



Guide to the William Alexander Smith Papers, 1765-1949

This collection guide was produced in **February 2019**.
This PDF version was created on **April 3, 2026**.

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

askRL@duke.edu

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

Table of Contents

Summary	3
Background	4
Administrative Information	7
Collection Inventory	7
Correspondence	7
Writings	9
Clippings	9
Genealogy	10
Legal and Financial papers, Photographs	10
Bound Volumes	10

Summary

Collection Title:

William Alexander Smith papers, 1765-1949

Creator:

Smith, W. A. (William Alexander), 1843-1934

Abstract:

William Alexander Smith was a textile manufacturer and businessman of Ansonville, North Carolina. Collection includes correspondence, account books, business records, and other papers, relating to Smith's career as a merchant, cotton textile manufacturer, farmer, and investor. Includes material relating to the family's agricultural, mercantile, and milling enterprises during the antebellum period, with references to Smith's interests in education, the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Civil War, and the United Confederate Veterans, and to automobile manufacture, banking, commercial finance, cosmetics, furniture, insurance, lumbering, patent medicine, personal loans, self-propelled railway passenger cars, real estate development, tobacco processing, and the mining of gold in Alaska and Montana, copper in Arizona, and mica in North Carolina. Correspondents include Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire, Francis Johnstone Murdoch, and George Stephens.

Extent:

20 Linear Feet (51 boxes; 9 separately bound volumes)

Language:

Materials in English

Collection ID:

RL.11702

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1b36p>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], William Alexander Smith Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Background

Scope and Content

Collection contains correspondence, legal and financial papers, volumes, printed material and other items relating to the various activities and interests of William Alexander Smith (1843-1934), businessman and investor.

Records of Smith's general mercantile business, 1866-1886, include store accounts, 1875-1886, and a purchase journal, 1875-1877, listing various expenses.

Records of the operation of a store with Charles A. Smith include a ledger, an invoice book, and inventories and financial reports pertaining to the store and its failure.

The management of Smith's farm on the Pee Dee River is documented by records on the cotton trade, prices, the condition of crops, and marketing, and includes agreements with tenant farmers. Records of the Yadkin Falls Manufacturing Company, Milledgeville, North Carolina, 1883-1896, of which William Smith was president, include a letter book, 1887-1888, and an account book, 1876-1887, listing the expenses for the construction of this cotton mill and an inventory of mercantile goods purchased by the company.

For the Eldorado Cotton Mills, Milledgeville, 1897-1906, of which Smith also was president, there are a letter book, 1899-1902; a time book, 1898-1903, a general store ledger, 1900-1903; bank check, dividend check, and deposit books, 1898-1902; correspondence with Tucker & Carter Rope Company which Eldorado supplied with goods, 1898-1902; and records of a legal and financial controversy, 1914-1919.

Other textile mills in North Carolina and South Carolina are the subject of correspondence with Francis Johnstone Murdoch, Episcopal clergyman and textile executive; with Lee Slater Overman, textile executive and U.S. senator; and with James William Cannon, operator of Cannon Mills.

Correspondence with George Stephens, president of the Stephens Company, developers, and officer of the American Trust Company of Charlotte, North Carolina, concerns real estate ventures, such as the development of Myers Park residential area in Charlotte.

Other records relate to investment in the Southern States Finance Company, 1922-1925.

Mining of gold, copper, and mica is the subject of material on the Eagle River Mining Company in Alaska, 1905-1916, the Montana Consolidated Gold Mining

Company, 1905-1918, the Monarch Mining and Smelting Company, Wickenburg, Arizona, 1906-1918, and the Spruce Pine Mica Company, Inc., Spruce Pine, North Carolina, 1924-1933.

Papers concerning the insurance business comprise those of the North State Fire Insurance Company and the Dixie Fire Insurance Company, both of Greensboro, North Carolina.

Relating to the railroad and the automobile industries are papers of the Edwards Railway Motor Car Company of Sanford, North Carolina, 1923-1927; the David Buick Carburetor Corporation, 1922-1932; the Fox Motor Car Company, 1922-1923; and the Winston-Salem Railway through Ansonville, 1910-1911.

Other business records concern lumbering in North Carolina, 1916-1925; the Carolina Remedies Company of Union, South Carolina, 1922-1925; the W. L. Hand Medicine Company of Charlotte, North Carolina, 1923-1925; the John E. Hughes Company, Inc., tobacco processor of Danville, Virginia, 1922-1924; and the Forsyth Furniture Lines, Inc., 1922-1923.

