

MSS. Collection #132

Edmunds/Fry Family Papers, 1754, 1834-1980s [bulk 1880-1930s].
1½ boxes (38 folders), ca. 210 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. Much the collection relates to John Walker Fry's work as an amateur photographer and genealogist, and to his family and friends. Also included are materials pertaining to Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds' historical works on Fry's photography and Blandwood Mansion, as well as an assortment of printed material and personal documents. Researchers interested in Blandwood, the history of photography and local studios, or the Fry, Walker, or Gray families may find this collection useful.

Arrangement: This collection is organized into two groups by creator or owner, with series and folders arranged by document type or subject. The groups are: **Edmunds, Mary Lewis Rucker**, 1920-1980s; and **Fry, John Walker**, 1834-1936.

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

Processing: This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by volunteer Alice Bailey in October 2013. Additional oversize materials were incorporated by Archivist Elise Allison, and the finding aid was updated in July 2022.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Walker Fry (1854-1938) was born to Mary Carr (1831-1901) and John James Fry (1825-1888) in Richmond, Virginia. 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 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 (1860-1895) was the daughter of Emma Morehead (1836-1896) and Julius Alexander Gray (1833-1891), 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 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 (1888-1977) 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** (1883-1971), 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 (1915-2006) 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 Holt Edmunds (1913-2002) 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, Ancestry.com, the Guilford County Register of Deeds database, the works of Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds, *O. Henry: A Biography of William Sydney Porter* (David Stuart, 1990), *Greensboro: A Chosen Center* (Gayle Hicks Fripp, 1982), and an article published online by South Atlantic Companies (a copy of which is filed in the folder at the front of the collection).

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

The Edmunds/Fry Family Papers consist primarily of correspondence, financial documents, photographs, and printed materials relating to members of the Fry, Gray, and Walker families, as well as Greensboro and Blandwood Mansion. The Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds group might interest researchers studying her writings, the history of Blandwood, or John Walker Fry's

photographic endeavors. (I 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 (II 1:1-7). A map of the Blue Ridge Railroad's Stump House Division based on surveys made by John Walker Fry and the company charter for the Greensboro Loan and Trust may provide insight into Fry's business endeavors (II 2:2, 3:5). Of particular interest may be *Pierce C. Rucker* by Al Fairbrother (I 2:5), the first volume in the "Fairbrother Pen-o-Graf series." In the preface, Fairbrother discusses 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.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

I. Edmunds, Mary Lewis Rucker

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

The literary materials include typed notes for "The Story of Blandwood," a historical talk that Edmunds delivered to the Round Table Study Club of Greensboro in 1980 (1:2), and two typewritten manuscript pages from *The Photography of John Walker Fry*, by Mary Lewis Rucker Edmunds, with handwritten editorial comments (1:1).

2. Personal. 8 folders (14 items). 1920-1980s.

This series consists of miscellaneous documents, images, and publications. Included are a letter from a representative of the Round Table Study Club about Edmunds' upcoming talk about Blandwood (2:1) and a hand-painted invitation to her wedding to Robert Edmunds (2:8). The color photographs feature a lapel watch that Percy Gray gave to his Spanish fiancée and a gravy boat from the Gray china set, according to handwritten notes on their backs (2:4). The prints were produced by the Museum of the Confederacy and feature Conrad Wise Chapman paintings of Civil War scenes around Charleston, South Carolina (2:6).

The publications include Aubrey Lee Brooks' *Selected Addresses of a Southern Lawyer* (1954; 2:7) and "A Lonesome Place against the Sky" (North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1971), a booklet about historic structures in North Carolina (2:2). Of particular interest 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*. This biography of Rucker contains little factual information but is interesting for being a volume in Fairbrother's "Pen-o-graf" series. It is autographed by the author and printed in mahogany ink with hand-painted initials (2:5).

II. Fry, John Walker

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

John Walker Fry apparently collected or compiled these materials relating to 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 (1:7).

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

This series contains a Greensboro Loan and Trust checkbook (2:1) and a printed company charter from the North Carolina General Assembly (2:2).

