



**State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives**

**Blackston McDannel Family Papers, 1780-1989, bulk
1830-1890**

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:

McDannel, Blackston, 1811-1888

Inclusive Dates:

1780-1989, bulk 1830-1890

Scope & Content:

Family papers consisting primarily of correspondence to and from Blackston McDannel of Greeneville, Greene County, Tennessee. The papers include extensive family correspondence as well as some business papers of McDannel, who was a plasterer by trade, a farmer and a United States Marshal in the administrations of Presidents Lincoln and Johnson. McDannel's diary kept during his service in the Mexican War of 1847-1848, and letters home to his wife and son, are also in the collection. A typed transcription of the diary and many of the letters, prepared in 1989, is part of this collection.

The correspondence includes information related to McDannel's efforts to help widows secure military pensions. Among those assisted were Esther Maxwell, the widow of Revolutionary War soldier Nathaniel Maxwell. A 1780 militia commission for Joseph Gurley of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania which appears in the collection likely is connected to this work. A 1793 letter from John Sevier to Col. Daniel Kennedy warning of an Indian uprising may also have been collected as evidence in a pension case.

A lengthy list of persons charged with treason in 1865 is among the papers. Evidently McDannel assisted one James H. Pickel in collecting the amounts each defendant was assessed.

Some of the correspondence from the 1880s was written to Blackston's oldest son, John L. McDannel. Included in this material are letters from distant cousins

in the Lanier family in response to John L. McDannel's questions about his ancestry.

A transcription of Blackston McDannel's Mexican War diary, and of much of his correspondence, was compiled in 1989 by descendant Lizbeth D. McDannel of Torrance, California. A copy of this work was provided to the Tennessee State Library and Archives by the donor and is included with the collection.

Physical Description/Extent:

1 microfilm reel

Accession/Record Group Number:

Mf. 2065

Language:

English

Permanent Location:

Mf. 2065 (available only on microfilm)

Repository:

Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

Administrative/Biographical History

Blackston McDannel or McDonald was born January 15, 1811, probably in Knox County, Tennessee. His parents were John McDannel and Sally Whitson. Blackston married Elizabeth Britton in Greene County on Oct. 28, 1830, who was the mother of his sons James and John. Elizabeth (born 1811) died May 22, 1848, and was buried at Old Harmony Cemetery in Greeneville. Blackston's second marriage, to Louisa Britton (born 1821), was recorded in Greene County on March 23, 1854.

McDannel often used the spelling McDonald for his surname, as did some of his correspondents. His family, however, generally used the earlier spelling and even his tombstone bears the name McDannel. In the late 1830s and early 1840s Blackston traveled the southeast doing plastering work on large buildings at such places as the Limestone Springs resort in South Carolina and Swannanoa near Asheville, North Carolina. At home in Greeneville he became active in securing pensions for widows of Revolutionary War veterans. In this work he was by 1844 associated with Congressman Andrew Johnson, who was also from Greeneville. Although a few letters to and from Andrew Johnson appear in this collection,

most were removed at an earlier date and appear in the published papers of President Johnson.

In August 1847 McDannel left Greeneville to serve as a clerk in the Quartermaster's Corps of the United States Army under Major Samuel Milligan in the war with Mexico. Milligan was a Greeneville native, attorney and former Congressman. Although he was not in battle, McDannel's diary and letters from this period are nonetheless of considerable interest for their description and commentary.

McDannel's friendship with Andrew Johnson and his Unionist politics earned him the post of U.S. Marshal for East Tennessee in 1861. Letters between McDannel and his wife, and also from his brother J.C.S. "Jo" McDannel of Knoxville, detail the troubles of wartime. In Sept. 1864 he wrote to his wife from Knoxville, "If there are any rebels in Upper East Tennessee, they had better be making tracks if they want to save their bacon. Our time is now here, and we will make use of our means to crush the rebellion and punish traitors."

From the time of the Civil War to the end of his life, McDannel continued living and working in Greeneville. Frequent correspondence from his brother in Knoxville and his wife and children, along with other relatives and business associates, indicate that he was a great letter-writer himself. He traveled, perhaps still doing work as a plasterer. In 1871 his wife Louisa wrote in concern about their son, Jim, who was ill. She said, "I want you to come home, and see if anything can be done for him, and think it is time you would come anyhow... I want you at home, if you never make another dollar." His son John, in a letter dated Jan. 27, 1873, wrote "Mary Thompson . . . said your health is poor – that you sometimes felt you could not abide long on this earth. Yet, Mary says you keep trying to make money." In 1876 Louisa McDannel died and was buried in Greeneville.

Blackston McDannel's final letter in this collection is dated Sept. 9, 1886, and written to his brother Jo. In it he speaks of a wish to return to Hard Scrabble, evidently in Knoxville, where he grew up. "All the landmarks of my boyhood have been obliterated. Near all of those whom I once knew are dead. A friend or two only remains. I wish I could get everything back as I saw it 70 years ago. You see Jo, I am what the creatures of civilization call an old foggy, and I pride myself in being one." Blackston McDannel died on July 27, 1888. In a later note, his son John stated that his father was clear-minded until three months before his death.

