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University of Memphis Libraries
Preservation and Special Collections Department

126 Ned R. McWherter Library
Memphis, TN 38152 - 3250
Phone: (901) 678 - 2210
E-mail: lib_sc@memphis.edu

John Isaac Cox collection

Title: John Isaac Cox collection
Collection No: MSS.429
Creator: Cox and Butler families
Extent: 0.5 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1887-1928 (Bulk dates: 1915-1916)

Abstract: The collection includes primarily correspondence written by former Tennessee governor John I. Cox (1855-1946) and members of his extended family, along with letters from politicians and constituents in his position as state representative, and some financial records.

Provenance: Donated by Nathan Kent Moran, July 2003; purchased from George E. Webb, Jr., March 2016.

Processed by: James E. Montague, August 2003; Gerald Chaudron, March 2014.

Access: Open to all researchers.

Language: English

Preferred Citation: John Isaac Cox collection, Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: March 2014

Biographical information

John Isaac Cox was born in Blountville, Tennessee, on November 23, 1855, the son of Henry Washington (1828-1863) and Martha Lavina Smith Cox (1831-1914). His father died in the Civil War when he was eight, and he became his family's sole source of support from the age of thirteen. Working a variety of jobs, he earned enough money to attend Blountville Academy for two terms, and in 1880 began studying law in the office of Judge W.V. Deaderick. Cox married Laura Lee Deaderick (1864-1885) in 1882 and they had a son, William. He was elected Justice of the Peace at the age of twenty-one and Sullivan County Judge ten years later. He then moved to Bristol, where he served as an Alderman and City Attorney. He was also State Revenue Agent. He served in the Tennessee House of Representatives from 1893 to 1895 and in the Tennessee Senate for three terms beginning in 1901. Cox's second wife was Lorena Butler (1870-1953), the daughter of a prominent Bristol physician, Dr. Matthew Moore Butler (1838-1913) and his wife, Mary Taylor Dulaney Butler (1843-1914), whom he married in 1889. They had two children, Matthew and Mary.

As Speaker of the 54th Assembly, Cox became governor on March 21, 1905, when James Frazier resigned to fill a vacant seat in the U.S. Senate. The adjournment of the state legislature only three weeks after Cox assumed office meant that his duties were routine, including the performance of ceremonial functions until the expiry of his term on January 17, 1907. He failed to win the Democratic Party's nomination for governor in 1906 but was reelected to the state Senate that same year, as well as in 1908 and 1910. He then served one more term in the state House of Representatives starting in 1913. Cox then served as Postmaster of Bristol from 1914 until 1922. By 1913 he had retired from his law practice to focus on managing his 600-acre farm near Bristol. He died on September 5, 1946, and was buried in Bristol.

Scope and contents

The collection includes primarily correspondence written by John I. Cox and members of his extended family, along with letters from politicians and constituents in his position as state representative. Included is a group of 20 letters to his wife, Lorena in 1915-1916 while she was recovering from an illness in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. There is also a group of letters written by members of Lorena Cox's family, the Butlers, including some by her father, Dr. Matthew Butler, mostly in the 1890s. The political portion of this collection centers on the Democratic Party primary for the U.S. Senate in 1915 between McKellar, Lea, and Patterson, with correspondence from Senators John K. Shields and Kenneth D. McKellar. The collection also contains some financial records of the Cox family.

Related materials

Governor John I. Cox Papers, 1905-1907, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Subject terms

Butler, Matthew Moore, 1838-1913.
Cox, John I, 1855-1946.
Cox, Lorena, 1870-1953.
Democratic Party (Tenn.)
McKellar, Kenneth Douglas, 1869-1957.
Shields, John Knight, 1858-1934.
Tennessee--Politics and government.

Inventory

Box 1

Folder 1. 13 items

Correspondence from Cox to his wife, Lorena, who was staying with her brother and his wife in Baltimore, Md., and Washington, D.C. while she was recovering from an illness, 1916 March 15-30.

Folder 2. 7 items

Correspondence from Cox to his wife, Lorena, who was staying with her brother and his wife in Baltimore, Md., and Washington, D.C., while she was recovering from an illness, 1916 April 2-11.

