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## **James Davis Porter papers**

**Title:** James Davis Porter papers  
**Collection No:** MSS.422  
**Creator:** Porter family  
**Extent:** 0.25 cubic feet  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1865-1904

**Abstract:** The collection comprises various materials documenting the life of James Davis Porter (1828-1912)—soldier, Tennessee legislator and governor, businessman and college president—including letters, a diary, a photograph, articles and genealogical materials.

**Provenance:** Purchased from Charles Apfelbaum, Watchung, New Jersey, May 2002.  
**Processed by:** James E. Montague, September 2002; Gerald Chaudron, July 2014.  
**Access:** Open to all researchers.  
**Language:** English  
**Preferred Citation:** James Davis Porter papers, Department of Preservation and Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

**Publication date:** July 2014

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## Biographical information

James Davis Porter was born in Paris, Tennessee, on December 7, 1828, the son of Thomas Kennedy Porter (b.1801) and Geraldine Horton Porter (b.1805). He studied at the University of Nashville and became a lawyer in 1851. In that year, Porter married Susannah Eliza Dunlap (1832-1914), the daughter of his law mentor, John Dunlap. They had six children, three of whom died at a young age.

Elected to the state House of Representatives in 1859, Porter introduced the "Porter resolutions," which bound Tennessee to the Confederacy should war be declared. After helping organize the Provisional Army of Tennessee, he spent much of the war as General Benjamin F. Cheatham's chief of staff, and saw action at various battles in Tennessee and Georgia. After the war, he returned to his law practice and was elected a delegate to the state's constitutional convention in 1870. He became a judge of the 12<sup>th</sup> circuit and joined the Democratic Party. Porter served as Governor of Tennessee from 1875 to 1879, being easily re-elected in 1876. He then became president of the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway from 1880 to 1884. In 1885 President Grover Cleveland appointed him Assistant Secretary of State and from 1893 to 1894 he was Minister to Chile.

Porter spent his later years as chancellor of the University of Nashville, and as president of Peabody College, which was established at the University of Nashville during his gubernatorial administration. He oversaw the liquidation and transfer of the University of Nashville's assets to the Peabody Education Fund, which allowed Peabody College to be reestablished at Vanderbilt University in 1909. Porter had wanted the college to be on the old University of Nashville site and resigned from the board of trustees.

In 1899, Porter published a book, *The Military History of Tennessee, War of 1861-65*, which became Volume VIII of Clement Evans' 12-volume series, *Confederate Military History*. He was also active in the Tennessee Historical Society and served as its president.

Porter died on May 18, 1912, in Paris, Tennessee.

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## Scope and contents

The collection includes various materials documenting the life of James Davis Porter. Of particular interest are two letters from 1904: one written by Porter to General Stephen D. Lee, and another addressed to Porter by Major Joseph Vaulx, about the Civil War battles at Franklin and Spring Hill, Tennessee, in late 1864 and the roles of Generals Cheatham, Brown, Hood, and Cleburne. The collection also contains photocopies of pages from the Porter family bible, and a 5-page diary written by Porter as he marched through North and South Carolina in early 1865.

In addition, the collection contains photographs of Porter and Duncan Eve, a prominent Nashville doctor. Finally, there is a mid-nineteenth century, ink on linen map of North Carolina.

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## **Related materials**

Governor James D. Porter Papers, 1875-1912, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

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## **Subject terms**

### **SUBJECTS:**

Spring Hill, Battle of, Spring Hill, Maury County, Tenn., 1864.

### **NAMES:**

Eve, Duncan, 1853-1937.

Porter, James D. (James Davis), 1828-1912.

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## **Inventory**

### **Box 1**

#### Folder 1.

Photocopies of articles from the *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War* and printouts from online sources pertaining to the events and people discussed in the letters located in Folders 2 and 3, including the Battles of Franklin and Spring Hill, and Civil War generals John C. Brown, John Bell Hood, Benjamin F. Cheatham, and Patrick R. Cleburne.

#### Folder 2.

Letter: James Davis Porter, Nashville, Tenn., to General Stephen D. Lee, 1904 July 26 [altered to August 5.]

Original and transcription of a draft letter discussing the roles of Cleburne, Brown, Hood and Cheatham in the Civil War battles at Franklin and Spring Hill in reference to a manuscript by Judge Casey Young. 6 pp. The letter was apparently in reply to an inquiry by Lee.

See Appendix for transcript.

