State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives
403 Seventh Avenue North
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FORT FAMILY PAPERS
1710-1962

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INTRODUCTION

The Fort family papers center around the descendants of Elias Fort (1730-1819) who came to Robertson County, Tennessee, from North Carolina in 1789. They were given to the Tennessee State Library and Archives by two members of the seventh generation from Elias Fort: Mrs. Nelson Trabue and Mrs. Oren Oliver, Jr., both of Nashville, Tennessee.

The materials in this finding aid measure 1.68 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials. Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Fort Family Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Fort family papers, 1710-1962, containing 11 volumes, 2 pamphlets, and approximately 300 items, consist of accounts, Bible records, correspondence, genealogical data, school records and school papers, a few church records, a sermon, sermon notes and religious essays, documents, a few photographs, wills, sketches, etc., dealing with the Fort family of Robertson County, Tennessee.

In the papers is a write-up of a Fort family reunion at Fort's Station, Robertson County, Tennessee, 1884, and included with this are reminiscences of Joel B. Fort (1854-1934) telling of his great-great-grandfather, Elias Fort (1730-1819), who came to Robertson County, Tennessee, in 1789. He and his married sons and daughters and their families, bringing with them their slaves, horses, cattle, and all other belongings, left Edgecombe County, North Carolina, and moved to Robertson County, Tennessee, where they prospered and, along with the other settlers on Sulphur Fork of Red River, had a thriving, well-ordered community around Turnersville and Port Royal as early as 1800.

Nine of the volumes in the collection are journals with various types of entries and belonging to different generations of this family. The earliest one, with only a few entries, belonged to Elias Fort (1730-1819) and the first entry, a promissory note, is dated 1791. Most of the other volumes belonged to his great-grandson, Josiah William Fort (1833-1887), farmer, county judge, and Baptist Minister. In one little volume are his notes for history class at the Elk Fork Academy, Robertson County, Tennessee, 1847; two have entries of farm and household expenses; another has a few entries, 1858-1862, in regard to his church, the Red River Baptist, such as a list of contributors to the church; and another, Bible verses that are applicable to such attributes as humility, justice, etc.

An account book, 1837-1860, belonging to Charles Metcalfe, brother-in-law of Joel B. Fort (1805-1867), has records of his carpentry and blacksmith work and lists of men who worked at his mill. This volume also contains lists of the bills for Elk Fork Academy, 1849-1852, along with records of the financial condition of the school and money paid to the "preceptors", John G. Wilson and F. M. Carmack.

An account book that belonged to Charles Henry Fort (1861-1938), a son of Josiah William Fort, the minister, has entries of farm accounts from 1899-1901, and journal entries of daily events from 1894-1905. One entry comments, "We begin this century with a telephone in our house giving us talking connection with the outside world. Can stand in our house and converse 200 miles easily. We all wonder what invention of this century can be more wonderful than this one." On page 167 of this journal is a note on the history of the Dark Fired Tobacco District Planters Protective Association of Kentucky and Tennessee.

Included is a volume of the Elk Fork Academy with the rules and regulations of the school, attendance records, list of classes, bills of patrons, etc., for the years 1848-1854.

One volume in the collection is the family Bible which originally belonged to John Thomas (1710-1776) and in the 1750's was carried from Nansemond County, Virginia to Edgecombe County, North Carolina, and about 1791, traveled onward to Robertson

County, Tennessee. Before being given to the Manuscript Section of the Tennessee State Library and Archives, it was the property of Miss Jane M. Fort, Adams, Tennessee.

There are 18 documents covering the years 1770-1879, which include bills of sale, land deeds, promissory notes, indentures, and the marriage bond, 1770, of Jacob Dickinson and Mourning Thomas. Included are 10 copies of family wills dating from 1761 to 1824.

The collection includes 10 school compositions, 1849-1850, and a valedictory, n.d., of Josiah William Fort (1833-1887) as well as one of his sermons, 1861, and several religious essays and sermon notes (1861-1867). There are report cards (1871-1874) from Cumberland University, Lebanon, Tennessee, for Joel B. Fort (1854-1934), and three unsigned school addresses which were probably his. There is a list, 1867, of articles sold from the estate of Joel B. Fort (1805-1867) with the price and to whom each item was sold.

