

MSS. Collection #62

Donnell Family Papers, 1769-1975. ½ box (35 folders), ca. 80 items.

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

INTRODUCTION

The Donnell Family Papers document four generations of land purchases, financial transactions, and social life in a prominent Guilford County/Greensboro family of the late 18th and 19th centuries. The collection is notable for several 18th century Guilford County deeds, a bill of sale for a slave (1796), and 19th century printed materials related to various important Guilford County/Greensboro institutions, businesses and families.

Arrangement: This collection is organized into eight series and, within series, materials are arranged alphabetically. The series are: **Correspondence**, 1839-1975; **Genealogical**, n.d.; **Legal**, 1769-1869; **Miscellaneous**, n.d.; **Photographs**, ca. 1880, 1975; **Printed**, 1817-80; **Receipts**, 1836-1866; and **School Documents**, 1875. Note: This collection also includes a small *Polyglott Bible* that belonged to Rachel Donnell (1975.136.40) and is filed in the book collection.

Provenance: Numerous accession numbers are associated with this collection: 1968.275....., 1968.277....., 1970.168....., 1970.279....., 1971.197....., 1973.263....., 1975.136....., 1976.3.3, 1979.161....., and 1981.184.... Most of these materials were donated by the following: Mr. Preston D. Callum, Mrs. Mary Louise Donnell Deal, Mrs. Dave Garvin Jr., Mrs. Rachel Donnell Forbes, Mr. A. Earl Weatherly, Mrs. Charles Van Noppen White, and Mrs. Dabney White. One item, a slave document, was purchased from Barry Smith in 1979.

Processing: This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by J. Timothy Cole in June 1996. Some of the biographical information was updated by Archivist Elise Allison in March 2022.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

As noted above, the Donnell Family Papers span four generations of a prominent Guilford County/Greensboro family. The family's origins can be traced to Robert Donnell II (1728-1816), who settled in the "Nottingham Colony" on Buffalo Creek in 1771. His son, **Major Robert Donnell** (1766-1847), would eventually attain considerable prominence, owning extensive lands and serving in the state legislature in 1817 and 1819. The major's first wife was Jennie Morrison (1790-1816) of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, by whom he fathered one son, Washington Donnell. Arnett mentions Washington Donnell, who was a student of Dr. David Caldwell Jr. and eventually became a doctor. Major Donnell's second wife was **Nancy McCabe Latta** (1788-1841) of Hillsborough, North Carolina. He fathered six children by her: Jane (1822-1858),

Susanna Sarah (1824-1828), Rachel (1825-1889), Robert C. (1827-1872), George (1829-1915) and Nancy (1832-1852). The major drowned in the Haw River near Hillsborough on March 31, 1847. His large estate, which included four plantations and twenty-three slaves, was divided between his children. (Note: Carroll holds that there were eleven children.)

Information about Major Donnell's children is scant, though in reference to the "old Van Noppen place" (located on the corner of Gaston and Eugene streets) Arnett notes that the home had formerly been owned by George Donnell, a nephew of W.A. Caldwell and likely a son of Major Donnell.

Biographical Sources: Biographical information on the Donnell family can be found in: *Windows to the Past: Primitive Watercolors from Guilford County, North Carolina, in the 1820s*, by Karen Cobb Carroll (Greensboro: The Greensboro Historical Museum, 1983), p. 22; and *Greensboro, North Carolina: The County Seat of Guilford*, by Ethel Stephens Arnett (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1955), pp. 283, 344. Additional dates were obtained from Ancestry.com.

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

Types of materials in this collection include genealogical charts, correspondence, bills of sale and deeds, photos, certificates, clippings, invitations, programs, receipts, U.S. patents and school documents.

Researchers interested in early deeds associated with Guilford County will find a number of interesting items. Several deeds in the collection (1809-29) appear to be for lands owned by Major Donnell (3:3-6). Other deeds (1793-1817; 3:6-7) are associated with Samuel E. Donnell, who was probably a brother of the major, and a very early Rowan County deed (1769; 4:8) is for a conveyance involving Thomas and James Donnell, possibly brothers of Robert Donnell II.

Other interesting documents include a 1796 bill of sale for a slave (3:1), and a U.S. patent for a corn sheller invented by Samuel E. Donnell (1833; 6:14). A tintype (5:1) probably features George Donnell, one of the major's sons, and a number of receipts (7:1) bear the same name. Other materials also relate to the major's children: the Bible of Rachel Donnell (1847; filed in the book collection), the will of Robert C. Donnell (1869; 3:12), and invitations sent to Jane Donnell (ca. 1840; 1:2, 6:6,7,9,10).