Folder 3. 15 items

Lorena Cox personal correspondence, 1902 September 2-1916 May 14.

Folder 4. 2 items

Letters dated 1893 January 29 and 1898 February 13 written to Cox by Lorena Cox. She discusses a local scandal and tells him some political gossip she has heard.

Folder 5. 1 item

Letter dated 1916 April 3 from friends and family sent to Lorena Cox in Washington, D.C. while she was recovering from an illness.

Folder 6. 2 items

Letters written to Cox's daughter Mary concerning her engagement to be married, 1915 August 30, September 18.

Folder 7. 1 item

Letter dated 1928 October 22 written by Lida J. Cox, former wife of Cox's son Matthew, to Cox requesting financial support for his granddaughter, Alberta.

Folder 8. 6 items

Cox household accounts, 1915-1916; First National Bank, Bristol, Tenn., slip, 1915 December 1.

Folder 9. 4 items

Statements sent to Matthew Cox for unpaid purchases: 1915 December 20, and 1916 January 3. Christmas greeting cards sent to Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Cox. (2)

Folder 10. 12 items

Cox business correspondence, 1915 November 15-December 20.

Folder 11. 8 items

Cox business correspondence, 1915 December 21-1916 January 25.

Folder 12. 1 item

Southern Fertilizer Association, Atlanta, Ga., Soil Improvement Bulletin No. 8, "Prosperity Without Potash", sent to Cox by the Virginia- Carolina Chemical Company, 1916.

Folder 13. 1 item

Balance sheet of R.L. Cox Company Wholesale, Chattanooga, Tenn., 1915 December 14.

Folder 14. 1 item

Letter dated 1897 February 6 from Charles Butler, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va., to his sister Lorena Cox.

Folder 15. 3 items

Letter dated 1897 February 26 from Cox, Biloxi, Miss., to his mother-in-law, Mary Butler, Bristol, Tenn.; letter dated 1897 February 27 from Mrs. Cox and Dr. Butler, Biloxi, Miss., to Mrs. Butler, Bristol, Tenn.; letter to Mama (Mrs. Butler?) from Lorena Cox?, 1896 December 18.

Folder 16. 3 items

Correspondence from Charles Butler to Mary Butler, his mother, written while he was in medical school at the University of Virginia, 1896 October 25-1897 February 8.

Folder 17. 2 items

Correspondence from Charles Butler to Dr. M.M. Butler, his father, 1896 November 22, December 13.

Folder 18. 5 items

Dr. M.M. Butler's business correspondence, 1887 November 5-1915 December 28.

Folder 19. 1 item

Letter dated 1913 February 26 from H.J. Patterson, Greenville, Tenn., urging Cox to "Keep your fight on Crump and Crumpism."

Folder 20. 1 item

Treanor Press Bureau Poll form for the November 1915 Democratic Party primary election for U.S. Senate from Tennessee. Candidates were K.D. McKellar, Luke Lea, and M.R. Patterson.

Folder 21. 12 items

Correspondence from Senator Kenneth D. McKellar and his supporters to Cox who supported McKellar in the 1915 Democratic Party primary election for U.S. Senate from Tennessee, 1915 September 1-December 28.

Folder 22. 7 items

Correspondence from Senator John K. Shields to Cox, 1915 November 4-1916 January 18.

Letter dated 1915 November 4 discusses Shield's stand on various national issues and the attack made on him by Senator Lea. Balance of correspondence concerns postmaster positions he is seeking for supporters.

Folder 23. 6 items

Correspondence to Cox from individuals seeking jobs or help with other governmental matters, 1915 October 15-December 25.

Folder 24. 1 item

Letter: Cox, Law offices of Haynes & Haynes, Bristol, Tenn., to All Masons in Good Standing in Sullivan County, 1890 May 12. Notes offer by J.W. Farmer, candidate for Registrar of Sullivan County, to pay \$500 to get rival W.S. Anderson "off the 'truck'". Cox vouches for Anderson as a fellow mason.