COOPER, DUNCAN BROWN
(1844-1922)
PAPERS
1838-ca. 1965

Processed by:
Mary Washington Frazer

Date Completed: September 8, 1972
Accession Number: 1972.153
Location: VIII-L-1-2
Microfilm Accession Number: 830

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INTRODUCTION

Duncan Brown Cooper (1844-1922), Nashville newspaperman and politician was most widely known for his role in the shooting death of Edward Ward Carmack, editor of the Nashville Tennessean. The papers are composed of accounts (bills, notes, receipts); correspondence and autographs; certificates; clippings, genealogical data and invitations; legal papers (agreements, bonds, deeds, estate records, indentures, minutes, wills); photographs; and sketches, speeches and writings.

About one-third of the correspondence are letters of sympathy and support for Cooper and his son Robin, after Edward Ward Carmack was shot by Robin the evening of November 9, 1908, on a street in downtown Nashville. There are also letters of a political nature written to Col. Cooper from all over the state; many dealing with the automobile business in Texas, 1909-10; and others dealing with family matters. There are a few genealogical notes on the families of Hugh Brown, John Donelson, John Burch and Allen Jones.

The materials in this finding aid measure 6.30 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials. Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Duncan Brown Cooper Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.
SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Duncan Brown Cooper Papers spanning the years 1838 to about 1965 and containing about 4,000 items are composed of accounts (bills, notes, receipts), correspondence, a few autographs, certificates, clippings, some genealogical data, invitations, legal papers (agreements, bonds, deeds, estate records, indentures, minutes, wills), photographs, two poems, sketches, speeches, and writings.

The item of earliest date in the papers is the poem written by Matthew Delamere Cooper (1792-1878) upon the burial of Ralph E. W. Earl, the portrait painter and friend of Jackson, at “The Hermitage” in 1838. (This poem is reproduced in Stanley F. Horn’s book, The Hermitage: Home of Old Hickory.) Mr. Cooper, in a few prefatory words to his poem, wrote “The man of iron soul, the hero of a hundred battles, wept over his departed friend!”

The correspondence includes about 1,400 letters, one-third of which are letters of sympathy and support for Duncan Brown Cooper and his son, Robin, after the unfortunate shooting of Edward Ward Carmack by Robin the evening of November 9, 1908, on the street in downtown Nashville. The incident was triggered by the split between these two “distinguished Democrats” Colonel Cooper and Carmack, editor of the Nashville Tennessean, when the latter championed state-wide Prohibition. Carmack through his newspaper editorially attacked and ridiculed Cooper personally and continued to do so after repeated requests and warnings to desist. As some one wrote, “In the face of the last of these warnings he went out of his way to publish a new attack, and then borrowed a pistol, armed himself and went on the street.” What ensued when Colonel Cooper and Robin encountered Carmack “was not a murder, but a street duel.” Who fired first? A matter of controversy. Clippings included in the papers give some of the arguments on both sides.

The letters of sympathy that Colonel Cooper received after this tragic incident reveal the antagonism that Carmack’s “vitiolic pen” and support of state-wide Prohibition had aroused. J.W. Reid wrote, “I say to you in all candor that in the killing of Carmack, while upon you and your gallant son has fallen the burden of its consequences, still, for services rendered your state by this act she must ever be your debtor. As long as he lived he would have been a festering sore upon the body of our commonwealth….” A more extreme response came from John R. Boyd who wrote, “I read with some interest the dispatching of Carmack. The pity is, that a gentleman should have performed the task that would have been more becoming to a mule … for the past twenty years devoted his energies to lambasting respectability. The only ability he has ever possessed or shown, is vulgar sarcasm… he met a befitting end….”
There are letters of support from friends, personal and political, former comrades-in-arms of the Confederacy, business associates, individuals who had been recipients of Cooper’s aid, and even from complete strangers. John A. Pickard wrote, “I know your generous, tender, kindly heart that takes in all mankind must be sorely tried, and such times needs the support of those who love you. I know virulent malignity nor malice ever found lodgment in your heart…all my life I have known you as a true, generous, high toned man gentle and forbearing…” Cooper’s friend, John Peacock, wrote, “Carmack has been trying to get somebody to kill him for the last twelve years…and it falls on my poor friend, who never gave any man offence in his life.”

