



State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives
403 Seventh Avenue North
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0312

**ORR, MARY HAMILTON THOMPSON,
PAPERS, 1791-1896,
AND ADDITION, 1779-1955**

Processed by:

Frances W. Kunstling, Harriet C. Owsley, and Elbert L. Watson
Date completed: 6-24-69

Addition processed by:

Ted Guillaum
Date completed: 5-6-98

Archives and Manuscripts Unit
Technical Services Section

Accession Numbers: 155, 287, 783, 997, 68-36, 68-16, and 94-228

Location: IV-J-2-3

Microfilm Number: 1257

INTRODUCTION

The Mary Hamilton Thompson Orr Papers, 1791-1896, and Addition 1779-1955, centers around the Hamilton, House, Morgan, Overton, Orr, Thompson, and Wilson families of Davidson County, Tennessee, Logan County, Kentucky, and Madison County, Alabama. Most of the papers were given to the Manuscript Section of the Tennessee State Library and Archives by Mrs. Samuel Holt Orr, Nashville, Tennessee, on behalf of the colonial Dames program of manuscript collection. An addition to the papers was a gift of Overton Williams, Nashville, Tennessee. The size of the collection after processing was completed on 6-24-69 was 2.10 linear feet, containing approximately 1,500 items and 8 volumes. Another addition was made in 1971 by Mrs. Robert Jordan, daughter of Mrs. Orr. This additional donation was processed and added to the original collection. The later addition pertains to the Orr family and includes the years 1779-1955. Documents included in the later addition include correspondence, applications to the Virginia Society of the Colonial Dames of America, biographical data, newspaper clippings, diaries, financial records, genealogical data, land records, legal documents, maps, military records, wills, and three photographs. The name index for correspondence does not include the correspondence found in the addition.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The original Orr Collection, containing approximately fifteen hundred items and eight volumes, spans the years 1791-1896. Most of the papers, however, are dated between 1820 and 1870. The collection is composed of correspondence, diaries, accounts, biographical data, genealogical data, invitations, land records (deeds, indentures, surveys), legal documents (agreements, estate papers, indentures, promissory notes, wills, etc.), memorabilia, newspaper clippings, notices, programs, school records, speeches, and writings. The major figures represented were members of the Hamilton, Harris, House, Morgan, Overton, Thompson, and Wilson families of Davidson County, Tennessee, Logan County, Kentucky, and Madison County, Alabama.

A sizable portion of the papers are those of George Washington House (1807-1850) of Madison County, Alabama, and Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, physician, businessman, Whig, Presbyterian, and advocate of temperance causes. There are sixty-four of House's letters, 1837-1850, most of which were written while he traveled about the South seeing patients and selling his medicines and were addressed to his wife, Mary (Hamilton) House (later Thompson). Although he began his career as a businessman, by December 30, 1842, House was writing his wife, "You wish to know whether or not I am initiated [into the medical profession]. Answer--I know enough." He also urged her to send him any "incurables" whom she might know. In an interesting letter of March 13, 1843, House asked Mary if she had seen the new comet in the west which was causing so much speculation. He described it as "the longest comet we have any knowledge of - it's tail is estimated to be above one hundred and fifty million of miles in length." Other subjects of interest in George W. House's correspondence include medical advice; family news; his travels throughout the South; the debts of his business, "Berine and House"; a detailed description of Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1840; and the cholera epidemic in Nashville in 1850.

The journal of George W. House, which he kept during 1830/1840, is another important part of the Orr Collection. The entries, beginning June 19, 1839, indicate much about the everyday occupations of antebellum Southerners, their visiting, church attendance, reading and writing habits, and games. House's diary also chronicles the extensive trips which he and Mrs. House made to visit relatives in Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee. A dedicated Whig, House recorded his political views in his journal. On June 22, 1839, he wrote, "It is thought here by many that Cannon will beat Polk at from seven to twelve thousand votes[in the Tennessee gubernatorial election]. True principles must and will triumph." On August 2, 1839, he lamented the election of Cave Johnson to Congress and called him a "subtreasurite Van Buren whole hog." James K. Polk, House considered "Tennessee's great humbuger." Another entry shows House a man of foresight in regard to the South's future; on March 4, 1840, he "endeavored to persuade my Brother to drop Cotton and cultivate Hemp. The farmers are all wrong." Other of George W. House's papers in the collection are a letter book dated 1840 and accounts for the years 1831-1852.

