



Guide to the Francis P. Corbin Papers, 1662-1885

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Summary

Collection Title:

Francis P. Corbin papers, 1662-1885

Creator:

Corbin, Francis P., 1801-1876

Abstract:

Francis P. Corbin (1801-1867) was a white plantation owner and resident of Paris, France, who married Agnes Rebecca Hamilton in 1825. Collection consists of financial and legal materials and correspondence related to Francis P. Corbin, his family, and the Couper and Hamilton families. Financial and legal papers include deeds, indentures, land grants, and surveys related to land in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana owned by the Corbin, Couper, and Hamilton families. Slavery papers in the collection document the enumeration, buying, and selling of enslaved people owned by the Corbin, Hamilton, and Couper families. Correspondence between members of the three families covers a variety of topics, including social and family matters, political discussions, plantation and business updates, race horses, theater and opera in Paris, the estate of James Hamilton, and railroad bonds.

Extent:

5 Linear Feet (2 boxes, 2 oversize folders)

Language:

Materials in English and French.

Collection ID:

RL.13025

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m14n02>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Francis P. Corbin Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

Collection consists of financial and legal materials and correspondence related to Francis P. Corbin, his family, and the Couper and Hamilton families.

Financial and legal papers include deeds, indentures, land grants, and surveys related to land in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana owned by the Corbin, Couper, and Hamilton families. These documents date from the 1660s through the 1840s and trace the inheritance and transfer of lands to Francis P. Corbin and his family, particularly St. Simon's Island, Wright Island, and Hopeton plantation in Georgia, a plantation in New Orleans, and land in Virginia originally owned by Edmund Jenings. Other financial and legal papers from the nineteenth century are bills and accounts, especially for James Hamilton and John Couper's business in Charleston and Savannah, and for the Corbin plantations in Georgia and Louisiana. Later papers (1830s and after) include receipts for tickets to Théâtre-Italien performances that Corbin attended in Paris, the settling and management of James Hamilton's estate, and bonds for railroad construction in the United States.

Slavery papers in the collection document the enumeration, buying, and selling of enslaved people owned by the Corbin, Hamilton, and Couper families. The earliest documents date from 1712 and are lists of enslaved people owned by Edmund Jenings in Virginia. These lists also have information about where each enslaved person is quartered for the year. Later documents from the nineteenth century include accounts, bills of sale, lists, and correspondence that discuss and provide evidence of the buying, selling, mortgaging, and enumeration of enslaved people. Also of note is an early nineteenth-century list of enslaved people owned by James Hamilton who were seized by the British forces during "the late war." Other materials in the Financial and Legal Papers and Correspondence of this collection may provide additional documentation of slavery.

Correspondence covers a variety of topics and members of the Corbin, Couper, and Hamilton families. Early correspondence (1807-1820s) is primarily for James Hamilton and deals with Hamilton and John Couper's merchant business in Charleston, particularly their dealings with cotton. Other financial and legal matters, such as land disputes, are discussed as well. Correspondence from the late 1820s and onward is primarily for Francis P. Corbin and touches on many topics, including social and family matters, political discussions, plantation and business updates, race horses, theater and opera in Paris, the estate of James Hamilton, and railroad bonds.

Social and family matters range from general updates to discussions of health but also include many letters of introduction for Americans traveling abroad

in Paris and Europe. Correspondence discussing political issues address topics such as the presidential election of 1844, British and French sentiments towards the Confederacy, and the activities of Confederate commissioner John Slidell. Plantation and business updates to Francis Corbin are typically from Robert Corbin, Edward Rawle, or H.C. Cammack and give updates on the quality of sugar, rice, and cotton crops, as well as the health of enslaved peoples at the plantations in Louisiana and Georgia. Correspondence from 1833 in particular discusses the health of enslaved people during a cholera epidemic. Several letters from the 1830s to the 1850s between Francis Corbin and his brother Robert discuss the breeding, selling, and performance of race horses. Letters discussing Parisian theater and opera, especially the Théâtre-Italien, primarily show Corbin making social plans with friends and addressing seating availability or options. Correspondence after James Hamilton's death in the late 1820s deals with the settling of his estate and in particular with the payment of and taxation on allowances from the estate to Agnes Corbin, who was the daughter of James Hamilton. Additional materials related to the taxation of allowances from Hamilton's estate can be found in the Financial and Legal Papers, including two items from the U.S. Circuit Court summarizing the case (Thomas Cadwalader v. A.W. Smith). Letters addressing the purchasing of stocks and bonds for railroad construction in the United States, particular in Pennsylvania, is prevalent in the 1850s and 1860s correspondence.

Also scattered throughout is correspondence between other members of the Corbin family, including Francis Corbin's wife, Agnes Rebecca Corbin, as well as their children Isabella, Richard, and Elizabeth. Letters between Agnes and Richard Corbin give details of Richard's return to the United States during the Civil War so that he could serve with the Confederate Army.

