



Guide to the Dismal Swamp Land Company records

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Summary

Collection Title:

Dismal Swamp Land Company records, circa 1660s-1860s, bulk 1810-1879

Creator:

Washington, George, 1732-1799; Walker, Thomas, 1715-1794; Meade, R.K. (Richard Kidder), 1803-1862

Abstract:

Collection comprised of 9 boxes of company records and 5 ledgers of organizational material of the Dismal Swamp Land Company, a shingle production company in existence between 1763-1879. Letter books, receipts spanning the entirety of the company's existence, and legal documents make up the bulk of the collection.

Extent:

4 Linear Feet

Language:

Materials in English.

Collection ID:

RL.10175

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1h901>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item.] Dismal Swamp Land Company, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

The Dismal Swamp Land Company records consist of company records spanning the 17th-19th centuries, with the bulk falling in the mid-to-late 19th century. The majority of records consist of financial documentation, including receipts for the purchase of equipment by the Company and numerous receipts for customers detailing quantities and prices of shingles purchased. Monthly ledgers and an account book are also present. The records include

legal documents surrounding surveys of the Dismal Swamp, indentures, wills, and several powers of attorney for shareholder meetings. Incoming correspondence intended for the Company's presidents, mainly from employees and shareholders, makes up the majority of the Correspondence series.

Biographical/Historical

The Dismal Swamp Land Company, originally operated as the Dismal Swamp Company, was a Suffolk, Va., enterprise founded in 1763 by George Washington, Thomas Walker, William and Thomas Nelson, Robert Burwell, John Robinson, Fielding Lewis, Anthony Bacon, John Lyme, Samuel Gist, Robert Tucker, and William Walters. The number of shareholders grew as original owners divested their interests and family inherited stakes. The company often relied on enslaved laborers either owned by the company or its proprietors. Many of the enslaved workers fled with the British during the Revolutionary War. The company operated between 1763-1879 and was originally interested in agricultural pursuits (including rice cultivation), but the sale of cypress shingles and staves proved more profitable. Reincorporated in 1814 as the Dismal Swamp Land Company, the company became profitable through lumbering in the early 1800s. The company went under as a result of post-Civil War economic conditions and concurrent decrease in the shingle trade. It dissolved in 1879.

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Arrangement

Materials arranged by topic, and then by date.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Processing Information

Processed by Liz Adams, December 2015.

Updated with additional historical note and subject headings by Meghan Lyon, August 2023.

Acquisition Information

The Dismal Swamp Land Company Records was received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a gift in 1939.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

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Names and Subjects

- Dismal Swamp (N.C. and Va.)
- Dismal Swamp Canal (N.C. and Va.) -- History -- 19th century
- Dismal Swamp Canal (N.C. and Va.) -- History -- 19th century
- Land companies -- United States
- Lumber trade -- Virginia
- Shingle industry -- Virginia
- Swamps -- Virginia
- Slavery
- Fugitive slaves -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Enslaved persons -- North Carolina

Collection Inventory

Financial, 1763 -1879 and undated

Physical Description: 1 Linear Feet

Chronological order.

Scope and Contents

Financial records of the Dismal Swamp Land Company, including bills of sale, monthly ledgers, insurance certificates, and dividends awarded to stockholders. A substantial portion of the series consists of receipts of payment to the company and its payments to various stockholders, vendors, and legal courts.

Early shareholder lists, 1764-1811 (online item available)	Box 1 > Folder 1
Physical Description: 1 folders	
Digital Object: Early shareholder lists, 1764-1811	
1763-1829 (online item available)	Box 1 > Folder 2
Digital Object: Financial, 1763-1829	
Account book, 1795	Box 1 > Folder 3
Physical Description: 1 folders	
Also includes letter book dating from 1812-1813.	
Letter book, 1812-1843	Box 1 > Folder 4
1830-1834	Box 1 > Folder 5
Physical Description: 1 folders	
Additional receipts, 1830-1835	Box 1 > Folder 6
Physical Description: 1 folders	
1835-1836	Box 1 > Folder 7
Physical Description: 1 folders	
Account book, 1837	Box 1 > Folder 8
Physical Description: 1 folders	
1837-1838	Box 1 > Folder 9
Physical Description: 1 folders	

