

DOBBINS, JOHN S.
John S. Dobbins papers, 1834-1916

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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Dobbins, John S.
Title: John S. Dobbins papers, 1834-1916
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 322
Extent: 2 microfilm reels (MF)
Abstract: Microfilm copy of the papers of John S. Dobbins, businessman, planter, and stateman of Gordon County, Georgia correspondence, legal and business documents, and land lottery certificates.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted access.

Terms Governing Use and Reproduction

All requests subject to limitations noted in departmental policies on reproduction.

Source

Gift, 1958.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], John S. Dobbins papers, Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Processing

Processed by MRD, 1958.

Collection Description

Biographical Note

John S. Dobbins (December 29, 1800-April 22, 1886) was born in South Carolina and died at his home in Gordon County, Georgia. Sometime before 1840, he moved from Spartanburg to Habersham County, Georgia, where he went into a mercantile business and acquired farming interests. His first wife, Caroline Moss Dobbins, mother of his four children, William, Joseph, Mary Emma, and Cornelia, died in 1849; her brother, Ephraim Moss, a business partner of her husband, died shortly after her death. In the approximately 20 years in which the family lived at Clarksville, Dobbins made a prominent place for himself in the community. He resigned as treasurer of Habersham County on February 16, 1858.

About that time he, his two sons, and a number of his slaves moved to a plantation near Calhoun, Gordon County, Georgia, leaving his wife, Sarah Williams Dobbins, whom he married in 1851, his daughters, and the remainder of his slaves to look after the place in Habersham. The men supervised clearing of the new land, planting of crops, and construction of houses and other plantation buildings. On April 1, 1860, Dobbins turned in a list of taxable property which included \$15,000 in land, 35 slaves valued at \$21,000, and enough other property to make a total of \$40,850.

Dobbins was a staunch Unionist until Georgia seceded, at which point he became a devoted Confederate. His son, William, a student at Emory and Henry College, volunteered as a private in Co. C, Phillips Legion, Georgia Volunteers; William was apparently mortally wounded in the Battle of South Mountain, Maryland on September, 14, 1862, and fell into the hands of the enemy. No later knowledge of him ever came to light. James Redman, a free Negro and husband of one of Dobbins's slaves, had been with William and was also captured, but in a different area of the battlefield. In 1866 Redman wrote from Maryland, saying he wished to return to Georgia.

The Dobbins family, including Joseph, who was attending Wofford College, and the daughters, who were at school in Rome, Georgia, refugeeed to Terrell County in 1864 as Sherman's army was approaching Calhoun. Joseph, who drove the horses and other livestock through the country served in Dawson as an agent of the Confederate government. In 1867 the family returned to Gordon County. At the end of the war Joseph went into a mercantile business in Marietta, but sold his interest in the business in about a year to accept a traveling position with a Baltimore firm. He came back to Calhoun and died at home on March 10, 1879. Mary Emma married Henry Hunt, and Cornelia became Mrs. Henry B. Herington.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of a microfilm copy of letters (1849-1918) to and from Dobbins and related family members (some in South Carolina and Alabama), friends, and business acquaintances. Topics discussed include agriculture and farming, slavery and freedmen, education, family, transportation and communication, politics, economics, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Letters (1861-1862) of William Henry Dobbins were written from camps in Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. There are also some letters written before the Civil War (1861) and during Reconstruction (1866) by former slaves of the Dobbins family; letters mentioning a relative jailed on suspicion of being a "KluKlux;" and letters (1862-1863) from a friend in the Confederate Army. Legal and business documents include bills, accounts, receipts

(for slaves, taxes, purchases), land lottery certificates, agreements (for businesses, hiring of slave labor, apprenticeship) insurance papers, leases, and a certificate of registry for a free man of color (1860). Correspondence, legal papers, and business papers arranged in chronological order except the following: Page 2 of the letter of A. S. Erwin to John S. Dobbins, October 26, 1862; page 3 of the letter of Eli Burkett, October 2, 1866; page 6 of the letter of Mamie Starr, March 1, 1877, are not on the microfilm in their proper order but are at the end of Reel 1.