George W. House's wife, Mary (Hamilton) House (later Thompson), is represented in the Orr Collection by twenty-eight letters written from 1839 to 1880, many of which are addressed to her husband. Probably the most interesting subject of Mary House's correspondence is Jenny Lind's visit to Nashville in 1851. On March 31, 1851, the Swedish Nightingale was in Nashville preparing for two concerts, one to be given that evening and one on April 2. Mrs. House wrote that "every hotel and boarding house in the city are ful[sic] and the cry is 'still the come' the town will be literally cramed [sic]." She also reported that P. T. Barnum had been in Nashville and held an auction of concert tickets in the Odd Fellows' Hall. Mary House paid the high (for that day) price of \$5.00 for her ticket; but the prize one had been bought by Mr. Turner for \$200.00. The excitement caused by Jenny Lind's appearances is indicated by Mrs. House's description of crowds in Nashville. "You cannot imagine what a crowd we have in N[ashville]. The square and the streets near the square, are thronged almost equal to Broadway for almost the entire population of the surrounding country, both village, town, and hamlet are now with us, and from neighboring states."

Like her husband, Mary (Hamilton) House saw the comet which appeared in the spring of 1843 and commented in her letters about when and where it could be seen and how its appearance alarmed people. With relatives spread about the South, Mrs. House had to travel a great deal in order to visit them. In February of 1846 she visited her brother and sister-in-law, Oscar and Sigismunda Mary (Taylor) Hamilton, in Clinton, Mississippi. Letters written en route describe her journey from Nashville to Memphis via the Cumberland River, the boat trip down the Mississippi River from Memphis to Vicksburg, and the train ride from Vicksburg overland to Clinton. In other letters Mary House wrote about the cholera epidemic that raged in Nashville in 1850. On June 24 she observed that "...as last year, it is confined to that portion of the city south of Broad south." By July 16, however, with only three to six or eight deaths over a period of twenty-four hours, she could report that the epidemic was subsiding. George W. House himself died in September of 1850, but the cause is listed as fever, not cholera. By the late summer of 1851 his widow was writing her brother Joseph Daviess Hamilton (1826-1855) about her impending marriage with the thrice widowed John Thompson (1793-1876) of Nashville.

In 1851 Joseph D. Hamilton was traveling extensively in Europe. Six letters written to his mother and sister describe his journey from Nashville to New York, life on board the *Waterloo* as he crossed the Atlantic, and the places which he visited in Great Britain and on the continent. There are also in the collection two small diaries kept by Hamilton during his travels abroad. Seven other letters of Joseph D. Hamilton, dated 1837-1852, tell about his studies, local news of Nashville, and Russellville, Kentucky, and family news.

The father of Joseph D. Hamilton and Mary (Hamilton) House Thompson, Joseph Daviess Hamilton (1782-1827) of Russellville, Logan County, Kentucky, was a teacher, farmer, and agent for the Bank of Kentucky. He is represented in these papers by fourteen letters written from 1806-1827, most of which are addressed to his wife Sally Bedinger (Morgan) Hamilton. In one letter written in February, 1807, to an unknown recipient, he

included a most interesting defense of slavery. According to Hamilton, a man should own slaves to aid and uplift them. "I do not know," he wrote, "of a better way for an individual to do than to own as many [slaves] as he can treat humanly, or if he can, liberate them at a certain age." If, however, self-interest was one's only motive, Hamilton felt that he did not need to have slaves. Other subjects of interest in his correspondence include family news; news of Russellville, Kentucky; the Logan and Newton Academies in Logan County; the teaching profession; his problems in collecting bank debts; and advice to his wife about managing their farm during his business trips.