No list of the children of Blackston McDannel appears in the collection. From census and other records the following have been identified:

(1) John Lafayette McDannel (1835-1915), helped manage the household as a young boy while his father was in Mexico and his mother was ill. John was a teacher in Lowndes County, Alabama, before the Civil War. By 1868 he was at

Croton Academy in Fork Creek, Monroe County, Tennessee. In the 1870s he was in Flint Creek and Concord, Tennessee. His letters mention his wife Mag and, in 1869, young son Frank. John died in Jefferson County at White Pine and is buried in the 1st Presbyterian Cemetery, Morristown, Tennessee. He continued to spell his name McDannel throughout his life.

(2) James J. McDannel (born ca. 1840), was living in Greeneville in 1871, evidently married and with children, and corresponding with his father. He may be the James McDannel who married Josephine Holcomb in Greene County in 1863.

(3) Sarah J. McDannel (1842-1885), married David C. Dukes in 1860. Dukes, whose mother was a Lanier, was Sarah's "near cousin" and her father strongly opposed the marriage. Documents in the collection refer to the "abduction" of Sarah by Dukes. Notes describing a property dispute between Dukes and Blackston McDannel's heirs after Sarah's death are also in the file. She is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery at Greeneville.

(4) Ann Eliza McDannel (1846-1870), was at home in Greeneville and corresponded with her father in the later 1860s. A letter from John L. McDannel dated March 25, 1870, speaks of her recent death. She was buried near her mother in Old Harmony Cemetery at Greeneville.

(5) Joseph Whitson McDannel (born ca. 1855), may have been the only child of Blackston's second wife. He married Emma Caroline Horton and was living in Athens, Tennessee in the 1870s. An infant daughter of J.W. and E.C. McDannel is buried at Old Harmony Cemetery.

Organization/Arrangement of Materials

Correspondence is arranged chronologically.

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

The collection will not be made available for research until January 1, 2017.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

While the Tennessee State Library and Archives houses an item, it does not necessarily hold the copyright on the item, nor may it be able to determine if the item is still protected under current copyright law. Users are solely responsible for determining the existence of such instances and for obtaining any other permissions and paying associated fees that may be necessary for the intended use.

Index Terms

Personal/Family Names:

Gurley, Joseph, active 1780
Johnson, Andrew, 1808-1875
Kennedy, David, active 1793
Lanier family
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865
Maxwell, Esther, 1755-1843
Maxwell, Nathaniel, 1741-1834
McDaniel family
McDannel, Blackston, 1811-1888
McDannel, Elizabeth Britton, 1811-1848
McDannel, J. C. S., active 1861-1865
McDannel, John Lafayette, 1835-1915
McDannel, Louisa Britton, 1821-1876
McDannel family
Milligan, Samuel, 1814-1874
Pickel, James H., active 1861-1865
Sevier, John, 1745-1815

Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:

United States. Army. Quartermaster Corps
United States. Marshal (Tennessee)

Subjects:

Farmers -- Tennessee -- 19th century
Mexican War, 1846-1848
Military pensions -- United States -- Revolution, 1775-1783
Plasterers -- Tennessee -- 19th century
Trials (Treason) -- United States -- 19th century

Geographic Names:

Greene County (Tenn.) -- Genealogy -- Sources
Greeneville (Tenn.)
Tennessee -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783

Document Types:

Business records
Correspondence
Diaries
Genealogies (histories)
Legal documents
Military commissions

Acquisition and Appraisal**Provenance and Acquisition:**

The collection was loaned to TSLA for duplication by the owner, Julia Pensinger, of 250 Canores Road, Afton, Tennessee, 37616

Processing and Administrative Information**Preferred Citation:**

Blackston McDannel Family Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives

Processing Information:

The collection was arranged and described by Charles A. Sherrill in February 2016.

Existence and Location of Originals:

The originals are retained by the owner, Julia Pensinger.

Related Archival Materials:

Correspondence between Blackston McDannel and Andrew Johnson is part of the Library of Congress collection of Andrew Johnson papers. That collection is available on microfilm and some items have been published by the University of Tennessee Press in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*.

DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Box	Folder
Correspondence, 1793-1839	1793-1839	1	1
Correspondence, 1840-1845	1840-1845	1	2
Correspondence, 1846-1849	1846-1849	1	3
Correspondence, 1850-1859	1850-1859	1	4
Correspondence, 1860-1869	1860-1869	1	5
Correspondence, 1870-1879	1870-1879	1	6
Correspondence, 1880-1887	1880-1887	1	7
Pennsylvania Militia commission of Capt. Joseph Gurley	1780	1	8
Mexican War diary of Blackston McDannel; also "Notes from the Journal of a Highland Tennessean, en route to Mexico."	1847-1848	1	9
Papers pertaining to the marriage of Carter Dukes and Sarah Jane McDannel	1860	1	10
List of fees due James H. Pickel in federal treason cases	1865-1866	1	11
Notebook of J.W. McDannel regarding dispute with David C. Dukes.	ca 1890	1	12
Miscellaneous notes and clippings	undated	1	13
"The Diary and Letters of Blackstone McDannel" compiled by Lizbeth D. McDannel	1989		