Arrangement Note

Arranged by record type.

Container List

Correspondence

Box	Folder	Content
MF1		Davis, Jefferson (1808-1889), ALS, 1 p. to Mrs. Varina (Howell) Davis (1826-1906), Mouth of the Rio Grande, August 16, 1846. A personal
MF1		1841 July 21-December 15, 1845: Includes letters concerning collection of debts; a copy of a letter from John S. Dobbins to Paul Rossignol, Superintendent of the Branch Mint at Dahlonega, Georgia, asking to be discharged from his "bond" on Rossignol's behalf, and Rossignol's answer; as well as a rough draft of a petition to the President of the United States for dismissal of Rossignol. A letter from Col. S. A. Wales, Eatonton, Georgia, February 5, 1842, discusses hard times, problems of exchange, prices, and other matters.
MF1		1846 March 25-December 5, 1853: Family letters chiefly concerned with business matters, land, slaves, and the Ephraim C. Moss estate. Caroline Moss, Dobbins's first wife, died September 14, 1849; her infant son, James Moss, died the same day. Ephraim Moss, her brother and a business partner of Dobbins, died soon after her death.
MF1		1855 January 3-December 31, 1855: Family letters concerning Moss estate, land in Gordon County. Apparently Dobbins bought the place near Calhoun from John Ray in the early part of 1855 and considered selling it before the end of that year. Most of the place was leased for longer or shorter periods by several farmers, some of whom "contended" for their leases.
MF1		1856 February 27-December 3: Dobbins still seems in the mood to sell the Gordon County land. Letters concerned with health conditions, education of the children, and establishment of free schools in certain sections. A letter (April 7, 1856) signed by the Commissioners of the "Bank of Athens" soliciting Dobbins's subscription to stock in the bank.
MF1		1857 February 6-December 19, 1858: Dobbins had a farm on the Cannsville Road near Clarksville, "premises on the public square" which may have included a dwelling and two storehouses. He sold this property to Robert McMillen (August 28, 1858). Correspondence continues much as above. The first letter of the correspondence between Dobbins and his second wife (June 16, 1858), in which news is exchanged between the places in Habersham and Gordon counties. These letters often contained notes from one or more of the children. Mr. Moss, Dobbins's father-in-law, apparently died sometime between March 8 and July 6, 1858. He had frequently requested that Dobbins bring his children (Moss's grandchildren) to South Carolina to visit him. He left the Dobbins children out of his will.
MF1		1859 January 4-December 29: The family still lives at Clarksville while Dobbins and the sons are often at the new place in Gordon County. William's first letter is written on January 26, 1859. Letters concerned with slaves, health, school, dress, manners, and the new house being built in Gordon County.

