



# **Guide to the James D. Davidson papers, 1829-1884, bulk 1836-1859**

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## Summary

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### Collection Title:

James D. Davidson papers, 1829-1884, 1836-1859

### Creator:

Davidson, James D. (James Dorman), 1808-1882

### Abstract:

James D. Davidson (1808-1882) was a white lawyer, college trustee, and Confederate commissary agent of Lexington, Virginia. The bulk of this collection dates from 1836-1859 and consists of James D. Davidson's professional correspondence regarding collection of debts and financial judgements, real estate transactions, and other legal matters. Items directly related to slavery include a letter (August 14, 1857) discussing Dr. Frederick Cousins, a free Black physician seeking payment for the treatment of an enslaved man named Henry. The collection also includes some personal papers, including a few letters pertaining to local sentiments and supply issues during the Civil War.

### Extent:

.5 Linear Feet (1 box)

### Language:

Materials in English.

### Collection ID:

RL.13121

### Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1rj2c>

### Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], James D. Davidson papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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## Background

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### Scope and Content

This collection is composed mainly of James D. Davidson's professional correspondence, the bulk of which dates from 1836 to 1859. Letters include

inquiries from clients and other attorneys regarding the status of legal matters such as collection of debts and financial judgements, real estate transactions, estate administration, depositions, and subpoenas. Correspondents include Alexander H. H. Stuart and William W. Boyd. Items directly related to slavery include a letter negotiating the hire of enslaved men for public works, dated January 8, 1854; and a letter from R.E. Mause (Lynchburg, Virginia) to Davidson dated August 14, 1857, discussing Dr. Frederick Cousins, a free Black physician seeking payment from the estate of Mr. Salling(?) for the treatment of an enslaved man named Henry.

Davidson's personal papers include invoices and receipts for household goods and scattered letters from friends and relatives. Correspondence topics include Whig politics, the 1848 U.S. presidential election, and family updates. There are only a few letters pertaining to the Civil War; these were written between 1861-1862 and document local anxieties over Confederate military setbacks. Supply issues are also mentioned, including a request from a quartermaster for assistance in obtaining horseshoes. In a February 1862 letter, Davidson describes his son Greenlee's efforts to establish an artillery company, including personal financial outlays, obtaining cannons, and recruitment of volunteers.

## **Biographical/Historical**

James D. Davidson was a white lawyer, college trustee, and Confederate commissary agent of Lexington, Virginia. He was born on November 7, 1808, in Rockbridge County to parents Andrew Baker Davidson and Susanna (Dorman) Davidson. Davidson graduated from Washington College in 1828 and was admitted to the Virginia Bar in 1831. He practiced law in Lexington, initially with his uncle Charles P. Dorman. In 1836, Davidson married Hannah Greenlee, with whom he would have seven children, including Greenlee Davidson (1834-1863). Greenlee went on to study law and join his father's practice. James Davidson also served as a trustee of Washington College (later Washington and Lee University) from 1858-1882.

Davidson was active in politics and was a supporter of the Whig Party, and, after its dissolution, the Democratic Party. During the Civil War, Davidson organized the Confederate Home Guard for Rockbridge County and served as a commissary agent for Virginia. He also gave financial assistance for Greenlee Davidson to establish the Letcher Artillery. Greenlee and two other sons died during the war.

Davidson died in Lexington on October 14, 1882.

Sources:

[Finding aid for the James D. Davidson Letters](#), Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, accessed 2025 June 16.

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## Arrangement

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The collection is arranged chronologically.

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## Administrative Information

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### 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 James D. Davidson papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library in 1957.

### Processing Information

Processed and cataloged by library staff in approximately 1957

Collection rehoused and collection guide created with reparative description by Mary Mellon, June 2025.

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## Names and Subjects

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- Lawyers -- Virginia -- Correspondence
- Law offices -- Virginia -- Records and correspondence
- Collecting of accounts -- Virginia -- 19th century
- Probate law and practice -- Virginia -- 19th century
- Slavery -- Virginia
- African American physicians -- Virginia -- 19th century
- Presidents -- United States -- Election -- 1848
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
- Virginia -- Economic conditions -- 19th century
- Virginia -- Politics and government -- 1775-1865
- Virginia -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Social aspects
- Davidson, James D. (James Dorman), 1808-1882
- Davidson, Greenlee, 1834-1863
- Stuart, Alexander H. H. (Alexander Hugh Holmes), 1807-1891
- Whig Party (U.S.)
- Confederate States of America. Army -- Supplies and stores
- Confederate States of America. Army. Letcher Artillery

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## Collection Inventory

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1829, 1835-1839	Box 1
1841-1844	Box 1
1845	Box 1
1846	Box 1
1847	Box 1
1848	Box 1
1849	Box 1

**Scope and Contents**

This folder includes a letter from Jas. M. Ranson (Charlestown) to Davidson dated November 9, 1849, in which Ranson offers to purchase an enslaved man and woman (unnamed) from Mr. Moorman. He offers to pay \$900 for them if the man is skilled with tools and the woman is a "good cook and washer."

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1850	Box 1
1851	Box 1
1852-1853	Box 1
1854-1863, 1865-1878, 1884, undated	Box 1

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**Scope and Contents**

This folder includes the following items related to slavery: a letter dated January 8, 1854, negotiating the hire of enslaved men for public works; a letter from R.E. Mausem (Lynchburg, Virginia) to Davidson dated August 14, 1857, discussing Dr. Frederick Cousins, a free Black physician seeking payment from the estate of Mr. Salling(?) for the treatment of an enslaved man named Henry.