



Guide to the Stuart Walter Case letters, 1837-1840

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Summary

Collection Title:

Stuart Walter Case letters, 1837-1840

Creator:

Case, Stuart W., 1819-1879; George Washington Flowers Collection of Southern Americana

Abstract:

Stuart Walter Case (1819-1876) was a white store clerk, originally from Indiana, who moved to Arkansas in the late 1830s. This collection consists of his letters home to his father, Thomas Case, which describe Stuart Case's experiences in Fayetteville, Arkansas between 1838-1840. The letters document his eyewitness account of the Trail of Tears through Fayetteville, with discussions of the animosity between different Cherokee factions; the exploitative businesses that sprang up to provision the forced emigrants along their route; and the bustling, diverse, and increasing violent community in Fayetteville.

Extent:

0.2 Linear Feet (1 oversize folder)

Language:

Materials in English.

Collection ID:

RL.13117

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1db4z>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Stuart Walter Case letters, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

The collection consists of letters sent to Thomas Case, Esq., from his son Stuart Walter Case. Stuart writes from Oakland and then Fayetteville, Arkansas,

describing his employment, activities, lodging, and the settlements in Arkansas he encountered. Stuart worked as a store clerk in Fayetteville, and many of the letters discuss Arkansas politics, development (building of fortifications and other structures), and business news. The letters include detailed descriptions of Fayetteville's role in the Trail of Tears, which overlapped with Case's residing in the town. He documents the Cherokee Nation's forced marches through the region, and describes the deep divisions between the different factions of Cherokee (some who were pro-migration, and most who opposed resettlement). Other topics in Stuart Case's letters include his attendance and mixed opinions of Methodist camp meetings; his recounting of ongoing tension and acts of violence between different Fayetteville residents and communities; a description of a vigilante trial and lynching (referred to as "Judge Lynch") following the Cane Hill Murders of 1839; and his expressions of both sympathy and fear of Native Americans he encountered during their forced migration through the town. At one point, he describes the commonplace practice of intermarriage between Indigenous, Black, and white people, and asks his father whether he would like to marry into the Cherokee Nation and "make a fortune without much trouble."

The earliest letter (1837) appears to be from Abram Case, who wrote to Thomas Case about his travels from home to Clinton, Alabama. It is in a different script and from a different location than the Stuart Case letters, but the signature is not clear and it could be this is a misattribution.

Biographical/Historical

Stuart Walter Case (also "Stewart Walter Cayce") was born on February 11, 1819, in New Albany, Indiana, to Thomas Case (1790-1840) and Jane Simonton Case (1791-1850). Case left home at the age of eighteen or nineteen to work as a store clerk for one "Mr. Wilson," evidently a family acquaintance, who had planned to establish himself in Arkansas. The letters document that Case initially lived and worked in Oakland before settling in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to work for Mr. James Sutton as a clerk in Sutton's store.

While in Fayetteville, Case lodged at the Fayetteville Hotel. His letters indicate he occasionally attended different Methodist camp meetings and that his store was located in central Fayetteville. He appears to have had an active social life, and mentions dating a young woman. At the time, Arkansas was a new state with legalized slavery; its population was both sparse and diverse, and intermarriage between white, Black, and Indigenous peoples was commonplace. Fayetteville became a converging point for bands of Cherokee, Muscogee (referred to by Case as Creek), Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and others forcibly expelled from the Southeastern United States following the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Tribes were transported west to "Indian Territory" (present day Oklahoma) in wagons, by boat, or on foot. Stuart Case was coincidentally an eyewitness to the peak months of forced Cherokee removal, known as the Trail of Tears, which went through Fayetteville, Arkansas

between October 1838 and March 1839. At that point in time, along with their ongoing displacement, the Cherokee Nation was deeply divided. There were violent skirmishes between different political and regional factions of the tribes. In his letters, Case wrote that he expected an "Indian War" between the different parties who had all converged in Fayetteville. He was not alone in his assessment, and white Arkansas settlers built new forts and established local militias as a means of protection against expected threats from "Indian Country."

