COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:
Claybrooke, John Samuel, 1807-1892

Inclusive Dates:
1804-1903

Scope & Content:
Consists of correspondence, accounts, newspaper clippings, obituaries, deeds, eulogies, field notes, letter fragments, a land survey, a poem, a historical sketch, a memorandum, and a land contract. Most of the correspondence relates to Claybrooke family life during the mid-19th century and a bit earlier. Comments on slavery and slaves recur throughout the correspondence and could be important for students of African American history.

Material quoted here is verbatim.

Family members write plainly about disease, ruined crops, slaves, and weather anomalies. In his March 13, 1860, letter to his sister Elizabeth, John S. Claybrooke included news about it all. By that date, the typhoid fever had left the Triune (Williamson County) area, but only after a miserable winter had entirely destroyed the turnip crop and ruined the wheat, “not a single green spine on thousands of acres.” The 10-inch clover roots were “frozen out of the ground, a thing unknown in this country before…. My negroes, who have had Typhoid Fever, though well, look feeble.”

Elizabeth Pomphret Claybrooke of Louisa County, Virginia, maintained a long correspondence with her brother John Samuel Claybrooke who had moved to
Nashville, Tennessee, to live with their uncle, Judge John Overton. On September 30, 1832, Elizabeth wrote to John Samuel, who may have expressed interest in a particular woman. Elizabeth replied, “to the best of my knowledge there is no marriage at hand in the circle of my female acquaintances,” but she would keep him apprised. She was chatty about the neighborhood and their friends. “Were you not surprized to hear of John Harts being baptized. It is the topic with all in this vicinity indeed the wonder of every body that knew him his wife joined the [Episcopal] church about a fortnight previous from the time of her being baptized he seemed to be completely wretched. his conviction was short but powerful I have never seen a greater change in anyone. I have heard his mother said she feared he was to hasty in joining her church so quick.”

Inventors may find interest in F. G. Smith’s letter of November 6, 1865, to John S. Claybrooke, president of the Tennessee & Alabama Railroad. Smith, writing from Columbia (Maury County), described his forthcoming patent for a “Self loading Railroad Steam Gun,” which would clear animals from the tracks. He proposed using hardened balls of clay two or three inches in diameter and whitewashed so as to be visible when being shot two or three hundred yards. The balls traveled at a “velocity sufficient to make them really dreaded by the intruding cows, but not intended to inflict any serious wound.” Gas-pipe tubes screwed into both sides of the boiler projected the hardened spheres.

The topic of women’s health persists in several letters. E. M. Williams of Tuckahoe, New York wrote to John S. Claybrooke on October 3, 1854, and suggested that poorly Susan visit Rockbridge Alum Springs (now a national historic district) in Virginia to take the waters for her declining health:

I have seen numbers of Ladies who I think, are afflicted in the same way, entirely restored to good health by the use of them – it is very remarkably water indeed. Tell Sam’l if she is yet sick & can’t go to the Springs, to send on for the water for her – it is now being put up, & sent to almost every part of the Union, for delicate females.

The accounts record school tuition fees for two boys’ schools. The earliest is for a July 1831 session for the “Academy near Mr. Wm. King’s house on the road leading to King’s Gin.” The others show tuition fees for the Harpeth Male Academy, of which J. S. Claybrooke was founder and president. Among the academy patrons (parents) are familiar family names such as Green, Russwurm, Tulloss, Bostick, Scales, Figuers, and Crockett. Two women, Nancy Crockett and Sarah A. Caruthers, appear on the roll. Soon to be governor Newton Cannon paid for two students in June 1832.

The Claybrooke and Overton Papers, Addition 2 is valuable for its regional, social, religious, political, agricultural, and familial content.
Physical Description/Extent:
.5 cu. ft.

Accession/Record Group Number:
2017-057

Language:
English

Permanent Location:
XVII-M-6

Repository:
Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

Administrative/Biographical History

John Samuel Claybrooke (1807-1892), born in Hanover County, Virginia, was a teacher, planter, and railroad executive. His parents, John Claybrooke and Sarah Overton Claybrooke, ensured him the best education of the day. Around 1820 he traveled to Nashville, Tennessee, and for a while made his home with his uncle, Judge John Overton. The young man so impressed Overton that in 1833, he made Claybrooke trustee of his vast estate. Overton died that year.