The way many felt about Carmack could be summed up as did E.H. Matthews in his letter to Cooper. He wrote, “…Carmack was nothing but a disturber of the peace, with a vituperous tongue, and wielded a poisonous pen…was an undesirable citizen…” Jessie M. Littleton of Winchester, Tennessee, wrote, “… Carmack was a brilliant man and I did not dislike him personally; but, his ambition was the only thing he loved. For that he would have sacrificed his friends, party, country, and everything else for which he professed so great a love. His head was all right but his heart was out of place….”

Many letters lambasted the prosecution in the trial of Cooper and his son, Robin. J.B. Foster from Enzor, Mississippi, wrote, “This is the most cold-blooded venomous, mean, underhanded malicious prosecution of which I am cognizant in my life of three score and ten years.” There was much criticism of Judge W.T. Hart, and the action of the Tennessee Supreme Court in upholding Cooper’s conviction of murder.

In 1910, Cooper was pardoned by Governor Malcolm R. Patterson and included are many letters to Cooper praising the action of the governor.

There are about 200 letters of a political nature written to Colonel Cooper from all over the state of Tennessee in the first decade of the 20th century. Included is one letter from Edward Ward Carmack in 1904, regarding national politics. Many of these correspondents sought aid from Cooper in obtaining political appointments. Many deal with the gubernatorial election and Malcolm Rice Patterson.

There are about 350 letters dealing with the automobile business in Texas, 1909-1910. These include orders for cars, parts, inquiries as to dealerships, etc., principally to and from the International Motor Sales Company, San Antonio, Texas; Nordyde & Marmon Company, Indianapolis, Indiana; and the Texas Motor Sales Company, Fort Worth, Texas.

Many letters deal with family matters. Included are letters to Cooper’s daughter, Mrs. Lucius Edward Burch, from her son and his family in Memphis, Tennessee, and from their hunting lodge in County Leitrim, Ireland, ca. 1940 – ca. 1960.

Miscellaneous letters from notable individuals include one in 1887 from historian George Bancroft to Mrs. James K. Polk with birthday wishes and praise for President Polk and her; a long letter from Isham G. Harris, 1888, in regard to misrepresentations printed in the Nashville Banner about him when governor and asking Cooper to republish what Harris had stated in 1876 with regard to his salary and the Bank of Tennessee; a short note from Cooper’s friend Grover Cleveland in 1903; a short undated note from
Joseph Jefferson, the actor famous for his role as Rip Van Winkle, a friend of the Warner family in Nashville and often a visitor in the Warner home. Jacob McGavock Dickinson wrote to Cooper September 3, 1891, complimenting him as one who “can more largely influence the cause of sound honest city government than any other person.” There is a letter from Carrie Chapman Catt to Mrs. Leslie Warner in regard to her work for woman suffrage; and a letter from Merrill Moore, sonnet writer and physician, to Mrs. J.C. Bradford in 1929, expressing his appreciation for her concern for art in Nashville.

Included with legal papers is an indenture, 1859, between Alexander J. Porter and William Frierson Cooper, both of Davidson County, Tennessee, selling to Cooper for $87,933 land (including stock, personal property, slaves, etc.) on the north side of the Cumberland River about three and one-half miles from Nashville known as Tammany Wood. Called “Riverwood,” it is today the home of Mrs. Lucius E. Burch, donor of these papers.

There is a copy of the State of Tennessee Appearance Recognizance Bond for Duncan Brown Cooper dated March 1909, in the amount of $24,000, and signed by many friends, his bondsmen.

Estate papers include that of Mrs. Leslie Warner listing her stocks, bonds, jewelry, real estate, etc. Family wills include hers, 1921, and that of both Mr. and Mrs. Lucius E. Burch, 1924, and their son, John, 1927.

There is a warranty deed, June 4, 1956, from Mr. and Mrs. Lucius E. Burch selling for $1.00 to the Burch Community Center, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee, a tract of land to be used for the Center only.

Minutes include those for a regular meeting and two special meetings, all in March 1959, of the Board of Directors of the American Frontier Life Insurance Company, Memphis, Tennessee.

Newspaper clippings include sketches of the historic Maury County, Tennessee, homes “Ashwood Place,” and “Rattle and Snap.” There is an article about Mrs. Robin Cooper and her home near Louisville, Kentucky.

There are a few genealogical notes on the Brown family (Hugh Brown, ca. 1762-ca. 1852); the Donelson family (John Donelson, 1718-1785; the Burch family (John Burch, ca. 1750-1818); and the Jones family (Allen Jones, 1739-1807).

Speeches include one given by Gordon Browning in his hometown, Huntingdon, Tennessee, when running for governor in 1952; extracts from speeches of Edward Ward Carmack derogatory to Cooper, 1908; and a paper read before the Old Oak Club, Nashville, by W.H. Witt entitled “Medical References in the Writings of Shakespeare.”

