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**University of Memphis Libraries
Special Collections Department**

126 Ned R. McWherter Library

Memphis, TN 38152 - 3250

Phone: (901) 678 - 2210

E-mail: lib_sc@memphis.edu

Chester family papers

- Title:** Chester family papers
- Collection No:** MSS.25
- Creator:** Robert J. Chester, Mary Jane Chester, Elizabeth Chester
- Extent:** 0.5 cubic feet
- Inclusive Dates:** 1829 - 1972
- Abstract:** This collection contains family correspondence and genealogical materials related to the family of Robert J. Chester (1793-1892) of Jackson, Tennessee.
- Donor:** Mrs. James Cowles, 1967, 1992.
- Processed by:** James E. Montague, 2003, Brigitte Billeaudeau, 2018.
- Access:** Open to all researchers.
- Language:** English
- Preferred Citation:** Chester family papers, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.
- Publication date:** November 2018

Biographical information

Robert Johnson Chester was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, on July 31, 1793. His family moved to Jonesborough, Tennessee, when he was a young man where his father, William P. Chester, was the family doctor of John Sevier and an innkeeper in the town. As an adult, Robert Chester made his home in Jackson, Tennessee, in the west of the state. Despite his middle name being Johnson, Robert's middle initial, "J" was often mistaken for an "I" and he is known as both Robert I. Chester and Robert J. Chester. Robert Chester served in the War of 1812 and received the rank of Colonel under General Sam Houston in the war of Texas independence. Robert served as a United States Marshal, was a Tennessee Democrat, served in the State Legislature of Tennessee, and was a celebrated Mason. His first wife, Elizabeth Hays, was the niece of Andrew Jackson. They had seven children: Mary Jane, John, Robert Hays, Martha Butler, William, Andrew Jackson, and Samuel Hays.

Elizabeth died in 1841 and Robert remarried in 1855, to widow Jane P. Donelson, née Royster. Robert died on January 14, 1892, at the age of 98 in Jackson, Tennessee. He is buried at Riverside Cemetery.

Scope and contents

The Chester family papers are comprised primarily of correspondence between Mary Jane Chester and members of her family based in Jackson, Tennessee. The correspondence focuses on local and school events at the Columbia Female Institute, local and national politics, a reception for Andrew Jackson, family health and illness, and educational plans for other members of the Chester family. Three letters in the collection date to 1836 and cover Robert J. Chester's experiences in Texas. Additionally, detailed genealogical records are included in this collection. Documents related to the Chester family in Jonesborough, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania are part of the collection along with articles that detail biographical information about Robert J. Chester.

For additional genealogical information about the Chester family see MSS0428. Adams, Battle, Cooper, and Donelson family papers.

Subject terms

Chester, Robert J., 1793-1892
Columbia Female Institute (Columbia, Tenn.)
Jackson (Tenn.)

Inventory

Box 1

Folder

- 1 Correspondence to Elizabeth Chester from Robert J. Chester re: political situation in Tenoxtitlan, Texas, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, and the Brazos River, 1836 January-February.
- 2 Family correspondence between Mary Jane, Martha B., Robert J. and Elizabeth Chester re: clothing needs for school and a reception for Andrew Jackson, 1840 September.
- 3 Family correspondence between Mary Jane, Robert J., Elizabeth, and John Chester re: event with Andrew Jackson, and the Female Institute, Columbia, Tennessee, 1840 October.
- 4 Correspondence between Mary Jane Chester and Elizabeth Chester re: Methodist conference in Jackson, Tennessee, local Whig and democratic politics, election of William Henry Harrison, and danger of fire at school, 1840 November.
- 5 Correspondence between Mary Jane, Martha B., Robert and Elizabeth Chester re: local news in Jackson, Tennessee, illness, and courtship, 1840 December.
- 6 Correspondence between Robert J., Elizabeth, and Mary Jane Chester, 1841 January; Letter to Robert J. Chester from F.G. Smith re: Mary Jane Chester's health and academic performance, 1841 January 11.
- 7 Correspondence between Robert J., Elizabeth, and Mary Jane Chester re: school examinations, writing and revealing too much in correspondence, and motherly advice on graceful manners and walking, 1841 February.
- 8 Family correspondence between Robert J., Elizabeth, John, Robert Hays, and Mary Jane Chester, 1841 March – April; Letter to Mary Jane Chester and William E. Butler re: arriving home and the health of Mary Jane's aunt, 1841 March 24.
- 9 Family correspondence between Robert J., Elizabeth, Mary Jane, Chester and Narcissa Hays, 1841 May -June.
- 10 Family correspondence between Robert J. Chester and Mary Jane Chester, 1842 January - December; Letter to Mary Jane Chester from Patsy Butler, 1842 January 9; Receipt for fifty dollars signed by F. Smith, 1842 December 12.
- 11 Family correspondence between Robert J., Martha, and Mary Jane Chester re: an earthquake felt in Columbia, Tennessee, coursework at the Columbia Female Institute, the sighting of a comet, 1843 January -June.
- 12 Letter to Robert J. Chester from Mary Jane Chester re: Texas Volunteer Company and activities of the Democratic party, 1844 June 25; Letter from Robert J. Chester to his son re: people he should meet and network with on his trip to Nashville, Tennessee, 1870 January 12; Letter from Mollie to her sister re: her status as a newly wedded woman, 1873 January 8.
- 13 Genealogical information attributed to the Bond, Chester, and Hays families; Typed manuscript, "Chester family in Jonesboro, Tennessee in 1799."
- 14 Genealogical records of the Blair, McLin, and Chester families; Handwritten manuscript by Robert Chester to Chester Bond and Kate Bond re: family genealogy, 1880 May 20.
- 15 Genealogical records for the Chester family.

- 16 Letter from Robert J. Chester to Mrs. Ormond B. Cooper re: family genealogy, 1889 September 12. Has typed transcript.
- 17 Images of Robert J. Chester and Jane P. (Donelson) Chester.
- 18 Untitled article about Robert J. Chester in "The American Historical Magazine and Tennessee Historical Society Quarterly," vol. 8, no. 1, 1903 January. Copy.
- 19 Robert J. Chester's obituary printed in the Appeal-Avalanche, no date. Copy.
- 20 Photocopied article about Robert J. Chester from, "Lodge of sorrow," 1892 January 28.
- 21 Photocopy of a biographical sketch of Robert J. Chester.
- 22 Robert J. Chester's will, 1892 February. Copy.
- 23 "Elmwood: Home of memories," in The Jackson Sun, Jackson, Tennessee, sesquicentennial edition, 1822-1972. Copy.
- 24 "Historic Chester home near Jackson is burned," in Memphis News Scimitar, 1910 September 17. Copy.
- 25 Typed excerpts from the diary of Juliana Conner, 1827 June 7-17.
- 26 Williams, Emma Inman. "The story of Jackson & Madison County, Tennessee from the prehistoric moundbuilders [sic] to 1917." Typed excerpts.
- 27 Daughter of the American Revolution membership form of Anne (Chester) Lowrey, Los Angeles, California. Typed excerpts.
- 28 Letter to Ormond from Janie B. Jones, Santa Ana, California re: her life in California, 1904 December 30; Letter to Patsy from Janie B. Jones re: religion and marrying ugly men, undated.