

LAUGHLIN, SAMUEL HERVEY, 1796-1850.

Samuel Hervey Laughlin diary, 1845-1847

Emory University
Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library
Atlanta, GA 30322
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Laughlin, Samuel Hervey, 1796-1850.
Title: Samuel Hervey Laughlin diary, 1845-1847
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 61
Extent: .25 linear ft. (1 box)
Abstract: Diary of Tennessee lawyer, journalist and politician Samuel Hervey Laughlin.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted access.

Terms Governing Use and Reproduction

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Source

Gift, 1975.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], Samuel Hervey Laughlin diary, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Processing

HEA, February 1977.

Collection Description

Biographical Note

Samuel Hervey Laughlin (May 1, 1796 - May 5, 1850), lawyer, journalist, and politician, was born in Washington County, Virginia near Abingdon, the son of John and Sarah Duncan

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Laughlin. From 1799 to 1810 the family lived near Barbourville, Kentucky. Samuel Laughlin attended a school near his uncle's home in Powell Valley for six months and one near his parents' home for two years. The Laughlin family returned to Washington County, Virginia in 1810. For the next four years Samuel Laughlin had a job "keeping store" in McMinnville, Tennessee. There he also assisted the county court clerk, served as deputy postmaster, and helped to organize a debating society. He read law and received a license to practice in 1815, when he moved to Murfreesboro. In 1816 he married Mary Clarke Bass (d. November 11, 1840); they were the parents of 11 children.

Laughlin's political career began with his election as attorney general in 1817. He moved his immediate family to Nashville in 1832 and soon afterward became the editor of the *Nashville Banner*. From 1835 to 1837 he edited the *Nashville Union*, a new Jacksonian Democratic newspaper, and helped to advance the political ambitions of his friend James Knox Polk (1795-1849).

Laughlin next resumed his practice of law in McMinnville. In 1838, representing a mountain district that included his home county of Warren, he won a seat in the state senate. For three consecutive terms he served on the committees on banks, federal relations, new counties, common schools, and the judiciary. During his second term, Laughlin was one of the "Immortal Thirteen" Democrats who blocked the election of United States Senators by the Whig-dominated legislature. Their actions prevented Tennessee from having Senators for two years. Laughlin continued his involvement with national Democratic politics by serving as a delegate to the 1840 national convention in Baltimore and as a presidential elector that year.

In 1844 Laughlin again became editor of the *Nashville Union*. He served at Polk's request for the duration of the presidential campaign. To fulfill his duties, the editor moved temporarily from Hickory Hill to Nashville. Laughlin visited Washington, D.C. in May and June, 1844 to assist George Bancroft and the Democratic Party "Address Committee." ory at Emory and Henry College if the Whigs ousted the Democrats in 1848. He never realized this plan and died in Washington on May 5, 1850.

Laughlin returned to Washington in February, 1845 as a member of Polk's inauguration entourage and remained there as the president's appointed Recorder in the General Land Office. His eldest son, Samuel Houston Laughlin, joined him in May to work as a clerk in his office. Around the mid-point of Polk's term, in late 1846 and early 1847, Samuel Laughlin planned to seek a professorship of political economy or law and hist

Biographical Source: "Diaries of S. H. Laughlin, of Tennessee, 1840, 1843," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, II (1916), 43-85; and Frank B. Williams, Jr., "Samuel Hervey Laughlin, Polk's Political Handyman," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (1965), 356-392.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of a 553 pp. manuscript volume of a diary by Samuel Hervey Laughlin entitled "A Diary of a Journey from Washington City to Tennessee, by way of Richmond, Lynchburg, and Abingdon, Va. and of events at Washington City, and Various Journeys, visits, travels, and Notes of Public men and affairs, from October 4th 1845 to Dec. 31, 1847."

The first page of the diary mentions Laughlin's trip from his home in Hickory Hill, Tennessee to Nashville, where he joined President-elect Polk and his family for the pre-inauguration journey

to Washington in 1845. The Polk entourage took the river route to Washington on February 1, arriving February 14.

The first major portion of the diary (pp. 2-45) recounts Laughlin's journey from Washington to Warren County, Tennessee in October, 1845. Laughlin proceeded south via mailboat along the Potomac River to the northern terminus of the Richmond and Fredericksburg Railroad; this line then carried him to Richmond. Laughlin recorded his observations on the people and the countryside he saw on his travels. He noted that farms in Stafford, Spotsylvania, Caroline, and Henrico Counties looked poor as compared to those in richer lands of the Southwest. Buildings in the city of Richmond favorably impressed him, but the farms between Richmond and Lynchburg and farther south in Virginia looked poor and exhausted. He stopped to visit relatives and friends in Washington County, Virginia before continuing south through Knoxville, Tennessee to his home in Warren County, arriving there October 19.

About a week later Laughlin began the return trip from Nashville to Washington (pp. 52-63) with his daughter Ellen Kizer (widow of Timothy Kizer), her two children, two of his sons (John James and Andrew Jackson Laughlin), a free black nurse, and three slaves. Also included among Laughlin's charges was Felix Grundy, grandson of the late Felix Grundy and son of the late James Grundy, who was going to Annapolis. The group traveled north by boat through Louisville, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Wheeling. Among Laughlin's careful observations about his travels, he noted in Louisville "no attempts worth notice to entice our servants to abscond" (p. 57). The Laughlin party reached Washington November 14.

Laughlin visited New York City in July and August, 1846 to purchase a supply of parchments for his recorder's office. He toured Norfolk and the navy yards in late August. His next major trip took him to Richmond in March, 1847, (pp. 231-260) to observe the Virginia legislature in session. After Richmond he visited Petersburg the same month.

In the summer and fall of 1847 (pp. 403-521) Laughlin was pre-occupied with his son Samuel Houston's enlistment in the army for the Mexican War and John's admission to Annapolis.

Much of the diary deals with national bureaucratic politics and scrambles for appointments, news of Tennessee politics, and social contacts in Washington, including those with President Polk. Laughlin describes in detail the management of his household, including slaves, and office. The diary also provides much information about Laughlin's health practices and family relationships.

None

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	Diary, October 4, 1845-December 31, 1847
