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Woodson family papers

Title: Woodson family papers
Collection No: MSS.114
Creator: Woodson family
Extent: 0.25 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1857-1916 and undated.

Abstract: The Woodson family papers contain the personal and business papers of father and son, John Morton Woodson (1821-1881) and Henry Morton Woodson (1845-1917), who farmed and engaged in various business activities in and around Memphis, Tennessee, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Donor: West Tennessee Historical Society.
Processed by: Robert D. Bohanan, January 1978; Gerald Chaudron, February 2014.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Woodson family papers, Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: February 2014

Biographical information

John Morton Woodson was born on May 31, 1821, at Hopkinsville, Powhatan County, Virginia. When he was but a little over five, his parents died and he and his only sister were taken by their grandparents, Captain Charles and Judith Leake Woodson, to their home "Rosebank" where they lived until grown and married. He finished at Hampden-Sidney College, and was married on April 6, 1842, to Elizabeth Cornelia Walton. In the summer of 1844 he moved to Mississippi, taking with him his young wife and son, Henry Morton, and all their slaves, four of his sisters-in-law and their slaves. It required seven weeks to make the trip from Cumberland County, Virginia, to Marshall County, Mississippi.

He later purchased a farm on Red Banks Creek - some ten miles west of Holly Springs; he called his home here "The Wigwam" - the name suggested by the fact that the Choctaw Indians, who had a few years previously been removed from this section, called their huts "wigwams". Here he served as postmaster - the office located in his house; and in 1850 or thereabouts was commissioned Captain of the Militia of Marshall County. In 1855 he sold his farm and removed to Germantown, Tennessee, 14 miles east of Memphis, where he engaged in the manufacture of cotton gins until the beginning of the Civil War when the factory was burned and the business was discontinued.

He was an old time Whig, a strong Union man, opposed to secession and voted against it, but when his adopted state seceded from the Union, he cast his lot with her, and all his sympathies and efforts were given to the South. While he did not enlist in the army, he did all that was in his power to aid the Southern cause. During the war his residence was many times occupied by Federal officers as their headquarters. While this was very unpleasant it was, perhaps, in a measure, a protection to the family as well as to his property. But everything he had in the way of property - that was moveable or destructible, was either carried off or destroyed by Federal soldiers. So the close of the war found him stripped of all his property except his residence and the bare land. He went to Memphis and worked in a shoe store. Unfortunately, his youngest daughter died in June 24, 1865, and a month later his wife died also. To pay his debts, Woodson sold his home in Germantown. In November 1868 he married Martha Louisa Chesley Davis, a widow and cousin of his first wife. About 1871 the family moved to Mississippi and he bought a farm some twelve miles west of Senatobia where he spent the remainder of his life. Woodson died on November 27, 1881. Martha died in 1895.

Henry Morton Woodson, born on April 6, 1845, at Lumpkins Mill, nine miles south of Holly Springs. He received his primary education in the primary schools of the neighborhood of Germantown, and later entered the Shelby Military Male High School in which he continued until the spring of 1861 when the Civil War broke out and the school disintegrated with nearly all the pupils and teachers enlisting in the service of the Confederacy.

In the spring of 1862 his uncle, Captain A. T. Walton of Marshall County, Mississippi, was commissioned to raise a company of volunteers. With the consent of his parents, he joined this

company – the “Coldwater Rebels”, which was to be designated "Company E, 34th Mississippi Infantry". While on leave at his home in Germantown he was taken prisoner by the 6th Illinois Cavalry, and kept in Memphis until exchanged at Vicksburg.

In December 1862, he reached his old command encamped at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, but because of an outbreak in the company of smallpox he was assigned camp duty with the 30th Mississippi Regiment. On June 27, 1863, the army left Shelbyville, finally crossing the Tennessee River on July 4. In this area he was to take part in the Battle of Chickamauga. In March 1864, while in winter quarters at Dalton, Georgia, he applied for, and was granted, a transfer to Company H, 13th Tennessee Infantry in General A. J. Vaughan's Brigade, Cheatham's Division, Hardee's Corps, Army of Tennessee. Woodson's regiment fought in a number of battles in Georgia in 1864 before he was hospitalized in Columbus with fever in July. After he recovered, Woodson remained there until the war ended and then returned to his father's farm.

He married Maria Louise Ford in 1866 and the following year they moved to DeValls Bluff, Arkansas, where Woodson became a merchant. They had two daughters but Maria died in 1871. Woodson returned to Mississippi and in 1879, in Bolivar, married Luella Catherine Newbern. The family moved to Memphis in 1882. Luella died in 1902 and Woodson married Edith Estelle Rudd in 1903. The couple's daughter, Alice, was born two years later. Henry Woodson died on November 22, 1917.

Source: Woodson, Henry Morton, *Historical Genealogy of the Woodsons and their Connections*, 2 vols., Memphis: Woodson. 1915, pp.305-307, 470-476. Accessed at <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005785317>

Scope and contents

The collection contains the personal and business papers of father and son, John and Henry Woodson, who farmed and engaged in various business activities in and around Memphis in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The bulk of the collection is concerned with the Henry Woodson consisting mainly of correspondence and miscellaneous papers. Included in the latter are several Civil War documents such as a furlough dated April 1, 1865, Woodson's parole as a prisoner of war, and his oath "not to take up any military duty whatever..." Correspondence deals with some business matters, but is in the main personal letters from Henry Woodson to his many acquaintances. He expresses his views on local and topical matters such as the yellow fever epidemic and the distaste which southern women have for traveling alone.

The business papers of John Woodson consist of several bills, receipts, contracts, etc. dating from 1856 to 1865.

Included in the collection is a handwritten article entitled "Unlawful Marriages". It includes a "table of kindred and affinity" similar to those found in old family Bibles of the early nineteenth century, indicating proper relationships within the family which will allow marriage. Indications are that this document predates the rest of the collection and was probably executed circa 1800.

Provenance

The collection is part of the archives and collected papers of the West Tennessee Historical Society (WTHS) housed in the Preservation and Special Collections Department. Funds for processing the holdings of the WTHS came in part from a grant from the National Publications and Records Commission, which were matched by the WTHS.

These papers originally included the John C. Saint papers (MSS.113). From the evidence available, both collections were deposited with the WTHS in the early 1950s by Dr. Alice Woodson Cameron, daughter of Henry Morton Woodson and great-granddaughter of John C. Saint. The Woodson and Saint collections were later separated.

Related materials

MSS.113. John C. Saint papers

Subject terms

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Tennessee.

Woodson, John Morton, 1821-1881.

Woodson, Henry Morton, 1845-1917.

Woodson family.

Yellow fever.

Inventory

Folder

- 1 Register.
- 2 Notes regarding the Woodson and Saint families.
- 3 Henry Woodson correspondence (carbon copies), 1878-1879.
- 4 Letter: Henry Woodson to John E. Burton, 1914.
- 5 Henry Woodson miscellaneous papers, 1857-1865.
- 6 John Woodson business papers, 1856-1865.

- 7 Unsigned manuscript on "Unlawful Marriages", undated.
- 8 Correspondence with Tiffany & Co. and others about Woodson coat of arms.
- 9 Correspondence concerning silver stolen in 1863.