- MF1 1860 January 5-December 23, 1860: The Dobbins family probably left Clarksville, Georgia on Tuesday morning, January 17, 1860. Dobbins wrote his sons the particulars of his plan for moving: "four wagons, 1 carriage and one Buggy-will put 6 mules to the large Wagon, will have along 15 Horses and mules in all--" Jim Redmond, a free colored man, wants to go with them, but Dobbins was not sure he would take him. Bill of sale for a seven-octave rosewood piano, May 16, 1860. Dobbins gave a five-year-old, lame mare mule as part of the payment. William entered Emory and Henry in August 1860. Dobbins was a delegate to a political convention at Milledgeville in August 1860. (See letter, September 1, 1860) Dobbins supported Bell and Everett. The Dobbins daughters entered the Rome, Georgia, Female College.
- MF1 1861 January 4-December 27, 1861: William left Emory and Henry and later in the year joined the Confederate Army. His wartime letters to the family are listed below, by date: August 14, Lynchburg, Virginia; September 11, Lynchburg, Virginia; September 15, Lynchburg, Virginia; September 21, Lynchburg, Virginia; September 29, Meadowbluff, Virginia; October 2, Big Sewell, Virginia; October 18, "Camp." He asks that his letters be directed to "Louisburg in care of Capt. Barclay, Phillips Legion, Floyd's brigade"; October 30, Camp Floyd, Western Virginia; November 6, Camp on Cotton Hill, Western Virginia; November 10, Camp Floyd, Western Virginia; November 25, Near Peterstown, Virginia; November 27, Camp near Peterstown, Virginia; December 8, Camp near "Dublin, Va."; December 14, Dublin, Virginia; December 21, Dublin, Virginia; December 24, Dublin, Virginia
- MF1 1862 January 4-September 4, 1862: William's letters to family continued. January 4, Hardeeville, South Carolina; January 23, Hardeeville, South Carolina; January 30, Hardeeville, South Carolina; February 10, Hardeeville, South Carolina; February 23, Camp near Hardeeville, South Carolina; March 7, Camp near Hardeeville, South Carolina; April 13, Hardeeville, South Carolina; May 1, Camp Pritchard, South Carolina; May 17, Camp Pritchard, South Carolina; May 19, Camp Pritchard, South Carolina; May 25, Camp Pritchard, South Carolina; June 8, Hardeeville, South Carolina; June 18, Hardeeville, South Carolina; June 22, Camp near Hardeeville, South Carolina; June 23, Camp near Hardeeville, South Carolina; July 3, Camp Elzy; July 11, Camp Elzy; July 18, Camp Elzy; July 25, Charlotte, North Carolina; August 6, Richmond, Virginia (near Drewry's Bluff); August 10, Richmond, Virginia (near Drewry's Bluff); August 18, Camp near Gordonsville, Virginia; August 25, Culpepper County, Virginia; September 1, Camp near Fairfax C. H., Virginia (?); September 4, Near the Potomac;
- MF1 1862 October 9-December 23, 1862: Several letters written between these dates are concerned with the wounds received by William at the Battle of South Mountain, Maryland, and attempts being made to locate him and to ascertain the exact nature and seriousness of his wounds. Joseph Oscar Dobbins was attending Wofford College, Spartanburg, South Carolina. Included in this

- period are several undated papers, probably concerning William's death; a Confederate order or pass; and a note signed by G. D. Phillips to J. S. Dobbins.
- MF1 1863 January 3-December 3, 1865: Other letters concerned with the death of William: A letter from E. L. Barclay (Clarksville, Georgia), Captain of William's Company, is dated January 2, 1863. There is also a letter from J. T. C. Sprewel (Camp near Fredericksburg, Virginia), February 16, 1863, and one from A. S. Ervin (Camp at Bunker Hill, Virginia), July 16, 1863. Joseph was at Wofford and the girls (Mary Emma and Corrie) at Rome, probably until Christmas, 1863. Dobbins apparently bought a place from John H. Rice in Terrell County, Georgia, sometime in the early part of 1864. About the last of February or the first of March 1864, the family moved to Chickasawhatchie, southwestern Georgia. Joseph Oscar Dobbins apparently lived in Dawson near the Terrell County plantation and seems to have served as an agent for the Confederate government. He drove sheep and other livestock through the country when the family moved (February 4, 1864). Elisha Lowrey was the overseer of the Gordon County Place while the family were away. His letters are full of the troubles suffered on the homefront during the late Confederacy and in the months that followed the surrender. He and his neighbors seem to have suffered as much from their neighbors and other Confederates as they did from the Yankees. Food was very scarce, and he and his family suffered with scurvy (February 19, 1865).
- MF1 1866 January 7-December 28: James Redman, free Negro who had gone to the army with William, wrote on January 7, 1866, inquiring about his wife, Susan, and their children, and wanting to come home. Joseph Oscar Dobbins went to Atlanta to find an opportunity for going into business. He seems to have gone into a general mercantile business with E. D. Cheshire of Marietta in January 1866. Within a few months, Joseph bought out Mr. Cheshire's "interest in the stock." On September 27, 1866 he left Marietta and went to Baltimore, Maryland, in search of employment. He arranged to travel in Georgia and South Carolina for two Baltimore houses. As early as November 1866 he began planning to move back to Gordon County. There is considerable discussion of freedmen. A letter of June 25, 1866 mentions the National Cemetery at Marietta.
- MF1 1867 January 4-December 31, 1869: The Dobbins family probably moved back to Gordon County in the first part of January 1867. Discussion in these letters of freedmen, Radical politics, the lack of "money," prices, crops, and the impeachment of President Johnson.
- MF1 1870 January 23-November 16, 1875: Collection of debts; land; politics. By this time, Mary Emma and Corrie are married. Many of Mr. Dobbins's contemporaries are dying. Correspondence opening with members of the Starr family (of "Starlight" near Nacoochee) who are related to the Dobbins family. Mrs. Dobbins's brother, George W. Williams (Charleston, South Carolina), invests some of Dobbins's money in City of Charleston stock. J. H. Ezell, Spartanburg, South Carolina (May 25, 1875), Mr. Dobbins's brother-in-law,