3. Miscellaneous. 7 folders (74 items). 1834-1912.

The majority of this series consists of correspondence and financial documents that belonged to John Walker Fry's father, John James Fry. Most of the correspondence appears to relate to his law practice in Virginia, but one letter from his son Gordon is also included (3:1). The receipts and other financial papers relate to H.W. & J.J. Fry & Co. (3:3). Of particular interest is a small group of documents relating to the military service of Annie Gray Fry's brother, Robert Percy Gray, during the Spanish-American War in 1898 (3:4). A map showing the Blue Ridge Railroad's Stump House Division is based on surveys made by John Walker Fry in 1881-1882, while another map shows the Virginia Navigation Company's day route on the James River in 1899 (3:5). Also included is a collection of souvenir postcards and photograph albums from Scotland, London, France, and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Illinois (3:6).

4. Personal. 4 folders (26 items). ca. 1876-1934.

This series contains personal correspondence, photographs, and printed materials collected by John Walker Fry. Included are an invitation to his 1881 wedding to Annie Gray (4:4) and an "In Memoriam" booklet produced upon her death. Similar booklets relate to Annie Gray's parents, Julius A. Gray and Emma Morehead Gray, and her brother, John Morehead Gray (4:2). Most of the correspondence was sent to John Walker Fry by his second wife, Nan (4:1). The photographs feature several portraits that likely show John Walker Fry at different points in his life (4:3). Also included are portraits of Mary Lewis Fry, Mary Gray Hodges, and several children (4:3).

5. Photographs. 8 folders (55 items). 1882-1933.

The highlight of this series is John Walker Fry's 1913 photograph of First Presbyterian Church's bell tower being struck by lightning, which is accompanied by a 1933 article from the *Greensboro Daily News* about it (5:1). Many of the other photographs are of uncertain authorship, with the subjects or locations not identified. The majority are outdoor scenes and formal portraits likely of family friends, some taken by Greensboro photographer Sidney

Alderman's studio and some taken by studios in other cities and states (5:2-5). Among the Virginia photographs are a portrait of the champion school football team of 1904-1905, a photograph of a parade float likely by Richmond photographer Max Freydeck, and an interior of Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg (5:7).

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	"	-- "A Lonesome Place Against the Sky" (North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1971)
	3	"	-- Newspaper clipping (<i>Greensboro Record</i> , 1975)
	4	"	-- Photographs (ca. 1980s)
	5	"	-- <i>Pierce C. Rucker</i> (Al Fairbrother, 1920)
	6	"	-- Prints & Drawings (Civil War, 1973)
	7	"	-- <i>Selected Addresses of a Southern Lawyer</i> (Aubrey Lee Brooks, 1954)
	8	"	-- Wedding invitation (1946)
II. Fry, John Walker			
<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
1	1	Genealogy	-- Correspondence (1907-1928)
	2	"	-- Family crest (Fry family)
	3	"	-- Family history & biography (Fry family; 1936)
	4	"	-- Family tree (Fry family; 1922)
	5	"	-- Newspaper clippings (1903-1936)
	6	"	-- Research
	7	"	-- Will of T. Joshua Fry (handwritten copy, 1754)
2	1	Greensboro Loan & Trust	-- Checkbook (1915)
	2	"	-- Company charter (1899)
3	1	Miscellaneous	-- Correspondence (1835-1886)
	2	"	-- Drawing (ca. 1912)
	3	"	-- Financial (1834-1860)
	4	"	-- Gray, Robert Percy (1882, 1898)
	5	"	-- Maps (ca. 1882-1899)

II. Fry, John Walker			
<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
3	6	Miscellaneous	-- Postcards & souvenir photograph albums (ca. 1880-1900)
	7	“	-- Wrapping paper (H.H. Cartland, ca. 1890)
4	1	Personal	-- Correspondence (ca. 1905-1916)
	2	“	-- “In Memoriam” booklets (1891-1934)
	3	“	-- Photographs (ca. 1876-1915)
	4	“	-- Wedding invitation (1881)
5	1	Photographs	-- First Presbyterian Church (1913, 1933)
	2	“	-- Outdoor scenes
	3	“	-- Portraits -- Adults
	4	“	-- Portraits -- Children
	5	“	-- Portraits -- Families
	6	“	-- Shipping package (Alderman)
	7	“	-- Virginia (ca. 1900-1930)