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Meriwether family papers

Title: Meriwether family papers
Collection No: MSS.120
Extent: 2.6 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1751-2010

Abstract: The Meriwether family papers document principally the activities of Minor Lee (circa 1827-1910) and Elizabeth Avery Meriwether (1824-1917), and their son Lee (1862-1966). The collection contains correspondence, legal documents, pamphlets, books and scrapbooks.

Processed by: Robert D. Bohanan, 1978; Gerald Chaudron, 2016-2021.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
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Biographical information

Lee Meriwether (1862-1966) was a nationally prominent lawyer, politician and author. He was educated in Memphis public schools, and in 1880 established with his brother, Avery, a periodical entitled the *Free Trader* which ceased publication in 1883. That same year his family moved to St. Louis, Missouri. In 1885-1886 he visited Europe, studying the condition of workingmen and the effect of the protective tariff. His report on the "Condition of European Labor" was published in the annual report of the U. S. Bureau of Labor in 1886. From 1886 to 1889 he served as a special agent of the Department of the Interior, collecting labor data in the United States. He was Labor Commissioner of Missouri in 1889-1890 and 1895-1896. In 1893 he set up a law practice in St. Louis which he continued for seventy years. He was an unsuccessful candidate for mayor of St. Louis in 1897 and 1901. During World War I, he was assistant to the U.S. ambassador to France and was commissioned to investigate reports of ill-treatment of German prisoners. Meriwether was a prolific writer. One of his first books, *How to See Europe on 50 Cents a Day*, was published in 1886 and was a best seller. Shortly before his death he estimated that he had written between 25 and 30 books.

Lee Meriwether's parents were Elizabeth Avery (1824-1917) and Minor Lee Meriwether (circa 1827-1910). Minor was an engineer, a colonel in Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederate cavalry, and in later years a lawyer and businessman. He was so opposed to slavery that when he inherited his father's plantation in 1851, Minor set the slaves free, and at his own expense sent them to free states in the north or to Liberia.

Elizabeth Meriwether shared her husband's social conscience. She was active in politics and the women's rights struggles of her day. Following the example set by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth attempted to vote in the 1872 presidential election. Unlike Anthony, who was arrested for her attempt, Elizabeth was allowed to vote. Both Elizabeth and her husband were active in the women's rights movement until Minor's death in 1910. In 1879, they attended the National Suffragists Convention as delegates from Memphis. Throughout this period Elizabeth travelled the country making speeches with Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others. Elizabeth was also a prolific writer. She edited and published a small newspaper, *The Tablet*, for several years, and wrote several books. The best-known, *Recollections of 92 Years*, was completed just a few months before her death.

Other family members represented in this collection include Minor's father, Garrett Minor Meriwether (1794-1851), and his wife Mary Ann Minor (1801-1833), along with Mary Ann's father, Dabney Minor of Orange County, Virginia.

A source on these families is Minor Meriwether's, *Lineage of the Meriwethers and the Minors from Colonial Times*, St. Louis, 1895.

Scope and contents

This collection was compiled and preserved by Minor Meriwether and his son, Lee. Most of the correspondence and papers were contained in two scrapbooks which were unbound when the collection was processed. At that time the papers were divided into four series. Series I is composed entirely of correspondence. Series II contains papers collected by the Meriwether family. Series III contains the addresses, speeches, articles, etc. of Lee Meriwether. Series IV contains scrapbooks, diaries and other bound volumes, excluding published works which were separated.

The correspondence in Series I is arranged alphabetically by author and then chronologically under each author. The only exceptions to this are folders 49-54 which contain intra-family correspondence, correspondence of a social nature with family friends, and letters received upon Avery Meriwether's death in 1883. Several groups of correspondence in Series I present interesting features. One of these is a series of eleven letters from Jefferson and Varina Davis to the Meriwethers circa 1873-1886 (folders 4-12; 14-15). This correspondence contains references to Davis' social and philanthropic affairs and to his personal life. Another pair of letters (folders 18, 31) tell the story of a dispute between Minor Meriwether and Nathan Bedford Forrest. Of particular interest is a collection of 30 letters (folder 26) written by Garrett and Mary Ann Meriwether between 1821 and 1826. The letters were written from Cabin Row, Christian County, Kentucky, and were sent to various relatives still living in Orange County, Virginia. They tell what life was like for the early settlers of this region and contain numerous marginal notes added by Minor Meriwether further clarifying some of the people and incidents alluded to in the letters. (See, for example, folders 28; 33-42). For information concerning the life and career of Elizabeth Meriwether, see the general and family correspondence contained in folders 49-53, in addition to individual letters sent or received by her also in Series I.

Series II contains legal documents (wills, tax receipts, deeds, etc.) generated by the Meriwether family, circa 1772-1874. Also included in this series are papers referring to many of the political and social interests of Minor and Elizabeth Meriwether. Of special interest are four short works, "The Ku Klux Klan" and "Black and White" by Elizabeth Meriwether, and Avery Meriwether's "English Tyranny and Irish Suffering" and "A Chapter in the History of Vivum-Ovo."

Series III contains the papers of Lee Meriwether. The majority of the collection consists of copies of his addresses, speeches, and articles. Included in this collection are numerous virulent attacks upon the New Deal and other political writings.

Series IV contains the scrapbooks of Minor and Elizabeth Meriwether and a typescript copy of Elizabeth's memoirs, *Recollections of 92 Years*. The scrapbooks contain mainly news clippings circa 1870-1900, and marginal notes and comments by the Meriwethers upon the events of the day. Also contained in this series are the diaries of Lee Meriwether. These diaries contain

references to Meriwether's numerous trips, his work for the government, and family affairs. Typescript copies are included in Series III. There are also bound copies of Lee and Avery Meriwether's paper, *The Free Trader/Meriwether's Weekly*, 1881-1883.

