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## Gentry, Robert Turner, 1865-1950 (MSS 713)

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### Recommended Citation

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

*Descriptive Inventory*

**MSS 713 GENTRY, Robert Turner, 1865-1950**

2 boxes. 25 folders. 413 items. 1887-1934. Originals.

SC2021.2.3

Related collection: [MSS 733](#)

***BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE***

Robert Turner Gentry, the son of Reuben Gentry and Pauline Baker, was born at New Liberty in Owen County, Kentucky on 18 August 1865. In 1890, he married Martha Beck Spangler of Owen County, the daughter of William Spangler and Harriett Carter. They had two sons, Reuben Emmett Gentry (1892-1981), called "Emmett," and William Paul Gentry (1899-1945), called "Paul."

After working at banks in Owenton, Georgetown and Corinth, Kentucky, in 1896 Gentry organized the Bank of Sonora in Hardin County and became its cashier. He also farmed and operated an insurance agency in partnership with his son Emmett. Beset with health problems in 1905-1906, the Gentry family explored the possibility of relocating to California, but Robert remained with the Bank of Sonora until his death on 4 June 1950. He is buried in Sonora Cemetery.

***COLLECTION NOTE***

This collection consists of the correspondence and personal papers of Robert T. Gentry of Sonora, Kentucky. The bulk consists of incoming letters to Gentry from his wife and relatives in Owen County (especially brothers Cooper Gentry and Marcus Gentry), colleagues in the banking business, and traders with whom he dealt in connection with his interest in acquiring Native American relics. Also included are some letters to Gentry's wife Martha ("Mattie") from her sons and other relatives and friends, many of whom lived in Owen County.

Box 1 contains Robert T. Gentry's general correspondence. Included are letters relating to his purchase of buggies; letters of recommendation written for him as he plans to establish his bank in Sonora; and a letter from the Prohibition Party paper *The Kentucky Vindicator* asking him to serve as treasurer (Folder 2). Several letters from New Liberty relate to the health of his father, and a Los Angeles correspondent discusses the prospects for opening a bank in southern California (Folder 3). In 1905, the illness of Gentry's wife and younger son send the family west to recover their health and to seek a permanent relocation; letters from this period

concern railway routes and fares, and news of affairs at home and at the Bank of Sonora (Folder 4). After the family returns to Sonora, Gentry's own health problems prompt him again to consider relocating, and much of his correspondence from 1906 (Folders 5-6) relates to negotiations for his resignation and the sale of his bank stock. In addition, his wife Mattie suffers a near-fatal bout of illness that brings expressions of deep concern from friends and family and offers to help Gentry at the bank. Other general correspondence and papers (Folders 7 and 12) relates to routine bank and insurance matters and, during World War I, to fundraising for the YMCA, Liberty Loans, and the U.S. Fuel Administration. Of interest is a copy of a letter to the Kentucky Fuel Administrator lamenting the shortage of coal for the citizens of Sonora in 1918. Gentry's correspondence with sellers of Native American relics (arrow points, implements, pottery) and other artifacts and curios (Folders 8-10) comes from across the country. Some correspondents are amateurs, while others are dealers who enclose formal price lists and brochures. Gentry's miscellaneous papers (Folder 11) consist of cancelled checks written primarily on the Bank of Sonora; bank and pocket memo books; and pocket maps of the West Indies and Philippines theatres during the Spanish-American War, and of the grounds of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.

Box 2 contains correspondence of Robert T. Gentry's wife Martha ("Mattie"), and of his sons and brothers. Most of Mattie's letters (Folder 1) to her husband (in which she often calls him "Robin" while she is "Pansy") convey local and household news while he is in Owen County in 1903 and again in 1906 during his father's final illness. Mattie also offers comments about the marital troubles of Robert's brother Cooper and his wife Florence, and an undated letter describes her recovery from illness. Letters to Mattie (Folders 2-4) come from her husband during his visits to family in Owen County; from merchants; and from relatives and friends with family news, expressions of concern as Mattie and her son Paul cope with illness, and comments on the family friction caused by Cooper and Florence Gentry's estrangement. Letters to Mattie from 1905 (Folder 3) concern plans for treating her health problems (apparently tuberculosis), including the move to California. Also included (Folder 5) are letters to Mattie with literature touting remedies for a variety of nervous and "female" complaints. Correspondence of Robert and Mattie's sons Emmett and Paul (Folder 6) includes Emmett's childhood letters to his parents from Owen County while they are traveling in the west; Emmett also writes from school in 1913. Later letters to Emmett concern possible employment in banking and insurance, investments in oil and coal, and membership in the Navy League during World War I. Also included is a certificate regarding Emmett's service with the Kentucky Council on Defense. Letters of Cooper Gentry (Folders 7-9) are written from 1900-1906 almost exclusively to his brother Robert. Like Robert, Cooper searched for opportunities to establish himself in banking, becoming the cashier of a bank in Wheatley (Owen County), Kentucky. He writes of their father's declining health, business opportunities in Wheatley and elsewhere, and consults with his brother on raising pigs. When his wife Florence files for divorce early in 1904, Cooper desperately enlists the aid of Mattie Gentry and others to convince her to withdraw the suit. His letters display a restlessness similar to Robert's as he debates their futures, buys and sells property, tries to maintain cordial relations with other family members, and encourages Robert in his plans to depart from the bank. Letters of Robert's brother Marcus Gentry, an Owen County farmer (Folder 10), concern their father's health, Cooper's unhappy marriage, and family and local news. Letters of Marcus's wife Sallie to Robert and Mattie Gentry (Folder 11) concern family, farming matters, and Florence Cooper's divorce suit. A few letters of Robert's sister Scottie (Gentry) Yancey (Folder 12) concern her family and suggestions for his curio collecting.

