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Carolyn Jones Ross Memorial Collection of Personal Papers of Jacob and Catherine Jones Thompson

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SUMMARY INFORMATION

Repository

University of Mississippi Libraries

Title

Carolyn Jones Ross Memorial Collection of Personal Papers of Jacob and Catherine Jones Thompson

ID

MUM00744

Date [inclusive]

circa 1842-1885

Extent

1.0 box

Abstract

Letters of the Jacob Thompson family and an antebellum journal and business documents pertaining to the family's property

Preferred Citation

Carolyn Jones Ross Memorial Collection of Personal Papers of Jacob and Catherine Jones Thompson (MUM00744), Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Jacob Thompson was born in Leasburg, North Carolina on May 15, 1810, but relocated to Mississippi in the mid-1830s to seek his fortune. Settling first in Pontotoc but eventually moving to Oxford, Thompson made his way as

a lawyer and plantation-owner. He served as Mississippi congressman from 1839 to 1851, during which time he chaired the committee on public lands and the committee on Indian affairs. Upon taking office, President James Buchanan appointed Thompson Secretary of the Interior, a position he held until he resigned January 8, 1861 to secede from the Union with his adopted state. He served in the Confederate army and in 1864 went to Canada at the behest of Jefferson Davis to oversee the covert Confederate maneuvers from Montreal. When the Civil War came to a close, Thompson was still in Canada where he had been joined by his wife Catharine in June 1865. Together, they fled to Europe because of uncertainty about Jacob's safety and freedom in the U.S. and because rumors swirled that Jacob had been involved in the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln. The Thompsons remained in Europe until approximately 1870 when they returned to Oxford briefly before settling in Memphis. Jacob Thompson died in 1885, a wealthy but controversial man, his later life still colored by scandal. The rumors about his involvement in the Lincoln assassination plot never fully died down and allegations about embezzlement that occurred during his tenure as Secretary of the Interior continued to follow him.

Catharine Jones Thompson was born in December 1822 and was, by all accounts, a precocious and beautiful girl. Known always as Kate, she was the daughter of John Peyton Jones, one of four commissioners appointed to organize Lafayette County and one of the wealthiest men in north Mississippi. Though Kate was only just sixteen, she and Thompson married on December 18, 1839. Kate gave birth to Caswell Macon, the couple's only child in October 1839. Though mature enough to marry, Kate was not, in Jacob's estimation, ready to act the politician's wife in Washington. While he served his first term as Mississippi congressman, Jacob sent Kate to school in France where she spent nearly three years. Twenty-year old Kate returned to her husband's side in Washington where they remained until 1851 when Jacob lost his congressional election. In 1846, Kate became the sole heir to the Jones estate when her only brother succumbed to fever on his way to fight in the Mexican War under the command of Jefferson Davis. The Thompsons returned to Washington in 1856 after Jacob was appointed Secretary of the Interior by Buchanan and soon became favorites of the first family, frequently paying social visits to the Buchannans. They stayed for five years during this stint in the capital, returning to Mississippi just before the state seceded. Kate lived in Oxford most of the war while Jacob traveled to fulfill his various assignments from the Confederate government. She witnessed the burning of Oxford and the destruction of her home as retribution for some of Jacob's alleged schemes from Canada. At Jacob's request, Kate made her way up the Mississippi river to join him in Montreal in 1865. After several frantic (on Jacob's part) weeks of no communication from Kate, the couple finally reunited in June 1865. At war's end, the Thompsons

fled to Europe, uncertain of the climate should Jacob return to the United States. Upon their return from Europe to no criminal charges for Jacob, the Thompsons rebuilt on the Oxford property and gave the home to Macon and his young wife, Sallie Fox Thompson. Jacob and Kate then established a home in their years travelling and supporting various friends and charitable causes.

