

**WILLIAM DAVIS COTTON FAMILY PAPERS**  
(Ms. 4780)  
Inventory

Compiled by  
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Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections  
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library  
Louisiana State University Libraries  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2007  
(Revised 2009)

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Proper acknowledgement of LLMVC materials must be made in any resulting writing or publications. The correct form of citation for this manuscript group is given on the summary page. Copies of scholarly publications based on research in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections are welcomed.

**SUMMARY**

- Size:** 1 linear ft., 4 vols.
- Geographic locations:** Baton Rouge, La.; Catahoula Parish, La.; Collin County, Tex.; Georgia; Fredericksburg, Va.; Chancellorsville, Va.; Richmond, Va.; Manassas, Va.
- Inclusive dates:** 1852-1989
- Bulk dates:** 1863-1890, 1969-1989
- Language:** English
- Summary:** Civil War correspondence of Drury P. Gibson and sister Mary Gibson Cotton, correspondence between George Spencer Cotton and Lizzie Davis, and personal papers of William Davis Cotton and family.
- Organization:** Series I, Mary Gibson Cotton Papers, 1852-1864  
Series II, George Cotton and Lizzie Davis Correspondence, 1888-1890  
Series III, William Davis Cotton Papers, 1925-1989
- Restrictions on access:** If microfilm is available, photocopies must be made from microfilm.
- Related collections:** Sam Houston Jones Scrapbooks, Mss. 3299, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
- Copyright:** Copyright of the original materials is retained by descendants of the creators in accordance with U.S. copyright law.
- Citation:** William Davis Cotton Family Papers, Mss. 4780, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
- Stack location(s):** S:136, H:14, OS:C

## **BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE**

Elijah Brannon Cotton (1813-1893) and Mary Gibson Bray (1824-1897) married in 1854 and resided at Duran Plantation in Catahoula Parish, La. The two had six children, including daughter Clara Cotton (1855-1926) and son George Spencer Cotton (1863-1939). Dr. Drury P. Gibson (1835-1880s), brother of Mary Gibson Bray, was a doctor who served during the Civil War. He joined the Catahoula Guerrillas, later part of Wheat's Battalion, and was involved in major battles in Virginia and Georgia.

George Spencer Cotton married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Davis (1872-1941), daughter of John Lugar Davis and his first wife, Elizabeth Gibson. Lizzie grew up in Collin County, Texas, and met George Spencer Cotton when he came to Texas to visit his sister, Clara Cotton, John Lugar Davis' second wife. George and Lizzie were married in 1890, and the two spent their life on Duran plantation in Catahoula Parish.

Lt. Colonel W.D. (William Davis) Cotton (Feb. 9, 1904-Dec. 23, 1989), son of George Spencer Cotton and Lizzie Davis, graduated from Louisiana State University in 1927. He married Anna Mae "Puddin" Cotton and they had two daughters, Carole Cotton-Winn and Jean Cotton, and one son, Stephen Cotton. W.D. Cotton was a lawyer in Rayville, La., founding president of First National Bank in Rayville, and president of the Louisiana State Bar Association and the LSU Alumni Federation. He also served in the Louisiana Legislature but resigned his seat to volunteer for World War II, in which he was involved with planning the D-Day invasion.

For further information about the Cotton family, see *The Cottons of Catahoula and Related Families*, a family history written by William Davis Cotton and his daughter, Carole Cotton-Winn in 1987.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The earliest items in the collection consist of correspondence from Drury P. Gibson, a doctor in the Confederate Army, to his sister Mary Gibson Bray Cotton (1857-1863). These letters describe life in various camps in Georgia and Virginia as a member of Major Chatham Wheat's Battalion. He discusses battles in Manassas, Williamsburg, and Richmond, as well as provides information about the specific battlefields, life inside each camp, and his role as physician and surgeon in his battalion.

Letters between George Spencer Cotton and his fiancée Elizabeth "Lizzie" Davis document the years of their engagement (1888-1890). Cotton, writing from Duran Plantation, and Davis, from Rhea's Mill in Texas, discuss topics such as family members, the purchase of a ring, and the date of their wedding.

Papers belonging to William Davis Cotton include correspondence, photographs, printed items, and miscellaneous and printed volumes. Correspondence relates to Cotton's law practice, his book on the Cotton family, and his presidency of the LSU Alumni Federation. Photographs include the dedication of the LSU Campus (1926), portraits of W.D. Cotton and Puddin Cotton (ca. 1926-1927), and possibly members of a fraternity (ca. 1926-1927). Printed items include alumni newsletters, programs from LSU events (1926-1987), and newspaper clippings. Printed volumes include 2 issues of *Gumbo* (1926 and 1927), and a Cotton family Bible (1917). A family history entitled *The Cottons of Catahoula and Related Families* is available (call number CS71.C851). This title was removed from the collection and cataloged separately.

**LIST OF SERIES**

**Series I, Mary Gibson Cotton Papers, 1852-1864**

**Series II, George Cotton and Lizzie Davis Correspondence, 1888-1890**

**Series III, William Davis Cotton Papers, 1925-1989**

## SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

### Series I, Mary Gibson Cotton Papers, 1852-1864

The earliest letter in the collection was written by Drury Gibson to his sister Mary in which he describes his medical training at a Marine Hospital and the shortage of physicians in the army with real experience (October 1, 1857), while a subsequent letter announces his arrival at Camp Moore in Tangipahoa, La (May 29, 1861). Gibson writes to a friend from Mitchell's Ford near Manassas, Va., following the First Battle of Manassas. He describes the weeks leading up to the battle, the character of Major Wheat and the Catahoula Guerrillas, and his medical treatment of wounded Yankee soldiers (August 1, 1861). A letter to Mary from Camp Beauregard tells her of the restlessness of the battalion in their anticipation of a battle, but also of their full confidence in General Beauregard (October 13, 1861).