The community also experienced a wave of violence later called the "Fayetteville War," which included several murders (particularly the Cane Hill Murders, where a family was murdered in their home) as well as recurring feuds and tension arising between the white settlers and Cherokee moving through the region. Case's letters discuss some of these events.

Case returned to New Albany, Indiana, in the summer of 1840. He married Hester Robinson in 1845. U.S. Census records indicated she emigrated from Ireland. Case served in the Mexican-American War (1845-1846) and then the family moved to Mobile, Alabama, where Case worked as a hardware merchant. He also served in the Alabama home guard during the American Civil War. The Cases had seven children. Stuart Case died in Mobile, Alabama, on July 16, 1879.

Sources cited:

"Trail of Tears," Encyclopedia of Arkansas: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/trail-of-tears-2294/>

"Cane Hill Murders of 1839," Encyclopedia of Arkansas: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/cane-hill-murders-of-1839-5075/>

Nelson Hackett Project: <https://nelsonhackettproject.uark.edu/nelson-hacketts-journey/>

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Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the Rubenstein Library's Citations, Permissions, and Copyright guide.

Acquisition Information

The Stuart Walter Case letters were purchased by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library from James Arsenault and Company in 2024.

Processing Information

Processed by Meghan Lyon, January 2025

Accessions described in this collection guide: 2024-0100

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Names and Subjects

- Arkansas -- Emigration and immigration
- Trail of Tears, 1838-1839
- Cherokee Indians -- Legal status, laws, etc.
- Indian Removal, 1813-1903
- Lynching -- Arkansas -- 19th century

- Murder -- Arkansas -- 19th century
- Clerks (Retail trade)
- Fayetteville (Ark.) -- History
- Cherokee Indians
- Cherokee Nation -- History

Collection Inventory

Manuscript letter from A. Case, in Clinton, Alabama, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1837 November 25 (online item available)

Folder 1

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from A. Case, in Clinton, Alabama, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1837 November 25](#)

Scope and Contents

Letter believed to be from Abram Case (Stuart Case's brother) to his father Thomas Case, describing his route and travel to Clinton, Alabama. He describes traveling through Louisville and then suffering through poor weather and a lame horse. He also describes the local population in Clinton, noting "the people are rough and disapated drunkness prevails." He uses a racist slur to describe local Black citizens.

Manuscript letter from S. Walter Case, in Oakland, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, New Albany, Indiana, 1838 July 6 (online item available)

Folder 1

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from S. Walter Case, in Oakland, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, New Albany, Indiana, 1838 July 6](#)

Scope and Contents

Case describes his travels since leaving New Albany, and details the location of a small farm that Mr. Wilson recently purchased "near the boundary line between the Neosho Territory and Arkansas state.... Wilson bought this place for its natural advantages (it being well supplied with water) and the Indian trade in the neighborhood, our customers being a great many of them Indians or Mix'd Blood, which is 'all one in Dutch'." Case includes a list of current prices, remarking that prices are inflated due to the recent arrival of "Cherokee Emigrants" who brought money but had no supplies. He also includes a description of the area, describing it as "beautiful country," and says Fayetteville "is small yet, but very tastefully laid out...."

Case writes at length about the different groups of people he's encountered, and shares his opinions about the various Indigenous tribes arriving and moving through the Fayetteville area. "Some of them are very fine people, a great

many White People are mixed with Indians, a White man with a Black wife, an occurrence not at all uncommon here, and vice versa. A good many of the people on this side of the line are seriously alarmed about the Creek Indians, as tis said they have showed a hostile spirit toward the Whites." He also describes the Seminoles, "just fetched from Florida in Irons same as the Creeks were. They were fighting the whites just before they left and they are trying to stir it up again. I have no doubt but there will be an Indian War here at no distant date. Any person will think so, that knows the circumstances under which they came, many of them in Irons, and when the boat lands they are not suffered to go ashore at all, also the greater part of them removed from their homes in Florida forcibly, and it is natural that men treated so must come here with very embittered feelings against the whites and more particularly the Creek Indians who are noted for being 'treacherous, cruel, and revengeful.'"

The letter includes crosshatch text.