Biographical/Historical

Francis P. Corbin (1801-1867) was born at "The Reeds" in Caroline County, Virginia, to Francis and Ann Beverly Corbin. He was a direct descendant of Henry Corbin, who began the Corbin family line in Virginia. Francis attended the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and married Agnes Rebecca Hamilton (1801-1894), daughter of James Hamilton, in 1825. James Hamilton (1763-1829) owned a mercantile business in Charleston, S.C., with John Couper (1759-1850), which they eventually moved to Savannah, G.A., and they jointly owned land in Georgia, including St. Simon's Island. After James Hamilton's death in 1829, Agnes and Francis Corbin inherited portions of Hamilton's estate. Due to financial and legal complications, including debt owed by John Couper to James Hamilton, the appointment of Couper's son (James Hamilton Couper) as an executor of Hamilton's estate, and the residence of Francis and Agnes Corbin in Paris, the estate settlement took many years to complete. Francis and Agnes Corbin moved to Paris, France, in the late 1820s, possibly to alleviate health issues Agnes was experiencing. They resided in Paris for the rest of their lives, although Francis made several trips back to the United States. Despite living in Paris, Francis Corbin was a partial owner of two

plantations in the United States: Hopeton plantation in Georgia, and another plantation in New Orleans. Francis and Agnes Corbin had three children: Isabella, Richard Washington, and Elizabeth.

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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 Francis P. Corbin papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library in 1944 and 1954, and as a purchase from Caroliniana Rare Books in 2023.

Processing Information

Processed by Rubenstein Library Staff.

Reprocessed by Leah Tams, October 2023. Added accession 2023-0087 and reprocessed to better group materials and to highlight the presence of slavery and enslaved people.

Accessions described in this collection guide: 1944 and 1954, 2023-0087.

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Related Materials

Related Material

Researchers may also be interested in the following collections:

Francis Porteus Corbin Papers, 1716-1899 (MssCol 671) at the New York Public Library.

James Hamilton Papers, 1769-1870 (RL.00497) at Duke University.

J. Hamilton Couper Plantation Records, 1818-1854 (00185-z) at UNC Chapel Hill.

Corbin Family Papers, 1794-1815 (24976) at the Library of Virginia.

Couper Family Papers, 1827-1955 (00186-z) at UNC Chapel Hill.

Couper Family Papers, 1775-1981 (ms3072) at the University of Georgia.

Couper and Fraser Family Papers (GHS 0265) at the Georgia Historical Society.

Couper and Wylly Family Papers (GHS 1872) at the Georgia Historical Society.

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Names and Subjects

- Plantations -- Louisiana -- Records and correspondence
- Plantations -- Georgia -- Records and correspondence
- Charleston (S.C.) -- Commerce -- History
- Saint Simons Island (Ga.)
- Hopeton Plantation (Ga.)
- Deeds
- Indentures
- Horse breeders -- Southern States
- Merchants -- Georgia -- Savannah.
- Merchants -- South Carolina -- Charleston
- Presidents -- United States -- Election -- 1844

- Opera -- France -- Paris -- 19th century
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Slave bills of sale
- Slave records
- Slavery -- Southern States
- Enslaved persons -- Southern States
- Railroads -- Pennsylvania
- Sugar growing -- Louisiana -- History -- 19th century
- Cotton growing -- Southern States
- Rice farming -- Georgia
- Corbin, Francis P., 1801-1876
- Hamilton, James, 1763-1829
- Corbin, Agnes R., 1801-1894

Collection Inventory

Biographical information, 1940s	Box 1
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Scope and Contents

Includes biographical and genealogical information about Francis P. Corbin, as well as legacy descriptions of collection material. Legacy descriptions may contain outdated or offensive language.

Financial and legal papers, 1662-1880 and undated	Box 1
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Physical Description: 5 folders

Financial and legal papers, 1709-1846	Oversize-folder 1
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Financial and legal papers, 1788-1816	Oversize-folder 2
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Slavery papers, 1712, 1802-1861 and undated	Box 1
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Scope and Contents

Materials related to the enumeration, buying, and selling of enslaved people owned by the Corbin, Hamilton, and Couper families. The earliest documents date from 1712 and are lists of enslaved people owned by Edmund Jenings in Virginia. These lists also have information about where each enslaved person is quartered for the year. Later documents from the nineteenth century include accounts, bills of sale, lists, and correspondence that discuss and provide evidence of the buying, selling, mortgaging, and enumeration of enslaved people. Other materials in the Financial and Legal Papers and Correspondence of this collection may provide additional documentation of slavery.

Account of enslaved people at Ripon Hall
plantation, 1712

Oversize-folder 1

Scope and Contents

An account of enslaved peoples, including their names, at Ripon Hall Plantation in Virginia, with details about their clothing and supplies.

Correspondence, 1807-1839

Box 1

Physical Description: 2 folders

Scope and Contents

Several 1833 letters discuss a cholera outbreak and its impact upon the enslaved people at the plantation.

Correspondence, 1840-1877, 1885

Box 2

Physical Description: 5 folders

Correspondence, circa 1820s-1860s

Box 2

Scope and Contents

Undated correspondence and letter fragments.