Other papers of Robert Gentry (Folder 13) consist of genealogical notes, including data on the relationship between his mother's family and that of Daniel Boone.

### ***SHELF LIST***

<b>BOX 1</b>	<b>Robert T. Gentry – Correspondence &amp; Papers</b>	<b>1887-1930</b>	<b>221 items</b>
Folder 1	Inventory and notes		2 items
Folder 2	Robert T. Gentry – General correspondence	1887-1902	17 items
Folder 3	Robert T. Gentry – General correspondence	1903-1904	15 items
Folder 4	Robert T. Gentry – General correspondence	1905	24 items
Folder 5	Robert T. Gentry – General correspondence	Jan.-Apr. 1906	28 items
Folder 6	Robert T. Gentry – General correspondence	May-Dec. 1906	20 items
Folder 7	Robert T. Gentry – General correspondence	1909-1918, n.d.	22 items
Folder 8	Robert T. Gentry – Correspondence re: relics collecting	1903	28 items
Folder 9	Robert T. Gentry – Correspondence re: relics collecting	1904	25 items
Folder 10	Robert T. Gentry – Correspondence re: relics collecting	1905-1908	20 items
Folder 11	Robert T. Gentry – Checks, bank books, pocket maps, memo books	1888-1930	19 items
Folder 12	Robert T. Gentry – Certificate – U.S. Fuel Administration	1919	1 item
<b>BOX 2</b>	<b>Robert T. Gentry Family – Correspondence and Papers</b>	<b>1893-1934</b>	<b>192 items</b>
Folder 1	Martha Gentry – Letters, mostly to husband	1903-1918	22 items
Folder 2	Martha Gentry – Letters to	1900-1904	14 items

Folder 3	Martha Gentry – Letters to	1905	18 items
Folder 4	Martha Gentry – Letters to	1906-1934	8 items
Folder 5	Martha Gentry – Health remedies	1904-1905	6 items
Folder 6	Reuben Emmett Gentry and William Paul Gentry – Letters and papers	1905-1918	21 items
Folder 7	Cooper Gentry – Letters of	1900-1903	27 items
Folder 8	Cooper Gentry – Letters of	1904-1905	24 items
Folder 9	Cooper Gentry – Letters of	1906	19 items
Folder 10	Marcus Clark Gentry – Letters of	1893-1906	20 items
Folder 11	Sallie Gentry – Letters of	1901-1905	6 items
Folder 12	Scottie (Gentry) Yancey – Letters of	1903	3 items
Folder 13	Genealogy notes	n.d.	4 items

### ***BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD***

MSS GENTRY, Robert Turner, 1887-1934  
713 1865-1950

Correspondence of Robert T. Gentry, Sonora, Kentucky, an insurance agent and cashier for the Bank of Sonora. Consists mostly of letters to Gentry from his wife, from Gentry's friends and siblings in Owen County, Kentucky, and from sellers and dealers of Native American relics. Some correspondence of his wife Martha "Mattie" Gentry is also included.

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### ***SUBJECT ANALYTICS***

Adams, Adele B., b. 1859 B1,F6; B2,F2,3  
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Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, 1905 B1,F4  
Baker family – Relating to B2,F13

Banks and banking – Hardin County – Bank of Sonora – Relating to B1,F2-7,11  
 Banks and banking – Louisville B1,F7  
 Banks and banking – Owen County B1,F11; B2,F7  
 Bromley, H. W. B1,F6  
 Brown, Elizabeth C. “Lizzie,” 1849-1923 B2,F2  
 Brown, Francis Headley, 1847-1926 – Correspondence B1,F5; B2,F1-4  
 Brown, J. C. B1,F4,6; B2,F4  
 California – Orange County – Travel and description, 1905 B2,F3  
 Calloway family – Relating to B2,F13  
 Carriages and carts B1,F2  
 Chain letters, 1904 B2,F2  
 Child, Anna N., b. 1845 B2,F2  
 Crabb, John A., 1861-1948 B1,F3  
 Craig, Mortimer L. “Mort,” 1857-1936 B1,F5  
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 Farms and farming – Owen County, 1903-1906 B2,F10  
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 Gardner, John A. B1,F4  
 Gentry, Cooper, 1870-1950 B2,F7-9  
 Gentry, Cooper, 1870-1950 – Relating to B1,F2; B2,F1-3,10  
 Gentry family – Relating to B2,F13  
 Gentry, Florence (Smith), 1872-1945 – Relating to B2,F1-3,8,10  
 Gentry, Marcus Clark, 1872-1951 B2,F10  
 Gentry, Martha Beck “Mattie” (Spangler), 1862-1940 – Correspondence B2,F1-9,11  
 Gentry, Martha Beck “Mattie” (Spangler), 1862-1940 – Relating to B1,F4,5  
 Gentry, Meredith Poindexter, 1809-1866 – Relating to B1,F3  
 Gentry, Reuben, 1828-1906 – Relating to B1,F3; B2,F1,7,9  
 Gentry, Reuben Emmett, 1892-1981 – Correspondence B2,F6,11  
 Gentry, Reuben Emmett, 1892-1981 – Relating to B2,F6  
 Gentry, Robert S., 1896-1960 B2,F11  
 Gentry, Sallie (Souther), 1874-1907 B2,F11  
 Gentry, William Paul, 1899-1945 – Correspondence B2,F6  
 Gentry, William Paul, 1899-1945 – Relating to B1,F4; B2,F4  
 Greene, Roy Farrell, 1873-1909 B1,F8,9  
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 Indians of North America – Antiquities – Relating to B1,F8-10  
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 O’Neal, Martha (Yancey), b. 1843? B1,F6; B2,F3  
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 Phillips, Josiah, 1843-1935 – Correspondence B1,F4,5  
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