James Gillespie Birney Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2008

Contact information: http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact

Catalog Record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm79012799

Additional search options available at: https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms008026

Prepared by Jacqueline Goggin
Revised by Michael McElderry

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2008
Revised 2010 April
Collection Summary
Title: James Gillespie Birney Papers
Span Dates: 1830-circa 1895
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1830-1850)
ID No.: MSS12799
Creator: Birney, James Gillespie, 1792-1857
Extent: 22 items
Extent: 1 container
Extent: 0.2 linear feet
Extent: 1 microfilm reel
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm79012799
Summary: Abolitionist and editor. Correspondence, diaries, a notebook, and newspaper clippings primarily concerning Birney's participation in the antislavery movement.

Selected Search Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People
Birney, James Gillespie, 1792-1857.
Holley, Myron, 1779-1841--Correspondence.
Lundy, Benjamin, 1789-1839.
Mudge, B. F. (Benjamin Franklin), 1817-1879--Correspondence.
Smith, Gerrit, 1797-1874--Correspondence.
Smith, Gerrit, 1797-1874.
Weld, Theodore Dwight, 1803-1895--Correspondence.
Weld, Theodore Dwight, 1803-1895.

Organizations
American Colonization Society.
Liberty Party (U.S.: 1840-1848)

Subjects
Abolitionists.
African Americans--Colonization--Africa.
Antislavery movements.
Slavery.

Occupations
Abolitionists.
Editors.

Provenance
The papers of James Gillespie Birney, abolitionist and editor, were deposited in the Library of Congress by Dion S. Birney in 1932. The deposit was converted to a gift in 1958.
Processing History
The papers of James Gillespie Birney were arranged and described in 1981. The collection was expanded and revised in 1986 and 1998, and additional revisions were made to the finding aid in 2008.

Transfers
The "Liberty's Advocate" (Amesbury and Salisbury, Mass.; 21 Oct. 1843, no. 5) has been transferred to the Rare Books and Special Collections Division where they are identified as part of the James Gillespie Birney Papers.

Copyright Status
The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of James Gillespie Birney is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions
The papers of James Gillespie Birney are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm
A microfilm edition of these papers is available on one reel. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Preferred Citation
Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, James Gillespie Birney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1792, Feb. 4</td>
<td>Born, Danville, Ky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>Graduated, College of New Jersey (Princeton University), Princeton, N.J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admitted to bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Began law practice in Danville, Ky.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Married Agatha McDowell (died 1839)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>Elected to Kentucky legislature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Moved to Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>Elected representative to first General Assembly of Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>Drafted legislation passed by the General Assembly of Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prohibiting the importation of slaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slave importation bill repealed by the General Assembly of Alabama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1832  Reintroduced legislation in the general assembly of Alabama prohibiting the importation of slaves
     Became agent for the American Colonization Society, traveling and lecturing in the South to promote colonization of slaves
     Returned to Kentucky
1834  Emancipated his slaves
1835  Formed Kentucky Anti-Slavery Society
1836  Moved to Ohio and began to publish the *Philanthropist*, an antislavery newspaper
1837  Elected executive secretary, American Anti-Slavery Society
     Moved to New York
1840  Vice president, World's Anti-Slavery Convention
1840, 1844  Presidential candidate for the Liberty Party
1841  Married Miss Fitzhugh
1852  Published *Examination of the Decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, in the Case of Strader, Gorman and Armstrong vs. Christopher Graham, Delivered at Its December Term, 1850: Concluding with an Address to the Free Colored People, Advising them to Remove to Liberia*. Cincinnati: Truman & Spofford
1857, Nov. 25  Died, Perth Amboy, N.J.

**Scope and Content Note**

The papers of James Gillespie Birney (1792-1857) span the years 1830-circa 1895, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1830-1850. They contain four types of material arranged in the following order: diaries, a notebook, correspondence, and newspaper clippings.

The diaries, consisting of three volumes, 1830-1850, were written by Birney while he traveled throughout the United States and abroad on antislavery lecture tours. They describe his travels on behalf of the abolitionist movement; his association with abolitionist leaders, such as Benjamin Lundy, Gerrit Smith, and Theodore Weld; his opposition to the followers of William Lloyd Garrison, who believed that slavery could not be abolished through legal and constitutional means; and his support for the colonization of slaves in Africa and for the American Colonization Society.

The notebook, circa 1895, may have been written by Birney's son, William, and contains biographical information on his father's activities as an abolitionist.

The correspondence, 1834-1844, contains mainly letters James Birney wrote to Gerrit Smith and Theodore Weld discussing antislavery activities. Included are a letter of 1844 to B. F. Mudge regarding the Liberty party's convention in Lynn, Massachusetts, and a photocopy of an 1839 letter to Myron Holley describing political agitation to end slavery.

The newspaper clippings consist of an obituary of Benjamin Lundy and a letter D. D. Barnard wrote to the United States House of Representatives in 1842 regarding a resolution of censure proposed by Congressman Joshua Giddings.

**Arrangement of the Papers**

This collection is arranged by type of material.
## Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 19,543

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>1830, Aug 31-Oct. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>1834, Sept.-Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>1840-1842, 1845, 1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>Notebook, probably by William Birney for a biography of his father, circa 1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>1834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>1835, 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>1839, Dec., photocopy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1 REEL 1</td>
<td>Newspaper clippings, 1839, 1842</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>