Correspondence includes 34 incoming letters, 1805-1962, which are principally concerned with family affairs. A few are concerned with church business, one in 1887, complimenting Brother Josiah W. Fort on the good response of his flock. One of particular interest is written from New Orleans, June, 10,1850, to Felix Grundy McKay, probably from his brother-in-law, George Seay, on his way to California. He writes, " the Cuba boys are thick in the city" and he mentions seeing Bob Wheat and says the wound he is laboring under appears to be slight. He speaks of the difficulties of getting his ticket on board ship for passage through the Canal, which route William Walker (1824-1860), who came to see him in New Orleans, had told him was preferable to going around the Horn.

Outgoing correspondence includes 23 letters, 1829-1875, dealing with family affairs. Most of these letters are from the mother and sister of Huldah Fort away at school in the Nashville Female Academy and are full of news, advice, etc.

There is a volume of genealogy on the Fort and allied families; and genealogical notes on the Wharton, Seay, Metcalfe, and Fort families.

Included is a pamphlet, "History of the Dickinson Road", which has an account of Jacob Dickinson (1751-1816), a forebear of the Forts, who built a Baptist Meeting House on the road from Nashville to Goodlettsville, Tennessee, which now bears his name, erroneously spelled "Dickerson."

Miscellaneous items include a sketch of Haysborough, "Nashville earliest competitor", which appeared in the Nashville Banner, Saturday, February 10, 1912; a biographical sketch of the Honorable Jesse Wharton (1776-1833), jurist and statesman; and a clipping from the Houston Post, September 9, 1962, about Obedience (Fort) Smith (ca. 1772-ca. 1844), the mother of Ben Fort Smith, hero of the battle of San Jacinto, and grandmother of Benjamin Franklin Terry, commander of Terry's Texas Rangers.

Included with the miscellaneous items is a tiny pamphlet, The Manual of the First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, 1847, which gives it declaration of faith, its deacons, etc., occupants of pews, and names of members in the order in which they were admitted. There is a broadside, n.d., announcing Joel B. Fort's talks in Virginia on behalf of the Tobacco Grower's Association.

CONTAINER LIST

Microfilm Roll #1

Box 1

1. Dickinson-Fort Family Bible, 1710-1822 (original owner, John Thomas, 1710-1776)

Box 2

1. Bible records – Dickinson and Thomas families
2. Bible records – Flowers family
3. Bible records – Fort family
4. Bible records – McKay family
5. Bible records – Metcalfe family
6. Bible records – Seay family
7. Correspondence – Incoming, 1805-1962
8. Correspondence – Outgoing, 1829-1875
9. Correspondence – Outgoing – Fort, Nancy (Metcalfe)
10. Correspondence – Outgoing – Fort, Piety
11. Documents, 1770-1879
12. Genealogical notes
13. Genealogical notes – Fort family
14. Genealogical notes – Metcalfe family
15. Genealogical notes – Wharton family
16. Genealogy – Fort and related families
17. Guardian papers, 1876-1889

Box 3

1. Account book – 1847-1860 (with Elk Fork Academy school accounts, 1849-1852)
2. Account book – 1899-1901 (with some diary entries, 1894-1905)
3. Accounts – Bills, receipts, notes, etc., 1826-1882
4. Diaries, memoirs, etc. – 5 volumes, 1791-1863
5. Elk Fork Academy – Register, 1848-1854
6. School notes – 1847
7. School report cards – 1871-1874

Box 4

1. Church records, 1878-1882
2. Estate papers, 1867
3. Fort, Josiah W. – letter to Church, n.d.
4. “History of the Dickinson Road”
5. Photographs (members of the family)
6. School compositions and address, Josiah W. Fort, 1849-1851
7. Sermons and religious essays – Josiah W. Fort, 1861-1883

8. Sermon notes, 1872-1881
9. Miscellaneous
10. Sketches – Biographical – Wharton, Jesse, and Obedience Smith
11. Sketches – General – Fort family reunion, 1884
12. Sketches – Places – Haysborough
13. Valedictory – Red River High School, n.d.
14. Wills, 1761-1824

NAME INDEX

This is a name index of the incoming correspondence only in the Fort Family Papers, together with the dates of the letters. The figures in parentheses denote the number of letters, if more than one. The last numbers refer to the box and folder in which the material is to be found. This correspondence is to be found in Box 2, folder 7.

