

MSS. Collection #132

**Edmunds/Fry Family Papers, 1754, 1870s-1980 [bulk 1880-1930s].
2 boxes (34 folders), 189 items.**

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. I 1:5, refer the researcher to the Group# Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

INTRODUCTION

The Edmunds/Fry Family Papers consist of correspondence, photographs, financial documents, manuscripts, genealogical research, and printed material. The bulk of the collection dates from 1880 to the 1930s and relates to John Walker Fry's work as an amateur photographer and genealogist. The collection also includes manuscripts from Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds' historical works on Fry's photography and Blandwood Mansion, as well as an assortment of printed material and personal documents.

Arrangement: This collection is organized into two groups by creator, with series and folders arranged by document type or subject. The groups are: **Edmunds, Mary Lewis Rucker**, 1950-1980 (bulk 1980); and **Fry, John Walker**, 1754, 1870s-1936.

Provenance: This collection was donated by Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds in April 1996 and assigned accession number 1996.51.1.

Processing: This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by volunteer Alice Bailey in October 2013.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Walker Fry was born to John James and Mary Carr Fry in Richmond, Virginia, in 1854. He attended Norwood School in Nelson County, Virginia, and McGuire's Select School in Richmond. In 1871, he began a long career in the railroad industry with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. He married Annie Gray (1860-1895) in 1881 and moved to Greensboro five years later to become general superintendent of the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railway, of which his father-in-law Julius Gray was president. In 1899, he left the railroad to establish Greensboro Loan & Trust Company (later called Greensboro Bank & Trust Company); he remained active as president until 1930.

Fry also served as president of other organizations, including the Greensboro Life Insurance Company and the Greensboro Merchants and Manufacturers Club. He was the only local member of the exclusive Climax Hunting Lodge in southwestern Guilford County whose membership consisted largely of wealthy northern financiers, including J.P. Morgan and John Swan Frick. John Walker Fry is best known for his amateur photography in Greensboro between

1888 and 1920. His work focused on his daughters, scenic landscapes, and hunting and fishing excursions.

Annie Gray was the daughter of Emma Morehead and Julius Alexander Gray, and a granddaughter of Governor John Motley Morehead. After her marriage to John Walker Fry, she gave birth to three daughters: Emma in 1886, Mary Lewis in 1888 and Annie in 1893. Annie Gray Fry died in 1895, but John Walker Fry and his daughters continued to live at Blandwood Mansion until he married Nannie Caldwell (1867-1916), a descendant of Rachel and David Caldwell, in 1897. The family lived at 340 North Elm Street until Nannie's death in 1916, by which time each daughter had married. Fry then relocated to Fisher Park Circle and later married Alice Harrison Everett (1871-1952) of Virginia.

Mary Lewis Fry married Pierce C. Rucker in 1912, and the couple lived at 422 North Elm Street. They had three children: Pierce Christie Jr. in 1913, Mary Lewis in 1915, and Walker Fry in 1923. In 1916, the family moved to 340 North Elm Street, which Rucker had purchased from John Walker Fry. **Pierce C. Rucker**, son of Houston Rucker, was a journeyman cotton broker in 1905 when he moved from Columbia, South Carolina, to Greensboro. He established Rucker Cotton Company and eventually expanded into warehouse operations in general goods and cotton. He had holdings in real estate, banking, and insurance by the late 1920s but lost these during the Great Depression. By the end of World War II, he had rebuilt his distribution and warehousing operations. In 1950, his eldest son succeeded him as president. During his life, Rucker served on A&T State College's Board of Trustees and as chairman of the Democratic Party of North Carolina.

Mary Lewis Rucker was raised in Greensboro and attended the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina and Greensboro College. She worked as a bookkeeper for her father's cotton company from 1940 until she married Robert Edmunds in 1946. The couple relocated to Edmunds' native home in Halifax, Virginia, but ultimately returned to Greensboro. Here she served as chairman of the restoration committee for Blandwood Mansion, and wrote *Governor Morehead's Blandwood and the Family who Lived There* (1976). She privately published several other books, including *Recollections of Greensboro* (1993), a collection of historical essays originally published in *The Hamburger Square Post*. In 1988, she won the North Carolina Society of Historians' Award for Historical Fiction for *Letters from Edgeworth*, which was published that same year.

Biographical Sources: The sources for this biographical note include items in the collection, the works of Mary Lewis Fry Rucker, *O. Henry: A Biography of William Sydney Porter* (David Stuart, 1990), *Greensboro: A Chosen Center* (Gayle Hicks Fripp, 1982), and an [article](#) published by South Atlantic Companies (a copy of which is filed in the first folder of the collection).