Kate Thompson gave birth to Caswell Macon in 1839, several weeks shy of her seventeenth birthday. Macon graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1858. He had been a member of the Chi chapter of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity while in school. He remained in Oxford in 1857 when his parents relocated to Washington, D.C. for his father's term as Secretary of the Interior. Macon achieved the rank of captain in the Confederate army and returned to Oxford after the war to manage the family's property while his parents hid out in Europe. He married Sallie Fox Thompson in 1861 and the pair lived in the rebuilt home in Oxford until his early demise in 1873, preceding his parents and his wife. In 1869, fearing that Oxford could lose position and prestige without a hotel, Macon and Sallie arranged to purchase the Butler Hotel site with William Avent, a wealthy Oxford resident. The Butler Hotel was lost in the burning of Oxford during the Civil War, leaving the town without any public accommodations. The Thompsons built Thompson House but leased the building for others to manage. The Thompson House, located on the north side of Oxford's historic square, currently houses Tollison Law Firm.

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SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Jacob Thompson collection consists of letters from the last years of the Civil War through Jacob's death in 1885. Many of those letters describe life as Americans abroad and life in Oxford in the immediate post-war period. Additionally, the collection contains a journal and some pre-war business documents with information about the Thompson family holdings, plantations, and slaves.

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ARRANGEMENT

This collection is arranged chronologically according to the letters.

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Publication Information

University of Mississippi Libraries 2014

Copyright Restrictions

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Additions

No further additions are expected to this collection.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Dr. Carolyn Jones Ross

Processing Information

Processed by Rachel McLemore in June 2014.

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CONTROLLED ACCESS HEADINGS

Geographic Name(s)

- Lafayette County (Miss.) -- History

Subject(s)

- Slavery -- Mississippi -- History -- 19th century

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COLLECTION INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Kate Thompson 26 April 1964

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Richmond Virginia. Letter regarding meeting with Jefferson Davis, Confederate operations from Canada, and hopeful return to Oxford.

Folder 2: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Kate Thompson 7 September 1864

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Toronto, Canada. Letter regarding the burning of Oxford and the family's safety, Lincoln's reelection, and southern exiles in Toronto.

Folder 3: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Kate Thompson 10 October 1864

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Montreal, Canada. Jacob still had not heard from Kate and would like to know her fate.

Folder 4: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Kate Thompson 13 November 1864

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Toronto, Canada. Letter regarding suffering during the war, Lincoln's election, and predictions about Lincoln's future policies.

Folder 5: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Kate Thompson 8 January 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Toronto, Canada. Letter regarding remaining in Canada, Kate's joining Jacob in Canada, and the family's wrecked fortunes.

Folder 6: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Kate Thompson 28 February 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Montreal, Canada. Letter regarding Canadian extradition law, Thompson's intent to flee Canada, expectations about the length of the war, and the reason Union troops set fire to the family home.

Folder 7: Letter from Kate Thompson to Tabitha Jones, Macon Thompson, and Sallie Thompson 25 June 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Montreal, Canada. Letter regarding Canadian views of Southerners, future travel plans, and a monetary exchange made on Macon's behalf.

Folder 8: Letter from Kate Thompson to Tabitha Jones 1 July 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Woodstock, New Brunswick, Canada. Letter regarding the difficulty of Kate's travels and the Thompsons' intentions to travel to Europe.

Folder 9: Letter from Kate Thompson to Sallie and Macon Thompson 16 July 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Liverpool, England. Letter describing the trip across the Atlantic with Yankees and latest European fashions and hairstyles.

Folder 10: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 29 October 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Florence, Italy. Letter regarding European cuisine, Macon's unhampered ability to conduct business, prejudice against rich people in Lafayette County, advice about properties and former slaves, and fashion.

Folder 11: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 6 November 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Rome, Italy. Letter regarding Macon's business troubles, intentions to stay abroad for Jacob's safety, and attempts at securing his pardon.

Folder 12: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 11 November 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Rome, Italy. Letter regarding travel abroad on passports issued by Emperor Napoleon and avoidance of the American Consul.

Folder 13: Letter from Kate Thompson to Tabitha Jones 23 November 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Rome, Italy. Letter describing observations about Rome and religion, avoiding Yankees in Rome, and their hopeful return

Folder 14: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Macon Thompson 12 January 1866

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Naples, Italy. Letter regarding safety of mail, theories on how Jacob came to be so hated, fear for the future of Mississippi but hope for the future of Oxford, orders to purchase more Oxford properties, and the

effects of the new wage labor system.