Gibson tells his sister about two major battles, one at Williamsburg on May 5, and the other near Richmond on May 31, discussing their success on the battlefield, the extent of their wounded and killed, and their confidence in a Confederate victory overall (June 10, 1862). A following letter talks of a Union defeat in early July (July 15, 1862). He describes the assault as well as the aftermath, including the amount of wounded from both sides on which he had to operate. He also asks his sister about the wounded men that returned home after the Battle of Seven Pines. Another letter from Gibson informs his sister that he passed the Army Medical Board examination and is now an assistant surgeon in the Confederate Army. He comments on the amount of experience he has gained since the war began (October 12, 1862). Gibson's two following letters discuss the large Confederate victory at the Battle of Fredericksburg and the high morale of his battalion. He talks of their utmost confidence in General Lee and the respected status of the Louisiana troops fighting in Virginia (October 18, October 26, 1862).

A letter of May 7, 1863 describes the Battle of Chancellorsville. Gibson tells his sister of the battle itself as well as his duties tending to the wounded. He mentions that General "Stonewall" Jackson was shot during the battle and lost his arm, while his following and last letter (May 14, 1863) tells of Jackson's death due to this injury. A photograph of Drury P. Gibson is also found in the papers (undated).

Finally, also included is a letter to Mary Gibson Cotton from John L. Gibson, brother of Mary and Drury Gibson, who also fought in the Civil War. In it, he tells his sister that he is sick of a soldier's life and wishes to return home (undated). Two documents belonging to Mary Gibson Cotton are also included, one a letter from A. Miltenberger discussing the cotton market (January 6, 1853) and the other a bill of sale for three slaves bought by Mary Gibson (1852).

These letters were edited and published by Debra Nance Laurence as "Letters from a North Louisiana Tiger" in the *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* (Fall 1979).

**Series II, George Cotton and Lizzie Davis Correspondence, 1888-1890**

Letters between George Spencer Cotton and Lizzie Davis span the years of their engagement, 1888-1890. The two, George from Duran Plantation in Catahoula Parish, La., and Lizzie from Rhea's Mill in Collin County, Tex., write love letters to one another and discuss events in their lives, news of family members, and plans of their wedding. Lizzie writes of school and her teachers, while George discusses his work on the plantation. One letter from George is addressed to Mr. John Davis and Clara Cotton Davis and asks for their consent to marry Lizzie (April 14, 1889). George and Lizzie continue to discuss plans such as a ring and a wedding date, and the final letter in their correspondence was written by Lizzie, expressing her excitement about George's upcoming trip to Texas where they would be married shortly after (January 27, 1890).

**Series III, William Davis Cotton Papers, 1925-1989**

Correspondence of William Davis Cotton pertains to his membership and term as president of the LSU Alumni Association (1969-1970, 1988), his research on the Cotton family and information surrounding the publication and recognition of his book *The Cottons of Catahoula and Related Families* (1988-1989). Miscellaneous documents include Cotton's juris doctorate diploma from Louisiana State University (1968), a mailing list of past presidents of the LSU student body from 1926-1989, and list of the Louisiana State Bar Association's Board of Governors (1965-1966).

Printed items include alumni newsletters (1969-1971), "A Record of Kiwanians who Served as Lieutenant Governor in the Louisiana - Mississippi - West Tennessee District of Kiwanis International" (1962), and programs from LSU events such as a commencement (1927), an honors banquet (1967), and a sports banquet (1969). The collection also includes correspondence, newspaper clippings, and other printed materials detailing Cotton's early political career and relationship with governor Sam Houston Jones (1939-1978).

Visual materials include a scrapbook from the Cottons' trip to Chicago for the 1933 World's Fair and photographs of the National Society of the Scabbard and Blade at the dedication of the LSU Campus (1926), portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Cotton (ca. 1926-1927), a group photograph of possible members of a fraternity (ca. 1926-1927), and a photograph of a Kiwanis meeting (undated). Later photographs show the LSU Law Class of 1927 (taken in 1967), Cotton crowning the 1969 LSU Homecoming queen, and a picture of Mr. and Mrs. Cotton with Mr. and Mrs. Charlie McClendon (1972).

Printed volumes include 2 issues of the *Gumbo* (LSU's yearbook, 1926 and 1927), Cotton's family Bible (1917), and an issue of *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* containing the edited Civil War letters of Drury Gibson in "Letters from a North Louisiana Tiger," written by Debra Nance Laurence (Fall 1979).



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CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack</u> <u>Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
S:136	1	1	<b>Series I, Mary Gibson Cotton Papers, 1852-1864</b> 1852-1855
		2	Correspondence, 1857, 1861
		3	Correspondence, 1862
		4	Correspondence, 1863
		5	Envelopes, newspaper clippings, 1863
		6	Photograph
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		7-10	September-December 1888
		11-14	January-August 1889
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			<b>Series III, William Davis Cotton Papers, 1925-1989</b>
		19	Correspondence, 1969-1979, 1988-1989
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		23	Illustration, undated
		24	Photographs, 1926-1972
		25	“A Record of Kiwanians who Served as Lieutenant Governor in the Louisiana - Mississippi - West Tennessee District of Kiwanis International” (1962)

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1852-1989

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<u>Stack</u> <u>Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
		26	Vol. X No.4 <i>North Louisiana Historical Association Journal</i> (Fall 1979)
		27	Sam Houston Jones materials, 1939-1978
	3	28-31	Chicago World's Fair scrapbook, 1933
H:14	--	--	<i>Gumbo</i> (1926 and 1927); Bible (1917)
OS:C	--	1	Newspaper clippings and campaign sign, 1939-1969