noe – Letters to Nellie Gates	1876-1878	8 items
Folder 4	R. C. Duncan – Letters to Nellie Gates	1880- Apr. 1881	17 items
Folder 5	R. C. Duncan – Letters to Nellie Gates	May 1881- 1882	14 items
Folder 6	Miscellaneous letters to Nellie Gates	1876-1939, n.d.	13 items
Folder 7	Miscellaneous letters and papers	1870-1937, n.d.	14 items

**BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD**

MSS GATES Family Letters 1864-1939  
398

Letters and papers of the family of Thomas and Nancy Gates, Calhoun, Kentucky. Most of the letters are courtship letters to daughter Nellie, with other letters from family in Connecticut, New York, and elsewhere.

½ box. 7 folders. 75 items. Originals, photocopies.

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**SUBJECT ANALYTICS**

Bewley, Elmore Woodward, 1850-1915 – Relating to B1,F3,4  
 Brooks, Mary Lee (Nicholls), 1876-1929 – Relating to B1,F7  
 Courtship, 1876-1882 B1,F3-6  
 Drury, Alison Eliza (Coats), b. 1855 B1,F6  
 Duncan, Robert Coleman, 1854-1945 B1,F4,5  
 Duncan, Robert Coleman, 1854-1945 – Relating to B1,F6  
 Gates, Cyrus, 1851-1888 – Letter to B1,F7  
 Gates, Irene “Rena” (Hawes), 1859-1921 – Comments about, 1876  
 Gates, Isaac Edwin, 1833-1916 B1,F2,6  
 Gates, Mary (Paine), 1831-1893 B1,F6  
 Gates, Mary (Paine), 1831-1893 – Relating to B1,F7  
 Gates, Nancy (Wright), 1828-1903 – Correspondence B1,F2,7  
 Gates, Nellie Gertrude, 1856-1950 – Letters to B1,F2-6  
 Harl, Martha J. “Mattie” (Gates), 1847-1929 B1,F6,7  
 Hines, Margaret Gates (Nicholls), 1878-1941 – Relating to B1,F7  
 Leases – McLean County, 1898  
 Noe, Emma D. (Chappell), 1859-1888 – Correspondence? B1,F7  
 Noe, Josiah Thomas “Joe,” 1850-1903 B1,F3,7  
 Yarbrough, Mary Elizabeth “Lizzie” (Duncan), 1846-1920 B1,F6

Niedermeier 08/28/2020