Still other materials are associated with the children of Jane Donnell (1822-1858), the major's daughter. These include invitations to her daughter Annie (ca. 1860; 6:4,5), and receipts from W.C. Porter & Co. of Greensboro for another daughter named Ella (1873; 6:13). A number of receipts bearing the name Latham Donnell (7:1) are also present, as are invitations and receipts for Arthur C. Donnell (1:2, 8:1), though the place of these individuals in the Donnell family genealogy is unclear.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

1. Correspondence. 2 folders (12 items). 1839-1975.

A letter from Mary Louise Deal (Mrs. Robert B. Deal) to William J. Moore, Director of the Greensboro Historical Museum mentions her work on a pamphlet relating to Major Robert Donnell as well as Donnell family artifacts in her possession (1975; 1:1). Also included in this series is a collection of handwritten invitations (1839-1877; 1:2). The names associated with this group include Arthur Donnell, Jennie Scales, Jane W. Donnell, and Nancy Gillespie.

2. Genealogical. 1 folder (2 items). n.d.

One of these Donnell family genealogical charts was prepared on legal-sized notebook paper and the other is on a "Pedigree Chart" copyrighted in 1936.

3. Legal. 11 folders (11 items). 1769-1869.

This series consists primarily of Donnell family deeds. A notable exception is a bill of sale for a slave named Comfort for forty-five pounds, sold by Mary Donnell to William Brown (1796, 3:1). A colonial Rowan County deed conveyed land [located on North Buffalo (Creek?)] from Thomas Donnell to James Donnell, possibly brothers of Major Robert Donnell (1769; 3:8). Several other 18th century deeds are Guilford County conveyances to John Larkin and Samuel Donnell (3:6,9,10). Also included in the series are deeds that refer to Robert and George Donnell (1809-1929; 3:3-5), as well as the will of Robert C. Donnell (1869; 3:12).

4. Miscellaneous. 1 folder (1 item). n.d.

This series consists of a roughly 2x2 inch seal for the State of North Carolina, probably detached from the deed in 3:10 (1790).

5. Photographs. 3 folders (3 items). ca. 1880, 1975.

The photographs include a tintype of George Donnell (ca. 1880; 5:1), as well as copy photos of the Guilford Limner's watercolors of Major Robert Donnell and his wife Nancy (5:2-3).

6. Printed. 14 folders (ca. 20 items). 1817-1880.

The printed materials contain a number of interesting invitations: to the Benbow House (1871; 6:3); to Blandwood from Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Morehead (n.d.; 6:4); for Lenox Castle in Rockingham County (1837; 6:6); to Raleigh for celebrations in honor of the completion of the North Carolina State Capitol and the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road (1840; 6:7); for a "picnic excursion" from Greensboro to Kernersville (1873; 6:8); to a ball at the University of North Carolina (1840; 6:9); and to the Village Hotel of Greensborough (1836; 6:10). Also included in this series are a stock certificate for the Bank of the United States (1817; 6:1); a program from the Oak Ridge Institute (1880; 6:11); receipts from the Benbow House and W.C. Porter & Co.

(1873; 6:12-13); and a U.S. patent for a corn sheller developed by Samuel E. Donnell, which includes the signatures of Andrew Jackson and R.B. Taney (1833; 6:14).

7. Receipts. 1 folder (ca. 25 items). 1836-1866.

The approximately 25 receipts (mostly manuscript) in this series are for a variety of transactions including payment of taxes and legal bills, as well as the purchase of Confederate bonds and household goods. Among the names in the group are: Robert Dick, George Donnell, Nancy P. Donnell, Latham Donnell, Daniel E. Albright, David Wyrick, William Hinds, James (?) A. Caldwell, Isaac Thacker (?), James D. Gilchrist, John C. Donnell, and Washington Donnell.

8. School documents. 1 folder (8 items). 1875.

This series consists of holographic copies of maps of the United States and other countries, probably drawn by a schoolboy. They are signed A.C. Donnell and dated 1875.