Provenance

The collection is part of the archives and collected papers of the West Tennessee Historical Society (WTHS) housed in the 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.

The collection was donated to WTHS by Lee Meriwether, St. Louis, Missouri, in 1960.

Two certificates related to Lee Meriwether were donated by Norris Allen in 1981.

The CD entitled *The Personal Album and Family Record of Minor Meriwether, 3716 Delmar Ave., St. Louis, Missouri, April 1886* was donated by the Meriwether Society, Inc., in 2016.

Related materials

MSS.124. Marshall Wingfield papers, Box 1, folder 4.

Subject terms

Davis, Jefferson, 1808-1889.

Davis, Varina, 1826-1906.

Free Trader.

Lamar, L.Q.C. (Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus), 1825-1893.

Meriwether, Elizabeth Avery, 1824-1917.

Meriwether, Lee, 1862-1966.

Meriwether, Minor.

Meriwether family.

Meriwether's Weekly.

Newspapers—Tennessee—Memphis.

Inventory

Box 1

Folder

Series I: Correspondence:

| | |
|---|----|
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| Nathan Avery to Clarissa Avery, ca. 1817. | 3 |
| Jefferson Davis to Elizabeth Meriwether, 2-17-1872. | 4 |
| Jefferson Davis to Minor Meriwether, 9-1-1873. | 5 |
| Jefferson Davis to Elizabeth Meriwether, 9-6-1873. | 6 |
| Jefferson Davis to Elizabeth Meriwether, 1-5-1876. | 7 |
| Jefferson Davis to Elizabeth Meriwether. 1-28-1876. | 8 |
| Jefferson Davis to Minor Meriwether, 8-7-1882. | 9 |
| Jefferson Davis to Minor Meriwether, 12-17-1882. | 10 |
| Jefferson Davis to Senators & Representatives of Mississippi, 2-15-1886. | 11 |
| Jefferson Davis to Minor Meriwether, 9-5-1886. | 12 |
| Nicholas Davis to Will Douglas, 11-25-1751. | 13 |
| Varina Davis to Minor Meriwether, 5-19-1874. | 14 |
| Varina Davis to Minor Meriwether, 11-13-1875. | 15 |
| George H. Dole to Minor Meriwether, 11-8-1883. | 16 |
| James Dunlop to Elizabeth Meriwether, 11-11-1865. | 17 |
| Nathan Bedford Forrest to Minor Meriwether, 5-26-1875. | 18 |
| J.F. Gilmer to Minor Meriwether, 7-16-1874. | 19 |
| Carrie Goodett to Meriwether family, 7-24-1883. | 20 |
| Isabella Beecher Hooker to Elizabeth Meriwether, 1-24-1873. | 21 |
| L.Q. C. Lamar to Elizabeth Meriwether, 1-30-1884. | 22 |
| L.Q.C. Lamar to Minor Meriwether, 5-11-1886. | 23 |
| Charles Meriwether to Will Douglas, 1-12-1790; 3-7-1790; 7-15-1790. | 24 |
| Elizabeth Meriwether to John Avery, 5-30-1862. | 25 |
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| Mary Meriwether to Virginia Brockman, 8-2-1828; 3-9-1831. | 28 |
| Minor Meriwether to Peter Meriwether, 12-27-1848. | 29 |
| Minor Meriwether to Elizabeth Meriwether, 12-28-1862. | 30 |
| Minor Meriwether to Nathan Bedford Forrest, 5-25-1875. | 31 |
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| Thomas W. Meriwether to Virginia Brockman, 4-5-1830. | 35 |
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| William Douglas Meriwether to Charles Meriwether, 10-4-1812. | 37 |
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| Dabney Minor to Charles Minor, 9-20-1815. | 40 |
| Dabney Minor to Charles Minor, 8-10-1819. | 41 |
| Dabney Minor to Charles Minor, 11-6-1812. | 42 |

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| Francis Minor to Minor Meriwether, 9-20-1877. | 43 |
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| Elizabeth Meriwether, "Black and White", 1883. | 73 |
| Avery Meriwether, "English Tyranny and Irish Suffering", 1881. | 74 |
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Elizabeth Meriwether, "Recollections of Ninety Years, 1824-1916", typescript.

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|-------------------------------------|------|
| Lee Meriwether, Diaries, 1884-1910. | 1-2a |
|-------------------------------------|------|

Box 5

The Free Trader/Meriwether's Weekly, Vol. 1-2, 1881-1882.

Meriwether's Weekly, Vol. 3-4, 1882-1883.

News clippings and miscellany. Includes "Avery Family in America" by Homer Sweet, 1888 March 25.

Micro *The Free Trader/Meriwether's Weekly*, Vol. 1-2, 1881-1882; *Meriwether's Weekly*, Vol. 3-4, 1882-1883. 2 microfilm reels.

OS1 *The Tablet*, Vol. 1, No.1-2, 1872 January 27, February 3.

Addition, 1981

- OS2**
1. Certificate: Appointment of Lee Meriwether as assistant to the United States ambassador to France, 1916 July 5. Signed by Secretary of State Robert Lansing.
 2. Certificate: Appointment of Lee Meriwether as an Officer of the Ordine della corona d'Italia (Order of the Crown of Italy), 1937 November 5.

Addition, 2016

AV CD: The Meriwether Society, Inc., *The Personal Album and Family Record of Minor Meriwether, 3716 Delmar Ave., St. Louis, Missouri, April 1886*, 2010.