Records of William A. Smith's activities as purchasing agent, banker, and broker include ledgers, 1873-1933; daybook, 1885-1893; letter and letterpress books, 1867-1895 and 1909-1910; and other account books.

Papers relating to Smith's writings include material on the publication of his *Anson Guards: Company Fourteenth Regiment, North Carolina Volunteers, 1861-1865* (Charlotte: 1914), including correspondence with the Stone Publishing Company, and reminiscences of several members of the Guards; papers on the causes and historiography of the Civil War, especially correspondence with Samuel A'Court Ashe, 1920s and 1930s, correspondence with Benjamin Franklin Johnson, 1915-1916, concerning a biographical sketch of Smith in Johnson's *Makers of America*; correspondence about Smith's pamphlet on the designing of the Confederate flag and the raising of the first flag of secession in North Carolina; and correspondence and genealogical notes used in the writing of Smith's *Family Tree Book, Genealogical and Biographical* (Los Angeles: 1922).

There are papers concerning the United Confederate Veterans, especially while Smith was commander of the North Carolina Division during the 1920s.

Correspondence, bills and receipts, ledgers, and writings concerning educational institutions relate to Carolina Female College, Ansonville, of which Smith's father, William Gaston Smith, was chairman of the board of trustees; sponsorship of the Nona Institute at Ansonville, 1906-1910, oriented toward the Episcopal Church; the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, of which Smith was a trustee; Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina, which Smith had attended before the Civil War; the education of Smith's adopted son, Bennett Dunlap Nelme, at textile schools and mills, including comment

about New Bedford and Lowell textile schools in Massachusetts, 1902-1907, and about North Carolina State College, Raleigh, 1900-1903; controversy over the content of history textbooks used in the state public schools, 1921; and membership on the board of managers of the Thompson Orphanage, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Correspondence with Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire and Archdeacon Edwin A. Osborne concerns affairs of the Episcopal Church, its missions, local churches, and the diocese.

Relating to the Freemasons are a history of Carolina Lodge No. 141 of Ansonville and the minutes of the lodge, 1906-1925.

Scattered correspondence and other papers pertain to North Carolina elections, especially the Democratic primary of 1912; the courts; the Democratic Party; county government; the good roads movement, especially in 1916; the family life and political career of Edward Hull Crump of Memphis, Tennessee, who was the son of Smith's first cousin; and politics in Mississippi and Tennessee. Other papers include the steam mill account books, 1851-1861, of Smith & Ingram who operated a sawmill in Anson County and correspondence, 1850-1851, concerning the acquisition of the steam machinery to run the mill; diary and notebook, 1765-1789, of James Auld, farmer, clerk of the court, and operator of a store for Joseph Montfort; North Carolina Argus subscription book, 1852-1853; account books, 1840-1857, of blacksmiths; account books, 1835-1858 and 1860-1864, of grist mill operators; ledger, 1835-1845, of William Gaston Smith's mercantile business; account books, 1840s and 1850s, of Joseph Pearson Smith, brother of William Gaston Smith, and operator of a mercantile business; ledger, 1858, of Joseph Pearson Smith, and ledger, 1855-1858, of Eli Freeman, carriage repairman, containing records of the sale and repair of carriages and buggies; deeds and plats; papers relating to the administration of the estates of William Gaston Smith (1802-1879), of John Smith (1772-1854), father of William Gaston Smith, and of Mary (Bellew) Smith (1775-1872), wife of John Smith; cashbook, 1875-1902, of William Alexander Smith; an inventory of notes and accounts receivable; stock dividend ledger, 1931-1934; and the financial reports of Mary (Bennett) Smith, William Alexander Smith's wife, and Bennett Dunlap Nelme, who, after 1926, were the legal guardians of William Alexander Smith.

Description taken from: Davis and Miller, Guide to the Cataloged Collections in the Manuscript Department of the William R. Perkins Library, Duke University (1980).

Biographical/Historical

William Alexander Smith (1843-1934) was a textile manufacturer and businessman of Ansonville, North Carolina.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

askRL@duke.edu

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

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 copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The William Alexander Smith Papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as purchases from 1957 to 1966.