had been in jail for 4 months on suspicion of being a "Ku Klux." Joseph Oscar Dobbins is often referred to as "Captain." He was 32 in 1875.

- MF1 1876 February 19-September 3, 1880: Most of this family correspondence is addressed to Joseph. One of the letters is Dr. W. H. Felton's on House of Representatives stationery, May 13, 1879, addressed to John S. Dobbins sympathizing with him about the death of his son, Joseph. Joseph had written to two of his father's old friends asking for news. C. H. Sutton and Dr. W. T. Rusk answered these letters with news of old neighbors in Clarksville. A letter of September 9, 1876 contains a description of a large country wedding. The first letters of the Herington family begin.
- MF1 1881 February 18-June 3, 1916: Family affairs; weather; crops; yellow fever and malaria in Georgia. Mrs. E. F. Herington, mother-in-law of Corrie (Cornelia) Dobbins, died April 25, 1895. A letter to H. B. Herington (Sugar Valley, Georgia) from Mrs. C. Helen Plane (Kirkwood, Georgia), April 7, 1904. He apparently fought in the Civil War under her husband.
- MF1 Undated correspondence. I. H. Wyly (Clarksville, Georgia) to J. S. Dobbins; C. H. Sutton (Clarksville, Georgia) to J. S. Dobbins; Miscellaneous undated correspondence

Legal papers

- MF2 1832 June 2-April 3, 1849: Includes Georgia Land Lottery certificates; articles of agreement for a co-partnership with James Brannon, Samuel A. Wales, and John S. Dobbins in a general dry goods and grocery business (January 10, 1835); articles of agreement for the sale of a store by Dobbins to John H. Wyly (March 5, 1847) Receipt for payment of \$78.00 by John S. Dobbins to Wm. Dobbins, his father, for 2 slaves (October 13, 1844); insurance on 5 buildings for five years (October 30, 1848). Throughout: deeds, mortgages, fifas, court orders, liens, letters of administration, instruments of sale, affidavits, leases, etc.
- MF2 1850 April 12-December 23, 1859: Papers concerned with settling Moss estate; deed to 1120 acres of land in Gordon County; receipt for books, vouchers, money, etc., belonging to the Office of Treasurer, Habersham County, Georgia (February 16, 1858); Slave Bill of Sale (October 29, 1858); agreement between John Ray of Coweta County and tenants for lease of land in Gordon County; agreement between Eaton Brown and Dobbins for Brown's duties and privileges as overseer of Gordon County land (December 18, 1857).
- MF2 1860-1901: Claim by J. S. Dobbins against Confederate States Treasury Dept. due his deceased son William. Deed for 50 acres of land in Terrell County bought by Dobbins from John H. Rice; also one for 350 acres. Agreement to donate "for a private way a strip of land" (April 8, 1895). Certificate of Registry for Free Man of Color (July 25, 1860); agreement for hiring of slave labor (January 2, 1865); farm rental agreement (December 11, 1862); contracts between Dobbins and former slaves (August 14, 1865; January 14, 1866); apprenticeship agreements signed by Dobbins and County Ordinary for hire

