



State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives

Jeff McCarn
Papers,
1884-1910

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:

McCarn, Jeff, 1867-1942

Inclusive Dates:

1884-1910, bulk 1909-1910

Scope & Content:

Collection consists largely of correspondence from individuals to Jefferson (Jeff) McCarn (1867-1942) during his political career as Davidson County attorney general. These letters support McCarn in his endeavors to promote prohibition, fight lawlessness, and attain political office. Noteworthy is the praise he received for successfully prosecuting Duncan and Robin Cooper for murder. (f. 6, f. 8, f. 14)

McCarn served as chief prosecutor during the Cooper-Carmack trial of 1909. Duncan and Robin Cooper, father and son, were convicted of murdering newspaper publisher and former U.S. Senator Edward Ward Carmack. Letters and telegrams offer congratulations on McCarn's oratory, argument, and victory. J. J. Odil claimed McCarn's "part in this great case should and will lift you toward the place you so much deserve in the confidence and esteem of the pick of this public." Another writer congratulated him on his, "brilliant victory." (f. 6)

Poet and local columnist Will Allen Dromgoole wrote to McCarn just after Thanksgiving 1908, apparently in response to a complimentary letter, "When I wrote the little verses I felt particularly desolate; I think I always do at the holiday time." She goes on to mention how grateful she is for her work at the *Nashville Banner*, where she is "among clear fair newspapermen." (f. 4)

Several letters are from members and clergymen of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Lee Parrish wrote to McCarn on January 25, 1906, “to commend, in the highest terms, your address to the Methodist ministers of the city on the gambling evil.” (f. 3) After McCarn announced his candidacy for governor in 1909, E. E. Hoss Jr. indicates he can provide a church membership list for McCarn because it is his “observation that where a man starts out with the preachers and women with him, he begins with a pretty good asset from which to build a stiff fight, whether of a political nature, or otherwise.” (f. 9)

McCarn’s enforcement of prohibition laws was commended by men and women alike. Numerous letters reference the fight against the “Whisky Ring” and the liquor problem. McCarn especially received support from the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Corporate Secretary Emma E. Johnson of the East Nashville chapter writes to “express the sincere appreciation of every member of our Union for the brave stand you are making.” (f. 5) Two affidavits in this collection provide testimony about purchasing alcohol at numerous taverns in order to provide evidence for the attorney general.

There were several people who wrote letters to endorse McCarn for governor. These enthusiastic letters pledged support for his election and a determination that he should be victorious. Some of these supporters offered campaign advice, suggesting that he seek the support of specific groups or regions. J. M. Hatfield hoped “to see you get every Carmack man, and every other man who is against the saloon and in favor of the enforcement of the law.” (f. 9) D. S. Adams of Cumberland City stated that if McCarn were governor, “the pardon mill would have a rest & the law would be enforced in Davidson, as well as Lake County—gentlemanly murderers of Davidson County would have their legs chained to cots alongside ignorant night riders from Lake County.” (f. 14)

McCarn dropped out of the governor’s race and became a candidate for judge of the criminal court. He was defeated in that election, and numerous letters offer condolences for the loss and encouragement for the future. William Hughes claims that McCarn was “beaten by money, whisky, and negroes, a very potent combination.” (f. 17) J. D. McKnight, the secretary of the Humboldt Democratic Club, praises McCarn saying, “your name is the password among the children for merit, the key word of the youth for good society, the monogram of the mother on the gold and silver plate in the home, the Cincinnatus of every honest man who plows the row, and drives the nail.” (f. 17)

Physical Description/Extent:

0.25 cubic feet/18 folders

Accession/Record Group Number:

2000-047

Language:

English

Permanent Location:

X-M-1

Repository:

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

Administrative/Biographical History

Jefferson (Jeff) McCarn (1867-1942) was born in Marshall, Arkansas, but the family moved to Texas when he was nine. His father was a Confederate veteran. According to historian Will T. Hale, McCarn “had few school advantages during his boyhood, and at his father’s death he was thrown upon his own resources” to support his mother and siblings. After working on a ranch and doing some preparatory school work, he attended Vanderbilt University Law School and graduated in 1894. McCarn was elected attorney general for the Tenth Judicial District (Davidson County) in 1908. His term was characterized by promoting prohibition and fighting corruption.