#### Folder 3.

Letter: Joseph Vaulx, Nashville, Tenn., to James Davis Porter, 1904 August 3.

Original and transcription of letter discussing the roles of Cleburne, Brown, Hood and Cheatham in the Civil War battles at Franklin and Spring Hill. 11 pp. Major Vaulx was inspector-general of Cheatham's division from 1862.

See Appendix for transcript.

Folder 4.

Newspaper: *Straws*, Louisville, Kentucky, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1881 May. Article on James Davis Porter, p. 4. (photocopy)

Folder 5.

Diary, contained in small wallet, written in 1865 between February 15 and April 15 by James Porter, detailing the march of Cheatham's Corps through South and North Carolina. 5pp.

Folder 6.

Genealogical information.

Photocopies of pages from the Porter family bible; copy of article about James Porter; photocopy of article about the death of Porter's brother, William Henderson Porter (1842-1864), in the Battle of Brice's Cross Roads; photocopy of article about the Battle of Brice's Cross Roads; photocopy of obituary notice of Porter's sister, Anna J. Porter (1845-1868).

Folder 7.

Photograph.

Mounted photograph of James Davis Porter standing on a porch decorated with American flags, surrounded by five unidentified seated and standing women. Undated.

Folder 8.

Photograph.

Cabinet card: Dr. Duncan Eve (1853-1937), Nashville, Tenn., 1882 December 6. Photographer: R. Poole, Nashville. Dr. Eve is wearing the regalia of the Knights Templar masonic order.

Folder 9.

Map: North Carolina, ink on linen, undated (mid-nineteenth century).

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## Separated materials

The following materials have been separated from the collection and disposed of as follows:  
Newspaper: *Straws*, Louisville, Kentucky, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1881 May.

Transferred to Special Collections newspaper collection.

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## Appendix

### Transcriptions

1. Letter: James Davis Porter, Nashville, Tenn., to General Stephen D. Lee, 1904 July 26  
[August 5.]

[p.1]

Nashville, July 26th, 1904 [altered in pencil to "Aug 5<sup>th</sup>"]

Dear Gen Lee:

Your letters on the 24<sup>th</sup> instant [altered in pencil to "of July"] are received. Majr Pickett, Capt. Pilcher, like myself, never heard of Judge Young, and of course cannot afford to ask for the privilege of reading his M.S. if he had desired to permit the friends of Cheatham and Brown to be heard, he would have invited them to examine disputed points with which they were most familiar?

Judge Young as you write, said to you that he had written to myself on this subject and that I "made no reply". I never received a line from him. I have always been accessible, I have been to Memphis many, many, times, I have a very large acquaintance there, it is especially extensive with the old Soldiers and it is surprising that he ~~never met~~ did not see me, especially if he wished to consult me? You explain your interest in this matter by a reference to a publication made by "Majr Vanderford of Cheathams Staff". The major was never to my knowledge a member of Cheatham' [p.2] Staff. I knew him in 1862-3, as chief of Ordnance to Gen Cleburne, and afterwards as assistant to the chief Ordnance officer of the Army, my recollection [sic] is that on the Tennessee campaign he was acting as Chief for the Army, I am quite certain that I did not see him during that campaign. I hope Cheatham has not suffered ~~bee~~ in reputation from a belief that his staff officer had wantonly or by mistake, or for want of information, assailed you? Whatever Vanderford wrote or published was upon his own responsibility and without suggestion from Cheatham or his friends. Cheatham was the most generous of men, the most tolerant, the most forgiving, and absolutely free from envy or jealousy. I never read Judge Young's letters to yourself until they were sent to me recently. In our former correspondence you sent the letters from Mitchell and perhaps others, relating to Brown' condition at Spring Hill; as I have informed you before this, that I did not know the Judge, or even his given name ~~but that I had been told that the late Hon Casey Young had in preparation a book or paper [p.3] on Spring Hill and Franklin, he was a friend of mine, but he died before I had an opportunity of discussing the subject with him or of ascertaining that he was not the author.~~

You refer to Bate as being "on Brown's right," he was ordered to form on the left of Cleburn, the latter being on Brown's left. Brown's division constituted the right, until Stewart came up with orders to form on Brown the right of Cheatham's corps. If this formation had been made Stewart's centre would have been on and across the pike.