Manuscript letter from Stuart W. Case, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1838 October 11 (online item available)

Folder 1

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from Stuart W. Case, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1838 October 11](#)

Scope and Contents

Case explains that he has taken a new position, managing a grocery for Mr. James Sutton in Fayetteville, and that he now boards at the Fayette Ville Hotel and has moved away from Oakland. He disparages Oakland, describing the stores there as "being the most doggish, dirty holes you ever had any conception of, drunken Indians laying all about... there has been three men killed within the last two weeks within a compass of ten miles...." He continues, "where I am now there is great difference, the people being generally very civil and orderly, some very fine and have been well raised, and all uncommonly friendly."

Manuscript letter from S. Walter Case, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1838 December 4 (online item available)

Folder 1

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from S. Walter Case, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1838 December 4](#)

Scope and Contents

Letter from Stuart Case to his father Thomas Case, commenting on local news and also sending well-wishes to various relatives and family members. Stuart

writes scathingly about "General Isham Key," who he calls "the hoary old sinner!".

He also discusses "preparations going on to defend the frontiers, there is two large forts building, one on the line between this County and the Nation, the other at the site of old Fort Smith, below Van Buren, on the Choctaw line. The latter will be one of the largest class of Forts, and is intended, when finished to be the 'head quarters' of the South Western division of the army....

Case also discusses the Trail of Tears: "Great preparations are also making for the Emigrating Cherokees, who are daily expected, agents are riding all about the country, buying up provisions, corn etc. for their subsistence, stands are being erected every ten miles all through Missouri and Arkansas as depots for corn. Its said that 1200 are within a few days march of here now, the whole number to come is computed at 14 to 15 thousand souls."

Manuscript letter from S. Walter Case, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to "Father," in Indiana, approximately 1839 March 31 (online item available)

Folder 1

Physical Description: 1 sheet, folded; last portion of letter and the mailing address area of the letter is missing (letter sheet torn).

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from S. Walter Case, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to "Father," in Indiana, approximately 1839 March 31](#)

Scope and Contents

Case writes that he is in good health. He implies things are dull, so his letters might be lacking in quality, with the caveat "without the Indians get to killing themselves off faster than usual, or what is worse commence on us, I do not know where I'll find matter sufficient to write about every two weeks." Case then summarizes the current circumstances of Cherokees passing through Fayetteville.

Some excerpts: "The stir and bustle of the Cherokee emigration is beginning to die away, most of them having already arrived and taken up their abode in the far west to all appearances well satisfied, though it is all one with them whether they are, or not, they having nothing before them but 'Hobson's Choice.' The agents are busily engaged in dispersing of the waggons and horses which were used in bringing them out here, and the farms around here laugh in their sleeves, at the cheap bargains that they get out of them.

"The Nation at present is divided into two factions or parties, one of which is call the Ross Party, which is by far the most numerous, and is principally composed of full blooded Cherokees - they were opposed to the removal of themselves west. The Treaty was made by the other party without their consent - the other party is called the Ridge Party and is principally composed of half breeds and mixed blood'd Indians, together with a great many white men who

have married into the nation, they being principally all well off. These rival factions cannot bear the sight of each other, and if they happen to meet any where there is always sure to be a fight.

"By the by what think you of marrying into the nation? Fine way to make a fortune without much trouble, they always prefer a white man."

The next segment of the letter is torn with a large portion missing, and it is unclear what Case wrote about although it seems to continue his thread about intermarriage between different races. He concludes with well wishes to his family and writes that he hopes business picks up soon, because he gets homesick "when I have nothing to do."

Manuscript letter from S.W.C., in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1839 August 4 (online item available)

Folder 1

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from S.W.C., in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1839 August 4](#)

Scope and Contents

Case writes about rising violence in Fayetteville, and describes the increased tension among the Cherokee Nation as well as the 1839 Cane Hill Murders and their aftermath.

Some quotes: "The state of the Cherokee Nation at this time is dreadful, a civil war is on the point of commencing, the nation is divided into factions and the head of one part has been assassinated by the orders of the other where it will end no body knows.... the arms, ammunition etc. in the arsenal at this place have been distributed to the different volunteer companies, so that almost every man is completely armed, and altogether our own and country has a very warlike and savage appearance."

