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Tennessee State Library and Archives
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POLK, JAMES KNOX
(1795-1849)
COLLECTION
1815-1949

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INTRODUCTION

This collection of James Knox Polk (1795-1849) papers, member of Tennessee Senate, 1821-1823; member of Tennessee House of Representatives, 1823-1825; member of Congress, 1825-1839; Governor of Tennessee, 1839-1841; President of United States, 1844-1849, were obtained for the Manuscripts Section by Mr. and Mrs. John Trotwood Moore. Two items were given by Mr. Gilbert Govan, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and nine letters were transferred from the Governor's Papers.

The materials in this collection measure .42 cubic feet and consist of approximately 125 items. There are no restrictions on the materials.

Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the James Knox Polk Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The James Knox Polk Collection, composed of approximately 125 items and two volumes for the years 1832-1848, consist of correspondence, newspaper clippings, sketches, letter book indexes and a few miscellaneous items.

Correspondence includes letters by James K. Polk to Dr. Isaac Thomas, March 14, 1832, to General William Moore, September 24, 1841, and typescripts of ten letters to Major John P. Heiss, 1844; letters by Sarah Polk, 1832 and 1891; Joanna Rucker, 1845-1847; H. Biles to James K. Polk, 1833; William H. Polk to General Gideon J. Pillow, 1848; and a letter by Bishop Otey to Mrs. William Julius Polk, 1860.

The letter indexes for 1844-1847 are arranged alphabetically by the author and include brief descriptions of the contents of the letters. Correspondents include Robert Armstrong, George Bancroft, Thomas H. Benton, Aaron V. Brown, James Buchanan, John C. Calhoun, Lewis Cass, John Catron, J.F.H. Claiborne, George M. Dallas, Jefferson Davis, John A. Dix, Andrew Jackson Donelson, Stephen A. Douglas, John H. Eaton, A.H. Everett, Thomas Ewell, John Fairfield, Edmund P. Gaines, R.H. Gillett, Daniel Graham, Duff Green, J. George Harris, W.H. Haywood, Henry Horn, Sam Houston, C.J. Ingerson, Ralph J. Ingersoll, Andrew Jackson, Spencer Jarnagin, Cave Johnson, Reverdy Johnson, J.K. Lane, Amos Kendall, Amos Lane, S.H. Laughlin, W.L. Marcy, John Y. Mason, John M. McCalla, A.O.P. Nicholson, John Norvell, Gayton P. Osgood, John L. O'Sullivan, Robert Patterson, J.K. Paulding, Gideon J. Pillow, Leonidas Polk, William H. Polk, J.G.M. Ramsey, Thomas Ritchie, John C. Rives, Richard Rush, James E. Saunders, James Shields, John Slidell, S.S. Southworth, Joel B. Sutherland, R.B. Taney, John A. Thomas, John Tyler, Martin Van Buren, Aaron Vanderpool, C.P. Van Ness, Robert J. Walker, Samuel P. Walker, J. Whitcomb, William J. Whitthorne and Henry A. Wise.

Articles and clippings from Tennessee newspapers concern various phases of the career of James K. Polk. Sketches are available for the Polk homes in Tennessee including the James K. Polk Home in Columbia and "Polk Place" in Nashville, the former residence of Felix Grundy. Also included are sketches of Polk homes in Maury County built by sons of Revolutionary War soldier William Polk (1758-1834) of North Carolina. These homes are "Hamilton Place" built by Lucius Junius Polk (1802-1870) in 1832, "Ashwood Hall" built by Leonidas Polk (1806-1864) in 1836, and "Rattle and Snap" built by George Washington Polk (1817-1892). Another sketch concerns "Mecklenburg Place" built by Colonel Edwin Polk near Bolivar, Hardeman County, in 1820.