Bainbridge, A., 1822, re: Truth and his persecutors; church business
Carr, Charles, 1841, re: his father's estate
Carr, Will C., 1842, re: Kentucky money worth more than Tennessee money, etc.
Doak, A. S., 1875, re: his awe at prospect of entering the ministry
Fort, C. H. (2), 1879-1881, re: health of his sister and one of his patients; affection for his brother
Fort, John T., 1872, re: accounts to be collected
Fort, John, 1937, re: William Fort and origin of Tennessee's name
Fort, William, 1860, re: recommending his son to his brother, J. B. Fort
Green, Nathan, 1837, re: grades of Mr. Fort's son at Cumberland University; recommending the school
Gorham, T. J., 1827, re: advantages of education
Hall, E. C., 1861, re: hard times; no Baptist minister in her locality, etc.
Horton, Henry H., 1933, re: appreciation for work of Joel B. Fort as Inspector at large of petroleum products of State of Tennessee
Janie (2), 1887-1889, re: family news
Love, Joseph, 1840, re: his life in Texas
McConnico, Garner, 1819, re: church and family news
Metcalfe, Thomas (3), 1831-1832, re: claim against estate of Ilai Metcalfe
Nichol, J., 1805, re: a young man's arithmetic ability and terms at which he can be hired
Peay, Austin, 1926, re: his appreciation of Joel B. Fort's compliments
"Pink", 1846, re: her gay social season in Memphis (?)
Ralph, 1962, re: 18 calls made on relations within 50 miles, Robertson County, Tennessee
Seay, Amanda, 1862, re: trip to Elkton to see Sammy Seay in the Confederate Army
Seay, George, 1850, re: events in New Orleans, Bob Wheat, price of voyage through Panama Canal, etc.
Seay, John, 1847, re: asking his sister to confide in his wife
Seay, Samuel, 1852, re: family affairs
Seay, Sammy, 1863, re: his discharge and reenlistment in the Confederate Army
Shackleford, P. M., n.d., re: cousinly advice and family news
Webber, A. W., 1887, re: church work; compliments to Brother J. W. Fort for the good response of his flock
Winters, Ralph L., 1962, re: "Marcus" in Robertson County, Tennessee
Young, William C., 1837, re: family news

This is a name index of the outgoing correspondence only in the Fort Family Papers, together with the dates of the letters. The figures in parentheses denote the number of letters, if more than one. The last numbers refer to the box and folder in which the material is to be found in Box 2.

Fort, E. P., 1875, re: family news, 8
Fort, J. B., n.d., re: work on the farm, 8
Fort, Nancy Carr (Metcalfe) (8), 1858-1860, re: family news and advice to her daughter, Huldah, in Nashville Female Academy, 9
Fort, Piety (9), 1858-1859, re: family news, her sister's news from the Nashville Female Academy, etc., 10
Fort, W. D., 1875, re: family, 8
Morrison, B. A., 1866, re: family news, 8
Seay, Samuel, 1829, 1852 (2), re: his idea of a perfect wife; enclosing bill of freight to Major A. J. Donalson (sic), 8

This is a chart showing only the direct line from the two donors of the papers back seven generations to Elias Fort, the head of the family in Robertson County, Tennessee, in 1789.

Elias Fort
1730-1819
m.
Sarah Sugg
1738-1802

Josiah Fort
1762-1848
m.
Piety Horn

Joel B. Fort
1805-1867
m.
Nancy Metcalfe
1809-1860

Josiah William Fort
1833-1887
m.
Eliza Penelope Dancy
1834-1882

Joel Battle Fort
1854-1934
m.
Sallie McKay

Duncan McKay Fort
1893-
m.
Sarah Lee Kirkpatrick
1896-

Mary Leslie Fort
1922-
m.
Oren Oliver, Jr.
1919-

Ida Garrett Fort
1886-1954
m.
Walter O. Carlisle
1880-1955

Jane Carlisle
1922-
m.
Nelson Trabue