

The J. Spotts McDowell Collection

Repository

Dutchess County Historical Society
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Access Number

DC.0096 – DC.0098

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2013 January 22

Creators

J. Spotts McDowell
William James Vassar

Extent

.1 linear ft

Dates

1827 – 1910

Conditions Governing Access

No Restrictions

Languages

English

Scope and Content

The collection consists of a large biography of William James Vassar by his grandson J. Spotts McDowell. Also included is a collection of transcripts and photocopies of correspondence. The material seems to have been gathered/created in the early 1970s.

Historical Note

William James Vassar was born on July 7, 1827 to James W. Vassar and Elizabeth Bond Vassar in what is now Nassau County, Long Island. His father moved to Poughkeepsie in 1828 where he was a sloop captain. William James ran away to Bath, Maine at the age of 10 before joining the crew of Captain Edward S. Tobey, a neighbor of his fathers in Poughkeepsie. After Captain Tobey married and retired in 1841, William lived with him in Poughkeepsie until 1843. Then, at the age of 16 he left for New York where he gained employment on a ship making year-long voyages to Hong Kong. At 18 he lived for a time in New Orleans where he began working for the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs for two years in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. He made two trips removing the Seminole Indians from Florida to what is now Oklahoma. He then worked as a Gulf coast sailor an in a lumber yard in Mississippi before moving to Cincinnati to work on the river boats. Here he corresponded with his family intermittently. He visited Poughkeepsie once in 1850 before he married Mary Catherine Brickard in Cincinnati in December of that year. They moved to a farm she inherited in Southern Indiana where they had ten children. William James Vassar enlisted in the Union Army in 1864 at the age of 37. He served as a Private for almost a year and fought at the Battle of Franklin and the Battle of Nashville. Mary Catherine Vassar died of tuberculosis in 1870 at the age of 37. William remarried in 1880 to Sarah H. Laughlin and had an additional five children. She died in 1892 at the age of 45. William then married Margaret Showers in 1895. In 1903 he sold the farm and retired to the town of Napoleon, Indiana where he died on January 10, 1910 at the age of 82.

Provenance

The Collection was donated to the Dutchess County Historical Society by J. Spotts McDowell after 1974.

Subject Headings

Personal Correspondence

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Container List

Small Collections Box 3

File	Contents	Date
File 1 DC.0096	Brief biography of William James Vassar	1827 – 1910
File 2 DC.0097	Letters written by William James Vassar & wife to their son William James Vassar	1848 – 1852

File 3 DC.0098	Biography of William James Vassar of New York and Indiana by J. Spotts McDowell	1827 – 1910
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