Claybrooke married Mary Ann Perkins in 1834. They made their home at Triune (then Hardeman’s Cross Roads), Williamson County and had a large family. Mary Ann Perkins Overton died in 1863. The 1860s must have presented certain emotional challenges to John S. Claybrooke. Not long after he lost his wife, two of his favorite sisters died (1864) back in Louisa County. His brother Thomas, with whom he was close, died in 1868.

Always public-spirited, Claybrooke opened Harpeth Male Academy in Williamson County around 1829. One newspaper obituary noted that Claybrooke’s pupils were “trained and prepared for the performance of duties, which, sometime or other fall to the lot of every true American citizen.”

By 1836, Claybrooke had settled in Williamson County and owned expansive lands in Haywood County and elsewhere in West Tennessee. In 1853, he was named president of the Tennessee & Alabama Railroad and served there until 1868. He was later president of the Nashville and Decatur Rail Road. Claybrooke died at his home “Brookland” in 1892. He and Mary Ann are buried at Mount Hope Cemetery, Williamson County.
Organization/Arrangement of Materials

Organized alphabetically by document type, then alphabetically by last name.

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:
None

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:
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Index Terms

Personal Names:
- Brinkley, R. C.
- Broaddus, A.
- Claybrooke, Annie Wingfield, -1922
- Claybrooke, Elizabeth P.
- Claybrooke, Frederick, 1837-1863
- Claybrooke, James O.
- Claybrooke, Jane R.
- Claybrooke, John Samuel, 1807-1892
- Claybrooke, Mary H.
- Claybrooke, Sarah
- Claybrooke, Susie Fearn
- Claybrooke, Thomas W.
- Coffey, Elijah
- Hart, James M.
- Hart, Sally O.
- Leath, C. A.
- Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865
- McAllister, J. M.
- Perkins, Thomas F.
- Williams, E. M.
Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:
Confederate States of America. Army. Tennessee Infantry Regiment, 20th
Confederate States of America. Navy
Episcopal Church. Diocese of Virginia
Harpeth Male Academy

Subjects:
Agriculture -- Tennessee
Baptism -- History -- 19th century
Cattle -- History -- 19th century
Cholera -- Tennessee -- History -- 19th century
Christian life -- Tennessee -- History -- 19th century
Death -- Religious aspects -- Christianity
Edema -- History -- 19th century
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Episcopalian -- History -- 19th century
Ferries -- Tennessee -- History -- 19th century
Flags -- Confederate States of America
Inventions -- United States -- 19th century
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Marriage customs and rites -- Tennessee -- 19th century
Plasterwork, Decorative -- Tennessee -- History -- 19th century
Slavery -- History -- 19th century
Typhoid fever -- Tennessee -- History -- 19th century

Geographic Names:
Columbia (Tenn.)
Hanover County (Va.)
Hardeman’s Crossroads (Tenn.)
Haywood County (Tenn.)
Hermitage (Tenn.)
Louisa County (Va.)
Memphis (Tenn.)
Mississippi River -- Navigation -- History -- 19th century
Pottiesville (Va.)
Tennessee -- History -- 19th century -- Sources
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
Walnut Grove (Tenn.)
Williamson County (Tenn.)
Wolf River (Miss. and Tenn.)

Document Types:
Accounts
Bills of sale
Correspondence
Envelopes
Essays
Field notes
Legal documents
Memorandums
Obituaries
Plats (maps)
Poems
Proposals
Surveys (documents)

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition:
The papers were donated to the Tennessee State Library and Archives by The Honorable George Paine and Ophelia Paine, October 10, 2017.

Processing and Administrative Information

Preferred Citation:
Claybrooke and Overton Papers, Addition 2, 1804-1903, Tennessee State Library and Archives

Processing Information:
The papers were processed by Susan Gordon, June 2019.

Related Archival Materials:
Claybrooke and Overton Papers, 1747-1894, Tennessee State Library and Archives
Claybrooke and Overton Papers, Addition, 1802-1959, Tennessee State Library and Archives
John Overton Papers, 1797-1833, Tennessee State Library and Archives
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