Guide to the Henry Clay letter
MSS.0310

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December 19, 2012
Describing Archives: A Content Standard
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Summary Information

Repository          W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama
Creator            Clay, Henry, 1777-1852
Title              Henry Clay letter
Date               1844 July 1
Extent             0.05 Linear feet (1 item; typescript copy)
Language           English
Abstract           Typescript copy of a letter written by Clay, dated 1 July 1844, from his plantation, Ashland, in Lexington, Kentucky, to Stephen F. Miller of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, commenting on the possible annexation of Texas.

Preferred Citation note

Henry Clay letter, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama.
Biographical/Historical note

Henry Clay (Sr.), born 12 April 1777, was the seventh of nine children of the Reverend John and Elizabeth Hudson Clay. His father died when Henry was four years old, and his mother married Captain Henry Watkins with whom she had seven more children. Watkins moved the family to Richmond, Virginia, where he secured employment for Clay in the office of the Virginia Court of Chancery, where he displayed an aptitude for law. Clay worked closely with George Wythe, Chancellor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, for four years, and then with Robert Brooke, the Virginia attorney general. Clay was admitted to practice law in 1797.

Clay relocated to Lexington, Virginia, and soon established a reputation for his legal skills and courtroom oratory. By 1812, he owned a productive 600-acre plantation called Ashland and numerous slaves to work the land. He had 60 slaves at the height of operations and likely produced tobacco and hemp.

After beginning his law career, Clay married Lucretia Hart on 11 April 1799. The couple had eleven children (six daughters and five sons): Henrietta (1800-1801); Theodore (1802-1870); Thomas (1803-1871); Susan (1805-1835); Lucretia (1809-1823); Henry, Jr. (1811-1847); Eliza (1813-1825); Laura (1815-1817); James Brown (1817-1864), and John (1821-1887). Seven of Clay's children died before him as well as his wife. By 1835, all six daughters had died of varying causes, two when very young, two as children, the other two as young women: from whooping cough, yellow fever, and complications of childbirth. Henry Clay, Jr. was killed at the Battle of Buena Vista during the Mexican-American War. Lucretia Hart Clay died in 1864 at the age of 83.

As a leading war hawk in 1812, he favored war with Britain and played a significant role in leading the nation to war in the War of 1812. In 1824 he ran for president and lost, but threw his electoral votes to John Quincy Adams, who made him secretary of state as the Jacksonians denounced what they considered a "corrupt bargain." He ran and lost again in 1832 and 1844 as the candidate of the Whig Party, which he founded and usually dominated. Clay was the foremost proponent of the American System, fighting for an increase in tariffs to foster industry in the United States, the use of federal funding to build and maintain infrastructure, and a strong national bank. He opposed the annexation of Texas, fearing it would inject the slavery issue into politics. Clay also opposed the Mexican-American War and the "Manifest Destiny" policy of Democrats, which cost him votes in the close 1844 election.

Dubbed the "Great Pacifactor," Clay brokered important compromises during the Nullification Crisis and on the slavery issue. As part of the "Great Triumvirate" or "Immortal Trio," along with his colleagues Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun, he was instrumental in formulating the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the Compromise of 1850. He was viewed as the primary representative of Western interests in this group, and was given the names "Henry of the West" and "The Western Star." A plantation owner, Clay held slaves during his lifetime but freed them in his Will.

On 29 June 1852, Henry Clay died of tuberculosis in Washington, DC, at the age of 75. He was the first person to lie in state in the United States Capitol.
Scope and Contents note

The collection contains a typescript copy of a letter written by Henry Clay, dated 1 July 1844, from his plantation, Ashland, in Lexington, Kentucky, to Stephen F. Miller of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, commenting on the possible annexation of Texas. Location of original unknown.

Administrative Information

Publication Information
W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama February 2008

Revision Description
December 2012

Conditions Governing Access note
None

Conditions Governing Use note
None

Provenance
unknown

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Controlled Access Headings
Genre(s)

- Letters (correspondence)

Geographic Name(s)

- Southern States--Politics and government

Personal Name(s)

- Miller, Stephen F. (Stephen Franks), 1805-1873

Subject(s)

- Government, Law and Politics
# Collection Inventory

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Henry Clay</th>
<th>433</th>
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