McCarn served as chief prosecutor in the Cooper-Carmack trial (1909) that led to the convictions of Duncan Cooper and his son, Robin, for the murder of publisher Edward Ward Carmack. During the fight over prohibition, Carmack had insulted the elder Cooper in an editorial. On November 9, 1908, the three men met face-to-face on a downtown Nashville street corner. Fearing an ambush, Carmack shot at the pair and wounded Robin. The younger man returned fire, killing Carmack instantly. One of McCarn’s admirers remembered “how poor Mr. Carmack was shot down like a wild beast.” (f. 14)

Following the trial, McCarn was in a strong position to run for governor as a Democrat in the 1910 election, but withdrew his candidacy when he was nominated for judge of the county criminal court. McCarn was defeated in that race, but his public service continued when he was appointed district attorney for the Territory of Hawaii in 1913.

McCarn married Mary D. Allison on October 9, 1895. They had three children: Corneille, Andrew Allison, and Mary D. McCarn. Jeff McCarn died in 1942.

Organization/Arrangement of Materials

Items are arranged chronologically

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

No restrictions

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

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Index Terms

Personal Names:

Cooper, Duncan Brown -- Trials, litigation, etc.
Cooper, Robin, -1919 -- Trials, litigation, etc.
Carmack, Edward Ward, 1858-1901 -- Political activity
McCarn, Jeff -- Correspondence

Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:

Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Tennessee Conference -- Records and correspondence
Woman's Christian Temperance Union -- Records and correspondence
Vanderbilt University -- Records and correspondence

Subjects:

Political campaigns -- Tennessee -- History -- 20th century
Prohibition -- United States -- History
Temperance -- Societies, etc. -- Tennessee

Geographic Names:

Davidson County (Tenn.) -- Politics and government -- 20th century
Nashville (Tenn.) -- Trials, litigation, etc.
Tennessee -- Politics and government -- 20th century

Document Types:

Correspondence
Affidavits

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition:

The papers were purchased from Peggy Dillard, Nashville, Tennessee, in 2000.

Processing and Administrative Information

Preferred Citation:

Jeff McCarn Papers, 1884-1910, Tennessee State Library and Archives

Processing Information:

Processing completed by Rachel Smith in November 2012. Finding aid revised by Rebecca Domm, February 2015.

Related Archival Materials:

Jefferson McCarn Papers, MS.2759. Special Collections, University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Tennessee

Electronic Location and Access:

<http://www.tn.gov/tsla/history/manuscripts/findingaids/2000-047.pdf>

DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Box	Folder
Correspondence -- Clagett and Brothers to H. J. Princess [?]	June 9, 1884	1	1
Correspondence, Incoming	1904	1	2
Correspondence, Incoming	1906	1	3
Correspondence, Incoming	1908	1	4
Correspondence, Incoming	Feb. 1909	1	5
Correspondence, Incoming	March 1909	1	6
Correspondence, Incoming	April 1909	1	7
Correspondence, Incoming	May 1909	1	8
Correspondence, Incoming	July 1909	1	9
Correspondence, Incoming	Sept. 1909	1	10
Correspondence, Incoming	Oct. 1909	1	11
Correspondence, Incoming	Nov. 1909	1	12
Correspondence, Incoming	Dec. 1909	1	13
Correspondence, Incoming	Feb. 1910	1	14
Correspondence, Incoming	May 1910	1	15
Correspondence, Incoming	July 1910	1	16
Correspondence, Incoming	Aug. 1910	1	17
Correspondence, Incoming	Undated	1	18