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Additional receipts, 1836-1838 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 1 > Folder 10
1839 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 2 > Folder 11
Additional receipts, 1839 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 2 > Folder 12
1840-1843 Physical Description: 3 folders	Box 2 > Folder 14 Box 2 > Folder 13 Box 2 > Folder 15
Additional receipts, 1840-1843 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 2 > Folder 16
1844-1848 Physical Description: 2 folders	Box 2 > Folder 18 Box 2 > Folder 17
1848-1849 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 3 > Folder 19
Additional receipts, 1843-1849 Physical Description: 2 folders	Box 3 > Folder 20 Box 3 > Folder 21
1850-1860 Physical Description: 3 folders	Box 3 > Folder 23 Box 3 > Folder 22 Box 3 > Folder 24
Additional receipts, 1850-January 1851 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 3 > Folder 25
Additional receipts, January 1851-July 1852 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 3 > Folder 26
Additional receipts, August 1852-1859 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 3 > Folder 27
1860-1870	Box 4 > Folder 29 Box 4 > Folder 30

	Box 4 > Folder 28 Box 4 > Folder 31
Physical Description: 4 folders	
Additional receipts, 1860-1869	Box 4 > Folder 32 Box 4 > Folder 33 Box 4 > Folder 34
Physical Description: 3 folders	
Additional receipts, 1869-1870	Box 5 > Folder 35
Physical Description: 1 folders	
1870-1879	Box 5 > Folder 38 Box 5 > Folder 39 Box 5 > Folder 36 Box 5 > Folder 37 Box 5 > Folder 40
Physical Description: 5 folders	
Additional receipts, 1870-1879	Box 5 > Folder 41
Physical Description: 1 folders	
Undated	Box 5 > Folder 42
Physical Description: 1 folders	
1779-1810	Box 9 > Oversize-folder 1
1836-1837	Box 9 > Oversize-folder 2
1838-1839	Box 9 > Oversize-folder 3

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Legal, 1665-1879, undated

Scope and Contents

Legal papers of the Dismal Swamp Land Company. Includes separate folders related to Powers of Attorney for annual meetings and last wills and testaments for investors in the Company. Series also includes indentures, court cases filed by and against the Company, and legal guardian documentation.

1665-1832 Box 6 > Folder 43

Physical Description: 1 folders

1833-1855 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 6 > Folder 44
1856-1879 and undated, undated Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 6 > Folder 45
Wills, 1749-1805 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 6 > Folder 46
Wills, 1805-1866 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 6 > Folder 47
Powers of attorney, 1825-1836 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 6 > Folder 48
Powers of attorney, 1837-1845 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 6 > Folder 49
Powers of attorney, 1846-1871 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 6 > Folder 50
1792-1816	Box 9 > Oversize-folder 4

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Correspondence, 1688-1879, undated

1688-1791 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 7 > Folder 51
1792-1813 Physical Description: 1 folders	Box 7 > Folder 52
1816-1819 Physical Description: 3 folders	Box 7 > Folder 55 Box 7 > Folder 54 Box 7 > Folder 53
1820-1851 Physical Description: 2 folders	Box 7 > Folder 56 Box 7 > Folder 57
1853-1870	Box 8 > Folder 58 Box 8 > Folder 59

Box 8 > Folder 60

Physical Description: 3 folders

1871-1879, undated

Box 8 > Folder 61

Box 8 > Folder 62

Physical Description: 2 folders

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Miscellaneous, 1763-1879

Photocopies, 1794- circa 1855

Box 8 > Folder 64

Physical Description: 1 folders

Other--family tree, Martha Fort

Box 9 > Oversize-folder 5

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Ledgers, 1837-1863

Physical Description: 5 items

Language: English.

Check book stubs, 1840-1846

Volume M:911

Language: English.

Check book stubs (Bank of Virginia), 1846-1848

Volume M:912

Language: English.

Check book stubs (Bank of Virginia), 1848-1851

Volume M:913

Check book stubs (Bank of Virginia), 1851-1863

Volume M:914

Language: English.

Bank book, 1837-1853

Volume S:910

Language: English.

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