Miscellaneous items include depositions by James K. Polk dated 1845 and 1848; invitations to political gatherings including a barbecue for Polk in Nashville in 1838, a mass meeting in Nashville in 1844, and to the Democratic Inaugural Ball in honor of Polk and Dallas in Washington, D.C., March 4, 1845; a school certificate from Murfreesborough (Murfreesboro) Academy for James K. Polk, October 5, 1815; sketches for James K. Polk and Sarah Childress Polk; and the will of James K. Polk, February 8, 1849.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

James Knox Polk

- 1795 November 2, born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, son of Samuel and Jane (Knox) Polk.
- 1806 Moved to Duck River Valley, Maury County, Tennessee
- 1815 Entered sophomore class at University of North Carolina after attending academies in Tennessee.
- 1818 Graduated with first honors in Mathematics and Classics.
- 1818 Returned to Tennessee after his graduation and studied law in the office of Felix Grundy.
- 1820 Admitted to the bar. Became a friend of Jackson.
- 1824 January 1, married Sarah Childress, daughter of Joel Childress of Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
- 1825 Entered Congress and was messmate with Hugh L. White and John C. Calhoun, who later became bitter political enemies. Opposed policies of John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay.
- 1828 Became leader of Administration forces when Jackson became President.
- 1832 Polk made a member of the Committee of Ways and Means. Lead fight on U.S. Bank in Congress.
- 1833 December, Polk was made Chairman of Ways and Means Committee and all questions dealing with the Bank were referred to his committee. President's chief defender.
- 1834 John Bell defeated Polk in race for the office of Speaker of the House by enlisting Anti-Administration votes and thus became one of Jackson's enemies. Polk was regarded as a martyr. Became Speaker in next session of Congress. Bell, Balie Peyton, and David Crockett persecuted Polk as a Speaker. Tried to make him fight a duel.

1839-41 Governor of Tennessee. Drafted for the post as the only person who could defeat the Whigs.

1841 Defeated for Governor by James C. Jones.

1843 Defeated for Governor by James C. Jones.

1844 Elected President on Democratic ticket.

1845-49 Measures of his administration carried out: (1) Reduction of the tariff (2) Independent treasury (3) Settlement of the Oregon boundary question (4) Acquisition of California.

1846 May 11, war was declared against Mexico.

1848 United States acquired New Mexico and California by the treaty.

1848 Wilmot Proviso attached to appropriation for money to buy Mexican territory provided that slavery should be excluded from all land to be acquired by this appropriation. Expansion policy added over 5,000 square miles of territory and gave the United States free access to the Pacific. "Polk Doctrine" shielded the American continents from European aggression.

1849 June 15, died and buried in the garden of "Polk Place" in Nashville. Later removed to the grounds of the Capitol.

CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

1. Correspondence – Biles, H., 1833
2. Correspondence – Otey, J.H., 1860
3. Correspondence – Polk, James K. (12), 1832-1844
4. Correspondence – Polk, Sarah Childress (2) 1832, 1891
5. Correspondence – Polk, William H., 1848
6. Correspondence – Rucker, Joanna (12) 1845-1847
7. Court Records – Maury County Chancery Court – Deposition – Polk, James K., 1845
8. Court Records – *McKee v. Nicholson* – Deposition – Polk, James K., 1848
9. Invitation – Barbecue – Polk, James K., Nashville, Tennessee, 1838
10. Invitation – Mass Meeting – Democracy of Tennessee, Nashville, 1844
11. Invitation – Democratic Inaugural Ball, Washington, D.C., 1845
12. Memoranda – Polk, James K., 1845-1847
13. Newspaper articles – Polk, James K. and Sarah C. Polk
14. Newspaper articles – Deposition of Polk property and reinterment of President and Mrs. Polk, 1893
15. Newspaper articles – “Polk Memorial Fountain,” 1918
16. Newspaper clippings – Tennessee newspapers, 1921-1949
17. Newspaper clippings – Tennessee newspapers, 1929-1946
18. Newspaper clippings – Polk homes in Tennessee
19. Program – Monument to Three Presidents from North Carolina, 1948
20. Receipt – Board for Polk family – Ann Eliza Peyton, 1831
21. Resolutions – Purchase of James K. Polk Home, 1922-1925
22. School Record – Murfreesborough Academy – Polk, James K., 1815
23. Sketch – Polk, James Knox
24. Sketch – Polk, Sarah Childress
25. Speech – Beard, William E. – “Polk Memorial Address,” 1943
26. Will – Polk, James K., 1849