Included with writings is an account by Francis C. Ward, Co. C, 50th Illinois Volunteers, of his capture of Colonel Cooper during the Civil War; an article by Trezevant Player Yeatman, Jr., on the plantation church St. John’s Episcopal, Maury County, Tennessee; a paper by Memphis lawyer, Lucius Edward Burch entitled “Council-Manager Government as related to Memphis, Tennessee”; and a booklet entitled “Prologue – events forming background of Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, May 20, 1775” by Alexander Graham and published by Charlotte (N.C.) Chamber of Commerce, 1924. There is a
short account of the death of Meriwether Lewis told by Cooper Frierson in regard to the jury being afraid to convict the innkeeper for what they believed to be the murder of Lewis.

Other items rounding out the collection include autographs of Elihu Root and James Knox Polk; a correspondence course certificate for W.F. Milner of Dossett, Tennessee; a few invitations and greeting cards; a poem; and many family photographs. There are also miscellaneous accounts, principally paid bills, for Colonel Cooper and W.F. Milner.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Duncan Brown Cooper

1844 Born April 21, at family home “Mulberry Hill” near Columbia, Maury County, Tennessee, son of Matthew Delamere Cooper (1792-1878) and his third wife Marian Witherspoon (Brown) Cooper (1822-1861).

ca. 1859 Student at Jefferson College, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania

1861-1865 Ran away from college and entered Confederate service; served as a colonel of a regiment of Forrest’s Cavalry, CSA; captured and imprisoned at Fort Delaware.

ca. 1865 Returned home; farmed; admitted to the bar but never practiced. Married first wife Florence Fleming (1843-1870); three children.

1867 Went to Texas.

1870s Married second wife Mary Polk Jones (1856-1893); five children.

1880s In business with Van Leer Polk and Edmund Cooper to mine silver in Mexico.

1881 Represented Maury County in Tennessee legislature.

1886-1888 President of Nashville American, one of the leading newspapers of the South.

1895 Served in Tennessee State Senate from Davidson County.

1908 Involved with son Robin in shooting of Edward Ward Carmack on evening of November 9, and convicted of murder.

1910 April 13, conviction upheld by Tennessee Supreme Court. Pardoned by Governor Malcolm Rice Patterson.

1922 Died November 4; interment in Zion Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Columbia, Tennessee.
CONTAINER LIST

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12. Certificates

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4. Beard – Bleekman
5. Boddy – Boyd
7. Brown, Bledsoe – Bryan
8. Buford – Bullock
9. Burch, Charles N. – Burch, Duncan C.
10. Burch, Edith
11. Burch, Elsie (Caldwell)
13. Burch, Lucius Edward (ca. 1902 - )
14. Burch, Nell – Burch, Sarah Polk (Cooper)
15. Burkitt – Byrns

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3. Carter – Catt
4. Cecil, A.D. – Cecil, Loyd
5. Chandler – Chappell
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7. Clark – Cooney
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9. Cooper, Duncan Brown – Cooper, John L.
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4. Dunlap, John R. – Dupont
5. Eakin – Embry
6. Erwin – Essary
7. Estill – Ewold
8. Farnsworth – Forgey
9. Foster, J.B.
10. Foster, Nettie B. – Fussell
11. Gale – Gates
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8. Hill, Sparrel
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3. International Motor Sales Company, February, 1910
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7. International Motor Sales Company, June, 1910
8. International Motor Sales Company, July, 1910
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10. International Motor Sales Company, September, 1910 – Irwin
11. Jackson – Jenkins
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17. Kane – Kuhn

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2. LaFollette, Harvey M. – 1908

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4. LaFollette, Harvey M. – 1910
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6. LaFollette, Katherine W.
7. LaFollette, Marion
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4. Mann – Matthews, Bedford F.
5. Matthews, E.H. – Mayes, Harrison
6. Mayes, J.M.
7. Mayes, W.M. – Mayo
8. Meeman – Merrill
9. Metzger Motor Car Company, January – August 1910
10. Mexican Herald – Moneyweight Scale Company
11. Moore, Eula – Moore, Felix W.
12. Moore, J. Washington – Morgan
13. Morris – Morton
14. Moses – Murray

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10. Palmer – Paterson, George
11. Patterson, Malcolm Rice
12. Patterson, Mary Gardner – Peacock
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2. Texas Motor Sales Company, January 1910  
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