Processing Information

Processed by Rubenstein Library Staff.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Collection Inventory

Correspondence, 1842-1949

Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1842-1891	Box 1
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1892-1896	Box 2
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1897-1898	Box 3
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1899-1900	Box 4
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1901-1903	Box 5
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1903 July - 1905	Box 6
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1906 January - August	Box 7
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1906 September - 1907	Box 8
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1907	Box 9
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1908	Box 10
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1909	Box 11
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1910	Box 12
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1910 September - 1911	Box 13
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1911	Box 14
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1912	Box 15
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1912 September - 1913	Box 16
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1913	Box 17
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1914	Box 18
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1915	Box 19
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1915 Sept. - 1916	Box 20

Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1916 July - 1917	Box 21
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1917 July - 1918	Box 22
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1919	Box 23
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1920-1921	Box 24
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1921 April - 1922	Box 25
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1923	Box 26
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1924-1925	Box 27
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1926-1929	Box 28
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1930-1931	Box 29
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), 1931 June - 1949	Box 30
Correspondence (Ansonville, N.C.), undated	Box 31

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Writings, 1765-1934

James Auld, John J. McLendon, William Carr Power, William A. Smith, Thomas J. Watkins and others, 1765-1934	Box 32
Writings, undated	Box 33

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Clippings, 1894-1933

Clippings, 1894-1915	Box 33
Clippings, 1916-1933	Box 34

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Genealogy

Genealogy	Box 34
-----------	--------

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Legal and Financial papers, Photographs, 1773-1949

Legal papers, 1773-1909	Box 35
-------------------------	--------

Legal papers, 1910-1949	Box 36
-------------------------	--------

Estate of John Smith (1772-1854)	Box 37
----------------------------------	--------

Estate of Marry (Bellew) Smith (1775-1872)	Box 37
--	--------

Estate of Charles W. West	Box 37
---------------------------	--------

Construction of building in Wadesboro, 1891	Box 37
---	--------

Estate of William Gaston Smith (1802-1879)	Box 38
--	--------

Bills, receipts, etc. for Carolina Female College, 1849-1859	Box 39
---	--------

Notes due Smith and unpaid, 1869-1905	Box 39
---------------------------------------	--------

Photographs	Box 39
-------------	--------

Bills, receipts, promissory notes, etc., 1809-1915	Box 40
---	--------

Bills, receipts, promissory notes, etc., 1916-1919	Box 41
---	--------

Bills, receipts, promissory notes, etc., 1920-1949	Box 42
---	--------

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Bound Volumes, 1840-1944

Blacksmith ledgers, 1840-1852	Box 43
-------------------------------	--------

Blacksmith ledgers, 1852-1857	Box 44
-------------------------------	--------

Freemasons: Ansonville, N.C., Carolina Lodge No. 141 meeting minutes, 1906-1925	Box 44
Smith and Ingram, Steam Mill ledgers, 1851-1861	Box 45
W.G. Smith, Grassy Island Mill, account book, 1860-1864	Box 45
Account book, 1876-1887	Box 46
Yadkin Falls Co. letter book, 1887-1888	Box 46
N.C. Argus, subscription book, 1852-1853	Box 46
W.G. Mercantile account book, 1835-1845	Box 46
William A. Smith: Inventory of notes and accounts receivable, 1886, 1890	Box 46
Joseph Pearson Smith: Account books, 1847-1860	Box 47
William A. Smith: Store purchases, 1875-1877	Box 48
William A. Smith: Stock dividends, 1931-1934	Box 48
J.P. Smith ledger, 1853	Box 48
J.P. Smith daybook, 1851	Box 48
J.P. Smith carriage ledger, 1858	Box 48
Charles A. Smith's inventory, 1889	Box 48
Charlotte Handkerchief Co.'s book, circa 1904	Box 48
Eldorado Cotton Mills, 1898-1903	Box 49
Miscellaneous volumes of William A. Smith and others	Box 50
Smith and Tyson and William A. Smith: Letterpress book, 1867-1890	Box 51
William A. Smith letterpress book, 1889-1895	Box 51

William A. Smith letter book, 1909-1910	Box 51
Charles A. Smith general store ledger, 1887-1889	Volume F:6138
Charles A. Smith general store invoice book, 1887-1889	Volume F:6139
John Smith grist mill ledger, 1835-1858	Volume F:6141
William A. Smith general store cash book, 1875-1902	Volume F:6142
William A. Smith ledger, 1875-1890	Volume L:6143
William A. Smith daybook and ledger, 1885-1896	Volume L:6144
Joseph Pearson Smith Ansonville Store ledger, 1850-1854	Volume F:6145
William A. Smith ledger, 1886-1906	Volume F:6146
William A. Smith ledger, 1905-1933	Volume F:6147

[Return to Table of Contents](#)