Joseph Daviess and Sally B. Hamilton's second son, Mortimer, moved from Russellville to Nashville in 1829. There are nine of his letters, 1829-1854, addressed to various members of his family. Writing to his brother Joseph Daviess Hamilton on February 28, 1851, Mortimer urges "Jo" to attempt the sale of East Tennessee Mining and Manufacturing Company stock while traveling in New York and France. Other members of the Hamilton family with correspondence in the Orr Collection are two more of Mary (Hamilton) House Thompson's brothers, Oscar and James M. Hamilton; her mother, Sally B. Hamilton; her aunt, Mary H. Hamilton; her uncle, James M. Hamilton; and her sisters-in-law, Emmeline (Hill) and Sigismunda Mary (Taylor) Hamilton.

The oldest son of John and Mary (Hamilton) House Thompson, whose name was also John Thompson (1852-1919), married Mary McConnell Overton, the grand-daughter of Judge John Overton (1766-1833). This explains the presence of some Overton family correspondence in the Orr Manuscripts. There is one letter, 1828, written by Judge Overton; six written by his son John Overton (1821-1898); one written by his brother Samuel Overton; and two written by John W. Overton. A letter from a Confederate soldier, headed "In Line of Battle Near Nashville Tenn. Dec. 6th 1864," and addressed to his sisters, was possibly written by Judge Overton's grandson John (1842-1906). Writing when there was little hope for the Confederacy, the soldier explained why he continued to fight. "No I could never submit to negro [sic] equality, or see our women insulted & degraded to a level [sic] with the slave....For what am I fighting?...I strike for freedom - our women - a nationality & existence, all of which are threatened...."

Six letters, 1830-1837, from John Samuel Claybrooke, Judge John Overton's nephew and the executor of his estate, tell about Claybrooke's journey from Virginia to "Travelers' Rest" in 1830, his plans for the future, his engagement to Mary A. Perkins, Judge Overton, the Overton estate and other family news. One of Claybrooke's letters contains information about a cholera epidemic in Nashville in 1833. He wrote that "There were as many as 60 cases of Cholera in a day, in the little town of Nashville. Many of its most conspicuous, enterprising and valuable citizens have died with this malady. Eighty, out of 83 convicts in the Penitentiary had the Cholera."

A letter of special interest was written by W. H. Gordon to Albert W. Harris on October 3, 1865. A resident of Okolona, Chickasaw County, Mississippi, Gordon wrote about agricultural conditions--cotton yields, prices per acre of plantations, etc.--in his area right after the Civil War. Especially illuminating are Gordon's comments about Negro labor, including the amount a laborer could cultivate, the wages paid him, and the

provisions supplied him. In writing about the conditions of the Negro in 1865, Gordon observed, "I am bitterly opposed to Class Legislation, as injurious to both parties. If the Negro is to remain in the country among us (which I am bitterly opposed to and in which I can see another revolution) we cannot avoid placing him on an equality with the whites, politically." Other correspondents of note in the Orr Collection include Campbell Brown, William G. Brownlow, Terry H. Cahal (1802-1851), Fortunatus Cosby (1765-1846), William Eustis, Presley Underwood Ewing, John McCormick Lea, John Christmas McLemore, and John Brown McEwen. For a complete listing of all correspondents, see the index in this register.

In addition to the diaries of George W. House and Joseph D. Hamilton, there is a diary kept by Fannie Wilson and one kept by her brother Thomas Black Wilson, both of Cottage Home, Davidson County, Tennessee. Fannie Wilson's diary is for the year 1859 when she was traveling in the northeastern United States. The entries record her visits to the Hudson River, West Point, Lake George, Lake Champlain, Niagara Falls, New York City, Washington, D. C., and Richmond Virginia. She writes about seeing Charles Blondin cross Niagara Falls on a cable in July, 1859, and describes Mount Vernon and the White House as they were in 1859. Thomas Wilson's diary was begun February 3, 1855, when he was seventeen years old and just taking over the management of his family's farm. Entries give brief comments about the planting of crops in the spring, weather conditions, Wilson's everyday occupations, family news, and important events in the states and nation.