of Negro minors (May 29; December 20, 1866); Bill to perfect title to land of Dobbins's heirs (1886).

- MF2 Miscellaneous: Tax receipts, lists of taxable property, lists of slaves, Confederate Quartermaster's notes, lists of receipts [?]; loyalty oath certificate, Confederate pass, Surgeon's approval of extension of furlough, receipt for wages, bounty, clothing issued to H. B. Herington (November 17, 1862) by Surgeon of Chimbarozo Hospital, broadsides [5], "Ordinances" - "Ordered 300 copies for the Convention" [Confederate?]; Obituary of Mrs. Mary Cullar Hightower, youngest daughter of William Hightower of Houston County, Georgia, and sister of H. B. Herington, husband of Cornelia Dobbins Herington; Death notice of Henry B. Herington; a "Family Right" to the use of a formula for making 1 gal. of "Lightning Washing Fluid"; receipts for subscriptions to *Chronicle and Sentinel*, Augusta, Georgia and notice of expiration of subscription to *Daily Journal and Messenger*, Macon, Georgia

Business papers

- MF2 1837-1849: Includes slave receipts, promissory notes, itemized doctor's bill, Athens Factory accounts (Thread or Textile); blacksmith's and general merchandise and carpenter's accounts; tailor's, shoemaker's, and schoolteacher's bills. In 1837 there was "no bank within 60 or 70 miles" of Clarksville, Georgia
- MF2 1850-1860: Includes papers concerned with E. C. Moss estate and an agreement for hire of a Negro slave, January 1, 1856
- MF2 1861-[?]: Includes receipt for one share in the Georgia Salt Manufacturing Co., April 29, 1862.
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Index of Selected Correspondents

Anderson, W. P. (Marietta, Georgia), merchant and realtor

4 ALS, December 9, 1872-July 17, 1873

Brannon, Col. John (Marietta, Georgia), postmaster at Clarksville in 1840.

5 ALS, August 4, 1854-October 8, 1855

Brannon, Sarah, wife of John

ALS, December 11, 1858

Caldwell, I. M. M. (Rome, Georgia), president of school which Mary Emma and Cornelia attended

8 ALS, April 2, 1861-August 17, 1863

Cheshire, E. D. (Marietta, Georgia), merchant in business with Joseph Dobbins

13 ALS, February 14, 1866-February 7, 1867

Cobb, Thomas Reed Rootes, 1823-1862 (Athens, Georgia)

ALS, November 24, 1855

Cox, Isaac (Milton, Georgia)

4 ALS, August 8, 1860-April 27, 1862

Dobbins, Bannister, former slave of Dobbins, enclosing letter of Jim Redman, Free Negro, to his wife Susie, another former Dobbins slave

1 L, January, 1866

Dobbins, Cornelia, 1847-1917

1 ALS, November 24, 1860

Dobbins, J. C. (Mud Creek, Millport P. O., Fayette County, AL), brother of John S. Dobbins

5 ALS, August 5, 1855-April 27, 1861

Dobbins, John S, 1800-1886

31 ALS, December 29, 1859-January 3, 1878

Dobbins, Joseph, 1844-1879

44 ALS, November 30, 1859-February 10, 1874

Dobbins, M. G. (Atlanta, Georgia)

ALS, January 19, 1866

Dobbins, Mary Emma, 1845-[?]