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

The Edmunds/Fry Family Papers consist primarily of photographs and documents relating to members of the Fry Family, as well as Greensboro and Blandwood Mansion. The Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds group might interest researchers studying her writings, the history of Blandwood Mansion, or John Walker Fry's artistic endeavors. (I 1:1, 1:2, 2:1). The first series of the John Walker Fry group contains genealogical information about the Fry and Walker families, and would be valuable to genealogists seeking to continue Fry's research. Records from the

Greensboro Loan and Trust may provide insight on the economy of Greensboro around the turn of the century (II 2:3). However, the most interesting item in the group is *Pierce C. Rucker* by Al Fairbrother (II 3:3), the first volume in the “Fairbrother Pen-o-Graf series” about which there is no further information. Fairbrother talks at length in the preface about the “pen-o-graf” as a form (supposedly an artistic form) that allowed him to portray Rucker more intimately than others. But it is not known what a “pen-o-graph” is, what practical use it had, or to what Fairbrother was comparing it; this enigma may interest book historians as a possible avenue of research.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

I. Edmunds, Mary Lewis Rucker

1. Literary. 2 folders (6 items). 1980.

This series contains typewritten manuscripts of *The Photography of John Walker Fry*, by Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds, with handwritten editorial comments. Also included are typed notes for “The Story of Blandwood,” a historical lecture that Edmunds delivered in 1980 to the Round Table Study Club of Greensboro.

2. Personal. 5 folders (2 items). 1954-1980.

Items in this series consist of miscellaneous personal documents, including correspondence from the Round Table Study Club and one hand-painted wedding invitation. Of potential interest are two publications: *Selected Addresses of a Southern Lawyer* (1954) by Aubrey Lee Brooks, and “A Lonesome Place against the Sky” (North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1971), a booklet about historic structures in North Carolina.

II. Fry, John Walker

1. Genealogy. 7 folders (35 items). 1754, 1870s-1936.

This series contains documents compiled by John Walker Fry on the ancestry of the Fry and Walker families. Document types include handwritten notes, a printed biographical history of the Fry lineage, correspondence, an illustrated family tree, and newspaper clippings; also included is a handwritten copy of the will of T. Joshua Fry, dating from 1754.

2. Greensboro Loan & Trust. 3 folders (27 items). 1899-1915.

The bulk of this series consists of correspondence and records documenting financial transactions conducted by Fry on behalf of the Greensboro Loan and Trust. Also included are a checkbook and company charter.

3. Miscellaneous. 4 folders (13 items). 1881-1920.

This series consists of various printed materials including illustrated railroad maps and a collection of souvenir postcards and photograph albums from Scotland, London, France, and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Illinois. The most interesting item is *Pierce C. Rucker*, a chapbook-length publication by Al Fairbrother, co-owner of the *Greensboro Record* from 1916 to 1919 and editor of the Greensboro literary magazine *Everything*. *Pierce C. Rucker* is a biography of Rucker containing little factual information, but interesting for being a volume in Fairbrother's so-called "Pen-o-graf" series, about which very little is known. It is autographed by the author and printed in mahogany ink with hand-painted initials.

4. Personal. 5 folders (53 items). 1882-1934.

This series contains correspondence, including a wedding invitation from 1881, and various items collected by John Walker Fry as mementos. The latter category includes several funeral programs, one of which is of interesting construction. Also included are photographs of members of the Fry family and individuals verified as family friends.

5. Photographs. 8 folders (53 items). 1882-1933.

This series consists of black and white photographs, most of uncertain authorship and origin, with few of the subjects identified. The majority of items are formal portraits and outdoor scenes. Also included are two photographs of the interior of an unidentified building and Fry's 1913 photograph of First Presbyterian Church's bell tower being struck by lightning accompanied by a 1933 article from the *Greensboro Daily News* about it.

FOLDER LISTING

I. Edmunds, Mary Lewis Rucker			
<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
1	1	Literary	-- <i>The Photography of John Walker Fry</i> (editorial notes, 1980)
	2	"	-- "The Story of Blandwood" (lecture notes, 1980)
2	1	Personal	-- Correspondence (1980)
	2	"	-- "Editor at Large," <i>Greensboro Record</i> (clipping, 1975)
	3	"	-- "A Lonesome Place Against the Sky" (North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1971)
	4	"	-- <i>Selected Addresses of a Southern Lawyer</i> (Aubrey Lee Brooks, 1954)
	5	"	-- Wedding invitation

II. Fry, John Walker			
<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
1	1	Genealogy	-- Correspondence
	2	“	-- Family history & biography (1936)
	3	“	-- Family crest (Fry)
	4	“	-- Family tree (Fry, 1922)
	5	“	-- Newspaper clippings (1903-1936)
	6	“	-- Research
	7	“	-- Will of T. Joshua Fry (reproduction, 1754)
2	1	Greensboro Loan & Trust	-- Checkbook (1915)
	2	“	-- Company charter (1899)
	3	“	-- Financial documents
3	1	Miscellaneous	-- Illustrations (1881-1912)
	2	“	-- Photographs
	3	“	-- <i>Pierce C. Rucker</i> (Al Fairbrother, 1920)
	4	“	-- Postcards & souvenir photograph albums
4	1	Personal	-- Correspondence
	2	“	-- Diploma (1882)
	3	“	-- Funeral programs (1891-1934)
	4	“	-- Photographs
	5	“	-- Wedding invitation (1881)
5	1	Photographs	-- Architecture
	2	“	-- First Presbyterian Church (1913, 1933)
	3	“	-- Outdoor scenes
	4	“	-- Portraits -- Adults
	5	“	-- Portraits -- Children
	6	“	-- Portraits -- Families
	7	“	-- Portraits -- Groups
	8	“	-- Shipping package