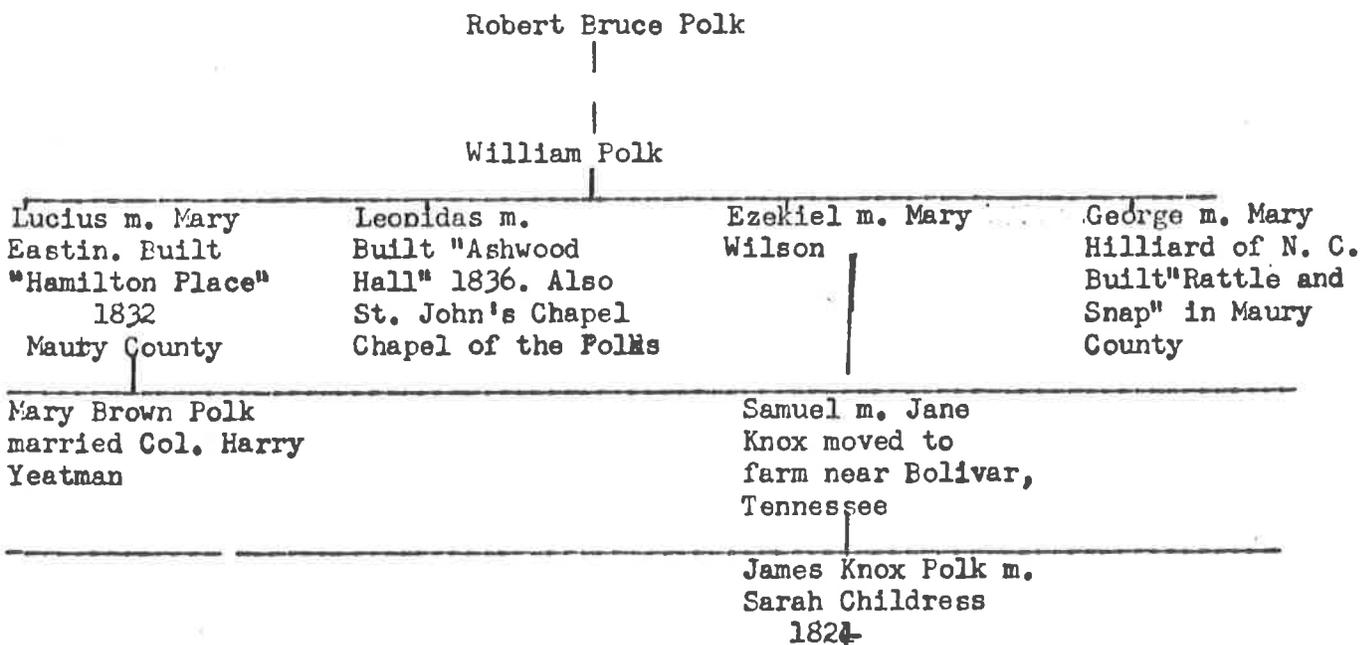
Letterbook Indexes (Wrapped Separately)

Volume I – 1844 – September 1845

Volume II – September 1845 – September 1847

JAMES KNOX POLK PAPERS

The James Knox Polk Papers composed of approximately 100 items contain very few original documents. They are primarily newspaper clippings, sketches, and a few photostats of public documents. There are some typed copies of newspaper articles a copy of an address made about Polk. There is one original letter written by William H. Polk from the City of Mexico to Major General Gideon Pillow, May 6, 1848. Some interesting newspaper clippings deal with the homes of the Polks in Tennessee. Lucius Polk built "Hamilton Place" in 1832. He married Mary Eastin, neice of Emily Donelson. Leonidas Polk built "Ashwood Hall" in 1836. George Polk built "Rattle and Snap" in 1845. He married Mary Hilliard of North Carolina. Ezekiel Polk, the grandfather of James Knox Polk married Mary Wilson and settled near Bolivar, Tennessee. These four brothers were sons of William Polk, a Revolutionary soldier, who obtained large grants of land in Tennessee which he divided between his sons. Samuel Polk, the father of James Knox Polk, married Jane Knox. James Knox Polk married Sarah Childress, daughter of a prosperous farmer near Murfreesboro, January 1, 1821.



In addition to the above materials 19 letters written by James K. Polk to Hogan and Heiss and Major John P. Heiss have been added to the collection. They are all written during the year 1844. These letters were transferred to the Manuscript Section from the Governor's Papers.