He continues: "The Indian alarm has, however, been almost swallowed up in the many murders which have lately taken place, for within the last five weeks in this country no less than fourteen persons have come to violent deaths, exclusive of three that were hung last Monday on Cane Hill. ... These men were suspected of being the ones that murdered, a whole family sometime since, the evidence against them was entirely (so I understood) circumstantial, and would not have hung them in a court of law, but they were men of bad character and the people were so excited that the voice of moderation was not heard at all.... Proceedings of this committee that condemned these men were not characterized by that tumultuous and mobbish spirit that the generality of Judge Lynch usually are, on the contrary every thing was conducted with the greatest coolness and propriety...."

Case then describes another violent feud and exchange he witnessed in the town square, which resulted in two men shot dead, and a third man stabbed. Case describes watching the murder from his store.

The letter ends with Case summarizing that his health is good, the weather is hot, and that "sometimes I get thinking that I will maybe come home this fall, more especially since these last murders, they have put me out of concert of Arkansas altogether and I think I will leave her certain next spring and go to Texas...."

Manuscript letter from "Stuart," in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, approximately 1839 September 30 (online item available)

Folder 1

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from "Stuart," in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, approximately 1839 September 30](#)

Scope and Contents

Stuart writes with an update on the circumstances surrounding him in Fayetteville, describing "this county, and town in particular, has become one of the most lawless and uncivilized places in all creation.... Shooting, stabbing, knocking down and dragging out, appear to be the order of the day and present in this place. In fact the Cherokee Nation is almost (to use a horse racers phrase) distanced, in the race for savageness -- Great many honest well-meaning men are leaving the country, selling their property at considerable discount rather than to stay."

He notes that the Methodists "have rendered themselves rather unpopular with the majority of the people by soliciting the slaves for contributions toward building the church."

He writes that "the Cherokee Indians are still fighting among themselves, council after council has been held and dissolved again, without effecting anything, each of the parties still remaining in a defensive attitude. One of the surviving chiefs or braves of the Ridge party has gone on to Washington City to see if their 'Great Father' Martin will do anything for them, it may be all right and good for Martin to be styled Great Father by the Indians, but if I was in his place I should be sorry for the morals of my children.... I should not be surprised if the war between the two parties doesn't degenerate into such skirmishing altogether, until Ross is killed, whose death will end the war."

Stuart also discusses an "review of the whole available force of Washington County at this place, by order of Colonel Commandant Hon. A. Nell Esq. Great anxiety, and some little excitement is manifested him in regard to the trial of Wallace at the next court, (which is in November) for the murder of Curry, of which I wrote you an account."

He then writes of his upcoming plans, sends well wishes to loved ones, and requests copies of New Albany newspapers.

Manuscript letter from S. Walter Cayse, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1840 April 8 (online item available)

Folder 1

Digital Object: [Manuscript letter from S. Walter Cayse, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Thomas Case, in New Albany, Indiana, 1840 April 8](#)

Scope and Contents

Letter to the family noting on "this day completes two long, long years since I left you for the land of the Stranger," and conveying his homesickness and nostalgia for his home. The letter then turns to business, and Case writes that his family can expect back home to New Albany in May.

Case spends a portion of the letter discussing how two years in Arkansas have changed him: "It seems to me sometimes that I am more changed in my way of thinking, that I have grown selfish, and callous to any thing save my own interest, but I suppose I am only a little older in the 'ways of the world,' and think (as I heard a man express himself the other day when accused of cheating) 'That the world is only a large violin, and that the Smartest man got the Sweetest music out of it.'"

Lastly, Case discusses the political climate and his newly-tarnished personal reputation in Arkansas: "This country is in a state of much agitation at this time, [hole in page] great deal of political excitement and [unclear text] generated within the last two months. Almost every one you see is armed to the teeth at all times, fights are frequent and angry disputes seem to be the order of the day. I have acquired within the last month, rather an uneviable notoriety in this place, much has been said relative to me and a certain young lady, not very creditable to the young lady's character, and I dont know but what my departure may be hasten'd by it. I dont care as it is in Arkansas but I dont want you to say any thing about it to any body..."

The letter is signed in a different ink "your affectionate Son and Brother S. Walter Cayse."