I went forward with Cleburn, he was informed by Forrest's cavalry and by Gen Hood that the enemy was between him and the Columbia pike, he had orders to attack at once, moving forward he found the advance of the Federal force on his right flank, upon which they opened fire and put Lowry's Brigade in slight confusion, Cleburn changed direction and advanced

driving the Federals pell mell towards Spring Hill. At this juncture, Cheatham came on the field, and ordered me to gallop back and hurry Bate forward. I found him at Rutherfords Creek [word marked out] wasting time [word marked out] as I believed constructing a bridge over water two or three inches deep. I gave him the order, he did not “want the men [p.4] to wet their feet”; at this juncture I discovered the head of Brown's column approaching. I gave him the order to go forward telling him how precious was time, his men waded the little stream, his advance brigade did this in my presence, I rode forward with Brown and Strohl [“o” altered in pencil to “a”] aided them in making their formation. Cheatham was present and gave the order to Cleburn and Brown to advance, and galloped down his line to meet Bates who had orders to form on the left of Cleburne saying I will remain with Bate during the action. Bate was not there but was found nearly a mile distant, claiming that he had orders from Gen Hood to march toward the Columbia pike where there was no enemy. Cheatham found him gave him, or repeated orders, to form on Cleburn' left, and returning found that his own order to advance had been countermanded by Gen Hood. This of course was done upon the report of Brown, with which you are familiar. Hood was so well satisfied that he went to bed and to sleep as reported by Senator Harris in a published letter addressed to myself, a copy of which was in possession of Gen Hood for years before his death. [p.5] as I have previously informed you, it was the purpose to make Cleburn responsible for the failure at Spring Hill. This was evidently determined on the march after Hood had decided that Cheatham was not responsible for it. Cleburn heard it on the march to Franklin, and communicated the information to Brown the last named repeated it to staff officers as he subsequently informed me.

Cleburne was enraged at the accusation and informed Brown that so soon as the campaign closed he would demand satisfaction of General Hood. His glorious death suppressed the accusation, but he died with a heart full of resentment toward the man who made it. His very last spoken words outside of the line of duty, were in denunciation of his detractor.

I have before me a letter written by Gen Brown in January, 1868, three years after Spring Hill, in which he states that he submitted the question of his advance to his four Brigade Commanders, after he discovered the force on his right flank and they advised against it, and it was then as I understand, referred to Gen Hood in Cheatham's temporary absence on the left and he countermanded the order to attack. Hood's had temporary Head quarters, about one hundred yards [p.6] from Cheatham's and both were very close to Brown's line of battle. You understand that at this time Cheatham was trying to put Bate in position. In the letter referred to, Brown states that he had heard that he had been accused of drunkenness on the field, and invoked my assistance in finding the author of the accusation. I felt \_\_\_\_\_ [illegible] certain that the story was without foundation, and advised him to give no attention to it. I regret that these things did not come up during Brown's lifetime, Judge Young seems to have been working on the Spring Hill incident before his death, it was cruel that an opportunity was not afforded him to be heard?

My letters to you were in no sense private, but I did not care to have extracts made from them and used as evidence by a man suspected of hostility to my friends.

Your friend and comrade

2. Letter: Joseph Vaulx, Nashville, Tenn., to James Davis Porter, 1904 August 3.

[p.1]

Nashville Hermitage Club

Nashville, Tenn., Aug 3<sup>rd</sup> 1904

Dear Governor:

Stewart did not form in line on Brown's right, nor elsewhere, so far as I could see.

But he bivouaced his troops in the rear - say  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile - and east of the road marked[(?) word partly missing] over from Duck R. His position was not that of a supporting one to the troops in line -

When Brown had nearly completed his formation, Gen Cheatham came up, from towards the left, and gave an order to Brown in these words: "As soon as your last brigade is formed move your right forward & attack; when it becomes Engaged order your left forward to attack. I will order Cleburne that as [p.2] soon as he hears your guns to attack in the same manner. I will order Bate to attack as soon as Cleburne becomes engaged, and I will remain with Bates Division during this Engagement"—

Then he rode away towards the left.

I can't remember that he was accompanied by anyone of his staff while giving the above order to Brown

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The paper you enclose to me, gives the first account that I ever heard that Brown sent a staff officer to Hood to report to him, the matter of a line of the enemy being discovered on the wooded hill, outside of & at about at right angles to [p.3] his main line works around the East Side of Spg. Hill-

The account of Gen Cheatham's movements & remarks made just before proceeding towards the right, to ascertain why the delay in attacking at that point, was given to me very soon after we arrived around Nashville by his acting Insp. Gen'l Maj Joseph Bostick, who spoke as from his own Knowledge & hearing, and being present with Gen. C when the following occurred- My memory has retained these things more vividly than much other circumstances prior to the movements at Spg. Hill -

Bostick said Gen C- had been to Cleburn [sic] & given him orders - likewise had instructed Bate [p.4] and then taken position in rear of Bate & for a short rest his staff dismounted.