Folder 15: Letter from Kate Thompson to Tabitha Jones 12 January 1866

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Naples, Italy. Letter regarding unfavorable conditions for return, opinions about former slaves, and observations about Italy with particular emphasis on Pompeii and the poor of Italy.

Folder 16: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 27 January 1866

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Alexandria, Egypt. Letter regarding observations of Egypt and "Arabs."

Folder 17: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 13 and 17 February 1866

Scope and Content

Letters sent from Alexandretta, Syria and Smyrna, Asia Minor. Letter describing time spent in the Holy Land and Smyrna and intentions to return to the U.S. despite continued uncertainty of Jacob's status.

Folder 18: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 5 April 1866

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Paris, France. Letter regarding travels from Vienna to Paris, uncertainty about plans to return, and advice from Jacob regarding property and the free labor system.

Folder 19: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Macon Thompson 3 March 1868

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Letter regarding coupons and rail bonds, desire to purchase and donate a lot in Oxford for a cemetery for the Episcopal Church, and settling in Montreal.

Folder 20: Letter from Kate Thompson to Sallie Thompson 29 November 1868

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Montreal, Canada. Little Kate has joined her grandparents at last and this letter is primarily a report on Kate's well-being and lessons.

Folder 21: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 6 December 1868

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Montreal, Canada. Letter regarding little Kate's activities, Cousin Anna, and a brief note about Jacob's disinterest in MCRR bonds.

Folder 22: Letter from Kate Thompson to Sallie Thompson 10 January 1869

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Montreal, Canada. Letter regarding little Kate and her new French maid.

Folder 23: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson undated [January or February 1869]

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Montreal, Canada. Letter regarding return to Oxford, business venture with Viser and Skipworth, and continued hatred of Yankees.

Folder 24: Letter from Katie Coyle to Jacob Thompson 31 December 1869

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Washington, D.C. Letter regarding results of Coyle and Thompson's discussions with President Johnson and a pardon for Jacob.

Folder 25: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 26 May 1870

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Memphis, Tennessee. Letter regarding Jacob's business travel to Paris and possible fever outbreak in Oxford.

Folder 26: Letter from Kate Thompson to Macon Thompson 5 July 1870

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Memphis, Tennessee. Letter regarding fever outbreak, Jacob in Europe, and Macon's business ventures.

Folder 27: Letter from Jacob Thompson to Kate Thompson 3 December 1876

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Oxford, Mississippi. Letter regarding Jacob and Sallie's division of Macon's estate.

Folder 28: Letter from Varina Davis to Kate Thompson 26 March 1865

Scope and Content

Letter sent from Beauvoir, Mississippi. Letter expressing sympathy after Jacob's death from Jefferson Davis' wife.

Folder 29: Thompson Family Business Journal circa 1854

Scope and Content

Lists homes, land holdings, business holdings, slaves; includes surveyors maps of most holdings

Folder 30: List of Negroes from Plantation Record Book undated

Scope and Content

Names, ages, descriptions of ailments of a number of slaves; appears to match those listed on the Mason's Bills of Sales from December 1856

Folder 31: Receipt for Sale of Slave from Plantation Record Book January 1842

Scope and Content

Includes price, name, description of physical health, and agreed upon return policy

Folder 32: Bill of Sale from Plantation Record Book 18 December 1856

Scope and Content

Bill of sale from Roscoe Heath to Jacob Thompson

Folder 33: Title of John Z. Mason to Certain Negroes from Plantation Record Book 22 December 1856

Scope and Content

Bill of sale from John Z. Mason to Jacob Thompson

Folder 34: Transfer of Lewis Mason for Certain Negroes from Plantation Record Book 22 December 1856

Scope and Content

Bill of sale from Lewis Mason to Jacob Thompson

Folder 35: Material from the Jacob Thompson Exhibit

Scope and Content

Photocopies of photographs and letters that were displayed as an exhibit for Thompson's birthday

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