13 ALS, December 19, 1858-May 10, 1863

Dobbins, Sarah, 1816-[?]

11 ALS, June 16, 1858-1863

Dobbins, William, 1841-1862

58 ALS, June 20, 1858-September 14, 1862

Edmondson, A. V. (Calhoun, Georgia)

12 ALS, August 24, 1855-May 31, 1857

Edwardy, E. M. (Allatoona, Georgia), music teacher, piano salesman

5 ALS, May 16, 1860-January 29, 1861

Erwin, A. S., Confederate soldier

3 ALS, October 26, 1862-July 16, 1863

Erwin, Alex S. (Athens, Georgia). Probably same person as above. He was a candidate for Judge of Circuit Court

2 ALS, August 19, 1878-September 29, 1878

Ezell, J. H. (Cowpens P. O., South Carolina), brother-in-law of Dobbins, accused of being a Ku Klux and put in jail for 4 months

ALS, May 25, 1875

Farmer, C. G. (Dawson, Georgia)

2 ALS, July 1, September 22, 1867

Felton, William Harrell, 1823-1909 (House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.)

ALS, May 13, 1879

Frix, Michael (Gordon County, Georgia), neighbor, renter, possibly a relative

8 ALS, August 30, 1855-November 17, 1856

Gage, R. J. (n.p.), husband of "Aunt Mat," Mrs. Dobbins's sister

ALS, August 28, 1878

Hardy, John W. (Cassville, Georgia), agent in Dobbins's purchase of land in Terrell County

10 ALS, February 8, 1864-February 18, 1865

Herington, Mrs. E. F. (Damascus, Georgia), mother of Henry Herington, Cornelia Dobbins's husband

23 ALS, December 6, 1879-November 16, 1894

Hughes, Thomas J. (Atlanta, Georgia)

4 ALS, October 30, 1855-April 21, 1856

Hughs, John J. (Gordonsville, Virginia)

2 ALS, November 21, 1862-February 5, 1863

Kollock, George J. (Clarksville, Georgia)

4 ALS, November 5, 1859-April 8, 1861. (The Library has a Kollock Collection, #476.)

Lowrey, Elisha (Gordon County, Georgia), acted as overseer while Dobbins family was living in Terrell County

20 ALS, April 3, 1864-November 30, 1866

Ray, John (Newnan, Georgia)

9 ALS, November 3, 1851-January 17, 1855

Redman, James (Bladensburg, Prince Georges County, MD). Free Negro, husband of Susan, former Dobbins slave

2 L, December 15, 1861, January 7, 1866

Rice, John H. (Dawson, Georgia)

2 ALS, February 8, 1860, February 18, 1864

Rossignol, Paul (Dahlonega, Georgia). Rossignol was superintendent of the Branch Mint at Dahlonega

ALS, December 31, 1842

Starr, Mamie ("Star-light," Nacoochee, Georgia), niece of Mrs. John S. Dobbins

18 ALS, May 2, 1875-December 31, 1878

Stiles, William Henry, Jr., 1834-1878 (Etowah Cliffs, Georgia)

2 ALS, May 15, 1866, March 3, 1866

Sutton, C. H. (Clarksville, Georgia), Dobbins's attorney

45 ALS, October 29, 1859-August 10, 1875, undated

Wales, Samuel B. (Eatonton, Georgia)

2 ALS, February 5, 1842, March 25, 1846

Williams, George (Charleston, South Carolina), brother of Mrs. John S. Dobbins

5 ALS, July 10, 1866-January 7, 1878

Wyly, John H. (Clarksville, Georgia)

8 ALS, March 21, 1860-July 23, 1873, undated

Young, Dillard M. (Marietta, Georgia), Dobbins relative

2 ALS, February 14, August 27, 1857

Young, William Pinkney (Marietta, Georgia), nephew of John S. Dobbins

11 ALS, March 27, 1852-September 27, 1854