Other papers in this collection include accounts, 1791-1896, for the following: James M. Hamilton, Joseph Daviess Hamilton (1791-1827), Joseph Daviess Hamilton (1826-1855), Sally B. Hamilton, George W. House, Abraham Morgan, John Thompson, Mary (Hamilton) House Thompson, and the Harris family. There are obituaries for Joseph D. Hamilton (1826-1855), Sally B. Hamilton, George W. House, and James Hamilton House and genealogical data about the Bedinger, Hamilton, House, Maxwell, Morgan, Orr, Overton, Swearengen, Thompson, White, Waller, and other related families. There are also land records for the Hamilton, Harris, House, Morgan, Overton, Thompson, and Wilson families and for James Coghlin. Legal documents include estate papers of Sally B. Hamilton and George W. House; two wills, 1840 and 1854, of Winefred Caroline (Powell) House; papers relating to the pardon of John Overton (1821-1898) after the Civil War, including a parole and pardon signed by Andrew Johnson; and legal papers of the Hamilton, House, Morgan, Overton Thompson, and Wilson families. In the data about schools are accounts, 1858-1860, for Sally Morgan House with the Nashville Female Academy and documents transferring land to Pleasant Grove Seminary and Washington Institute, both in Davidson County, Tennessee. Most of the rest of the Orr papers are composed of invitations, memorandums, memorabilia, newspaper clippings, notices, programs, and poetry.

ADDITION, 1779-1955

The addition to the collection was donated in 1971 by Mrs. Robert Jordan, measures 1/2 cubic foot and spans the years 1779-1955. Correspondence makes up about 1/3 of the addition and is arranged alphabetically by sender. The name index for correspondence does not include the correspondence found in this addition. Applications to the Virginia Society of Colonial Dames of America pertain to Martha Overton Dickinson and Mary Hamilton Thompson Orr. There are two biographical sketches describing Richard Clough Anderson, Sr., who was born January 12, 1750 and died in 1791. The sketch of Captain William Morgan was written by Mrs. Augusta Morgan Phillips and presented as a speech at a D. A. R. meeting. Diaries include a small diary signed on the last page by Sam Orr for the year 1857. The remaining documents in the diary folder include three individual items for the year 1866 but authorship is unknown. Financial records contain 28 documents, including the oldest document in the addition to the collection which is a receipt dated September 15, 1779. Genealogical data begins with an ancestral chart from Mary Orr Jordan (1809-1829), and includes 5 generations. The remainder of the genealogical data contains notes on various families including the Claiborne, Hill, Maxwell, Morgan, Orr, Overton, Sevier, and White families. Land records are arranged chronologically and include grants, indentures, warranty deeds and deeds of trust. Legal documents are three in number. The first records the sale of a slave woman named Evaline, age about 15, belonging to William J. Morton. The remaining two documents include a small claim for livestock and an acknowledgment of a cash gift from Martha C. Ewing to Mattie Lon Allen. There are copies of three wills included in the collection relating to Hugh Lawson, Sr., William Morgan, and Thomas Overton. There are four photographs that are identified as Sam Orr; Ada Holt Orr, mother of Sam H. Orr; Ada Holt, wife of Sam; and the tombstone of Col. Morgan (1760-1815).

There are no restrictions on the use of the materials in this collection.

CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

Accounts

1. Hamilton, James M.--1809-1888
2. Hamilton, Joseph Daviess (1782-1827)--n. d.; 1807-1819
3. Hamilton, Joseph Daviess (1782-1827)--1820-1828
4. Hamilton, Joseph Daviess (1826-1855)--1842-1860
5. Hamilton, Sally Bedinger (Morgan)--n.d.; 1828-1852
6. Harris, family--n.d.; 1864-April, 1872
7. Harris, family--May, 1872-1896
8. House, George Washington--1831-1852
9. Morgan, Abraham--1791-1819
10. Thompson, John (1793-1876)--n.d.; 1821-1856
11. Thompson, Mary (Hamilton) House--1851-1889
12. General--n.d.; 1814-1866
13. Cash Book--1860-1867