After remarking, at first, that it was time Brown had "opened", then, afterwards, growing more surprised and impatient that firing had not begun, he called to his staff - "Mount your horses, we will go to the right and see what is the matter up there". After proceeding some distance in that direction he met one of the two staff officers Brown had sent to report to him the condition of the enemy's line, etc.

Upon hearing this report Gen C- said to the bearer of it - "Come go back with me to Gen Hood and state to him just what you have [p.5] stated to me."

When come into Hood's presence, Gen C- announced that he had received a report from Brown by this officer and then said to the latter - "Now state to Gen Hood exactly what you have stated to me"

Upon hearing the report given Gen Hood said to C- "General if that is the case do not attack, but, order your troops to hold the position they are in for the night"

This is as near Verbatim as any man can relate an oral communication and is practically



Exact Now as Bostick because I was deeply interested and each & every word was deeply impressed on my memory—[p.6] shortly after Gen C- left Brown with the order & method of attack, I was directed to go to the left of the Div. and see that the troops were properly placed in connection with Cleburn's—I supposed that the right brigades would move for'd before I would get back to that end of the line - so when I returned everything was standing quiet, Gen B & staff (mounted) were in the road on the right - I was then informed that the attack was countermanded & in a few moments later Gen Brown said to me - "Gen Hood is going to send Stewart's Corps around Spg. Hill to take position on the Franklin Pike and in the morning he says will capture [p.7] the whole party".

(Now I can't say how Brown got this – whether from Gen Cheatham or whether Hood himself had been ~~there~~ seen by Brown.)

Gen Lowry spoke to me of Cleburn's first movement before reaching the immediate front of Spg Hill & the enemy's line –

Said that Hood ordered Cleburn to move towards the Columbia Pike in line of battle & engage the enemy there. That Cleburn moved a considerable dis- [word unfinished] in that direction (west) & saw not a man of the enemy – That Cleburn, finding no enemy in [p.8] his front, gave the command to "Change front forward on the Right"- Lowry's was the Right - in making this maneuver. Lowry's right companies were the most advanced on the "new direction" & came in sight of the enemy's pickets who fired & then retreated north towards Spg Hill –

That all the talk about a sharp skirmish there was not true - It amounted to nothing - all the wounded were from his right regiment, they were two or three only –

He said "Gen Hood was rattled" imagined Schofield army was moving East from [p.9] the Columbia Pike to attack him in flank while marching on that \_\_\_\_\_ (?) [sic] dirt road – From the way Lowry spoke of this movement west, & then the change north, I should not have inferred [sic] that there was any "Confusion" in his brigade.—

My recollection of Gen Brown's conversation with me, on the road to Franklin, ~~about the talk with Cleburn a short while before I came up, is that the cause of his resentment was the words of censure of him by Hood on the afternoon before, while about making the movement of his Div. towards Spg. Hill.~~ was that Hood was mad about the enemy escaping, & that he would put the blame of it upon someone - It was some years afterwards that [p.10] Brown told me of his meeting with Cleburn on the road to Franklin, and that he was much offended at Hoods words & said that he, Cleburn, intended to call Hood to account after the campaign was concluded –

You will see that much of what I state, was related to me by Bostick, Gens Brown & Lowry very soon after these things transpired and their accounts of these matters given when they were fresh – I have all along believed in their correctness & have retained them in my memory.

Sincerely yours,  
Joseph Vaulx

Wherein lies S.D. Lee's interest as manifested, is it in defense of Hood?

J.V.

[Note: Additional page on same stationery]

Page 3 = Stewart forming on Brown 's right –No! [written in ink]

**[all below written in pencil]**

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Put Lowrys brig in confusion  
never hear of that –

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Gen Lowrys statement to me of the orders to Cleburn by Hood & of Hood 's being "rattled" & supposing Schofield was in line along the pike intending to attack Hood while he was moving toward Spg H

Bostick's statement of Gen C- awaiting Brown's opening & the meeting with officer bearing Brown's message & Gen C- taking him to Hood & his countermand of attack - Brown on the road to Franklin etc