FOLDER LISTING

Series	Folder	Contents	
1	1	Correspondence	-- Deal, Mrs. Robert B. (1975)
	2	"	-- Invitations (1839-1877, n.d.)
2	1	Genealogical	-- Donnell family (n.d.)
3	1	Legal	-- Bills of sale -- Slave (1796)
	2	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Emily (1838)
	3	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Robert (1809)
	4	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Robert (1824)
	5	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Robert (1829)
	6	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Samuel (1793)
	7	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Samuel E. (1817)
	8	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Thomas (1769)
	9	"	-- Deeds -- Donnell, Thomas (1769)
	10	"	-- Deeds -- Larkin, John (1783)
	11	"	-- Deeds -- Larkin, John (1790)
	12	"	-- Wills -- Donnell, Robert C. (1869)
4	1	Miscellaneous	-- Seals -- State of North Carolina (n.d.)
5	1	Photographs	-- Donnell, George (ca. 1880)
	2	"	-- Donnell, Nancy (copy of 1820s watercolor, ca. 1975)
	3	"	-- Donnell, Robert (copy of 1820s watercolor, ca. 1975)
6	1	Printed	-- Certificates -- Bank of the United States (1817)
	2	"	-- Clippings (n.d.)
	3	"	-- Invitations -- Benbow House (1871)
	4	"	-- Invitations -- Blandwood (n.d.)
	5	"	-- Invitations -- Gray, Mr. & Mrs. J.A. (1860?)
	6	"	-- Invitations -- Lenox Castle (1837)
	7	"	-- Invitations -- NC State Capitol Celebration (1840)
	8	"	-- Invitations -- Sergeant, George S. (1873)
	9	"	-- Invitations -- UNC Ball (1840)
	10	"	-- Invitations -- Village Hotel (1836)
	11	"	-- Programs -- Oak Ridge Institute (1880)
	12	"	-- Receipts -- Benbow House (1873)
	13	"	-- Receipts -- W.C. Porter & Co. (1873)
	14	"	-- U.S. patent -- Corn sheller (1833)
7	1	Receipts (1836-66)	
8	1	School documents	-- Maps -- Donnell, A.C. (1875)

Index to the Donnell Family Papers (1769-1975)

Note: The numbers following the name/subject entry -- e.g. 1:1 -- indicate in which Series#:Folder# (or, if no ":", Series only) that name/topic can be found. Dates of the items are given in parentheses for an individual Series/Folder or, if at the end, for the entire subject/name entry. The abbreviation GSO indicates a Greensboro association.

Albright, Daniel E.: 7:1 (1856)

Bank of the United States (GSO): 6:1 (1817)

Benbow House (GSO): 6:3,12 (1871-1873)

Blandwood: 6:4 (n.d.)

Boon, C.A.: 7:1 (1860-1862)

Deal, Mrs. Robert B.: corresp., 1:1 (1975)

Dick, Robert: 7:1 (1866)

Donnell, Arthur C.: 1:2 (ca. 1875); 6:11 (1880); 8:1 (1875)

Donnell, Annie: 6:4-5 (ca. 1860)

Donnell, Ella: 6:13 (1873)

Donnell, Emily: 3:2 (1838)

Donnell, George: photo, 5:1 (ca. 1880); 6:12 (1873); 7:1 (ca. 1865)

Donnell, James: 3:8-9 (1769)

Donnell, Jane: 1:2 (1839); 6:6-7,9-10 (1837-1840)

Donnell, Latham: 7:1 (1849-1866)

Donnell, Mary: 3:1 (1796)

Donnell, Nancy P.: 5:2 (ca. 1975); 7:1 (ca. 1860)

Donnell, Robert: 3:3-5 (1809-1829); 5:3 (ca. 1975)

Donnell, Robert C.: 3:12 (1869)

Donnell, Samuel E.: 3:6-7 (1793-1817); 6:14 (1833)

Donnell, Thomas: 3:8-9 (1769)

Donnell, Washington: 7:1 (1836)

Genealogical: Donnell family, (n.d.)

Gilchrist, James D.: 7:1 (1857)

Gray, Mr. & Mrs. J.A.: 6:5 (1860?)

Hinds, William: 7:1 (1857)

Larkin, John: 3:10-11 (1783-1790)

Lenox Castle (Rockingham County): 6:6 (1837)

Lindsay, Jesse M.: 7:1 (1864)

Morehead, Mr. & Mrs. Eugene: 6:4 (n.d.)

Oak Ridge Institute (Guilford County): 6:11 (1880)

Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road celebration: 6:7 (1840)
Rockingham County, NC (Lenox Castle): 6:6 (1837)

Sergeant, George S.: 6:8 (1873)
Scott & Scott (Guilford County?): 7:1 (1866)
Simpson, F.L.: 7:1 (1859)
Slavery: bill of sale, 3:1 (1796)
State Capitol Celebration (NC): 6:7 (1840)

Thacker, Isaac: 7:1 (1857)

U.S. patent: corn sheller, 6:14 (1833)
University of North Carolina: dance, 6:9 (1840)

Village Hotel (GSO): 6:10 (1836)

Watson, Fannie: 7:1 (1866)
Weatherly, Andrew: 7:1 (1857)
Wyrick, Daniel: 7:1 (1858)

Young, W.W.: 7:1 (186?)