Box 2

Correspondence

1. Author unknown
2. Alexander-Beirne
3. Bibb-Cage
4. Cahal-Charlton
5. Clark-Currin
6. Dawson-Freeman
7. Gamble-Hamilton
8. Hamilton, Joseph Daviess (1782-1827)--n.d.; 1806-1827
9. Hamilton, Joseph Daviess (1826-1855)--1837-1852
10. Hamilton, Joseph Daviess-Hamilton, Mary H.
11. Hamilton, Mortimer-Hamilton, T. H.
12. Hannum-Hill

Box 3

1. House, George Washington--n.d.; 1837-1839
2. House, George Washington--1840-1843
3. House, George Washington--1844-1850
4. House, Sally Morgan-Latham
5. Lawrence-Moore
6. Morgan-Overton
7. Parson-Robinson
8. Ross-Taylor
9. Thompson, Annie-Thompson, Lawrence
10. Thompson, Mary (Hamilton) House--n.d.; 1839-1846
11. Thompson, Mary (Hamilton) House--1848-1880
12. Thompson, Sam M. Yerger
13. Letterbook--House, George Washington--1840

Box 4

1. Biographical data--Obituaries-- Hamilton, Joseph Davies (1826-1855); Sally Bedinger (Morgan) Hamilton; George Washington House; James Hamilton House
2. Confederate Bond
3. Diaries-- Hamilton, Joseph Davies (1826-1855)--1851
4. Diary--House, George Washington--1839/1840
5. Diaries--Wilson, Fannie--1859; Thomas Black Wilson--1851
6. Genealogical data--Bedinger, Hamilton, House, Morgan, Orr Overton, Thompson, and related families
7. Invitations, notices, and programs
8. Land records--Coghlin, James--1796-1803
9. Land records--Hamilton family--1817-1879
10. Land records--Harris family--1871-1888
11. Land records--House family--1834-1850
12. Land records--Morgan family--n.d.; 1816
13. Land records--Overton family--1818-1845
14. Land records--Thompson family--1867-1884
15. Land records--Wilson family--1848-1857

Box 5

1. Legal documents--Hamilton, Sally Bedinger (Morgan)--Estate papers, 1853
2. Legal documents--Hamilton family--1815-1879
3. Legal documents--House, George Washington--Estate papers, 1851-1854
4. Legal documents--House, Winefred Caroline (Powell)--Wills, 1840-1854
5. Legal documents--Overton, John (1821-1898)--re: pardon after Civil War
6. Legal documents--House, Morgan, Overton, Thompson, and Wilson families--1802-1882
7. Legal documents--n.d.; 1807-1895
8. Memoranda and memorabilia
9. Newspaper--Nashville Dispatch, September 13, 1863
10. Newspaper clippings--re: John Wilkes Booth and visit to Shy's Hill
11. Photograph--Mary Hamilton (Thompson) Orr and grandmother Mary (Hamilton) House Thompson
12. Poetry
13. Schools--Nashville Female Academy--Accounts, 1858-1860
14. Schools--Pleasant grove Seminary and Washington Institute
15. Speeches and writings

Box 6

ADDITION, 1779-1955

1. Correspondence--Allison - Dickinson
2. Correspondence--Edwards - Hunter
3. Correspondence--Latham - Musser
4. Correspondence--Orr, James
5. Correspondence--Orr, John Jr.
6. Correspondence--Orr, John Sr.
7. Correspondence--Orr, Mary
8. Correspondence--Orr, Mary Buchanan
9. Correspondence--Orr, Metta
10. Correspondence--Orr, Robert
11. Correspondence--Orr, W. F.
12. Correspondence--Overton - White
13. Correspondence--Author unknown
14. Correspondence--Fragments
15. Applications--Virginia Society, Colonial Dames of America

Box 6
Continued

- 16.** Biographical data--Richard Clough Anderson and Captain William Morgan
- 17.** Clippings
- 18.** Diaries
- 19.** Financial records--1770-1936
- 20.** Genealogical data
- 21.** Land records--1759-1906
- 22.** Legal documents--1817-1902
- 23.** Map--Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, VA
- 24.** Military record--Alfred N. King
- 25.** Wills--Hugh Lawson, Sr., William Morgan, and Thomas Overton
- 26.** Photographs