

C Thompson, Meriwether Jeff (1826-1876), Papers, 1854-1935
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INTRODUCTION

Civil War memoir, correspondence, business and legal papers, family genealogies, and miscellaneous papers of M. Jeff Thompson. Thompson was a civil engineer, a railroad and real estate promoter, mayor of St. Joseph, Missouri, and a brigadier general in the Confederate Army.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Meriwether Jeff Thompson Papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by C.A. Bailey in July, 1938. An addition was made in June 1974 by Lewis E. Atherton (Accession No.1082), and on 29 June 1982 (Accession No. 2428)

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Meriwether Jeff Thompson was born in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, to Meriwether and Martha Broadus Thompson on 22 January 1826. As a young man M. Jeff Thompson hoped for a military career. He received a rudimentary education in military tactics while attending school in Charleston, South Carolina, but failed to receive an appointment to any military academy. After his schooling was finished, Thompson worked as a store clerk in several towns in Virginia and Pennsylvania. In 1847 he moved to Liberty, Missouri, where he held a similar position.

In 1848 Thompson married Emma Hayes, the daughter of a Baltimore artist, and settled in St. Joseph, Missouri. Following his marriage, Thompson was elected city surveyor for St. Joseph and, later, county surveyor for Buchanan County. Thompson was soon involved in the development of the railroads in Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska, first as a surveyor and civil engineer and later as an officer of several companies. Thompson was also involved in several municipal improvement projects, including the organization of the St. Joseph gas company. In 1859 and 1860 he served as mayor of St. Joseph.

Thompson's first military experience came as commander of the local militia in Buchanan County. His most distinctive service in the Civil War came as brigadier general in charge of Missouri's first military district. Thompson's forces were involved in numerous engagements in Missouri and Arkansas and on the Mississippi River. His several victories over superior Union forces and his evasive maneuvers earned him the nickname "Swamp Fox of the Confederacy." Thompson was captured in 1864, however, and spent several months in various Union prisons before being exchanged. After his release Thompson returned to action, joining Generals Joseph O. Shelby and Sterling Price in an unsuccessful invasion of central and western Missouri. The Confederate troops serving under Thompson at the end of the war were some of the last to surrender in May 1865.

M. Jeff Thompson spent most of his life after the Civil War in New Orleans. He died in St. Joseph in July 1876.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

These papers relate primarily to the Civil War activities of M. Jeff Thompson, to his family, and to his business career prior to the Civil War. The most significant part of the collection is Thompson's Civil War memoirs, which describe his activities in Missouri and Arkansas, various Union prison camps, and on the Mississippi River. Biographical information is found throughout the collection, and genealogical information about the Thompson family and related families, is plentiful. Correspondence is scarce and limited to the period of 1861 to 1867. A small amount of information about Thompson's business interests and his life prior to the Civil War is found in the sections of biographical information, business and legal papers, and newspaper clippings. This collection is arranged by type of material and chronologically within each type.

FOLDER LIST

- f.1 Biographical Information. Biographical sketches of M. Jeff Thompson, including a paper entitled "Data Pertaining to Military Career of Brigadier General Meriwether Jeff Thompson," compiled by Mrs. Jesse V. Boswell. The paper includes quotations from newspaper articles, histories, and an 1867 letter by Thompson discussing the reasons why he fought for the Confederacy and his attitude toward Reconstruction. Also included are two original Confederate defense bonds issued by the exiled state government of Missouri in 1862 and paid to Thompson in 1864 for the time he spent as a prisoner of war. Background information on the history of bonds is included.
- f. 2-9 Memoirs. A typed transcription of M. Jeff Thompson's memoirs of his Civil War service. The first portion of the memoirs was written in 1864, while Thompson was in several Union prison camps. The memoirs were completed shortly after the end of the Civil War. Included is an introduction written by Thompson's daughter, Marcie Thompson Abell Bailey, which outlines Thompson's life prior to the Civil War. Thompson provides a very detailed account of his military service. His personal opinions, names of soldiers, and descriptions of engagements and troop movements are plentiful. Also included are copies of military correspondence and general orders and numerous poems written to and by Thompson.
- f. 2 Introduction, January-May 1861. Thompson's childhood and his early life in Missouri; anti-abolition address to the citizens of Missouri; poetry; Thompson's work at the 1861 Missouri state convention; war preparations; indecision about secession; and war activities in St. Joseph.
- f. 3 May-September 1861. Election as brigadier general; recruiting; military organization; troop discipline; poetry; and proclamation against Union general John C. Fremont (2 September 1861).
- f. 4 September-December 1861. Troop discipline and supplies; capture of Big

- River Bridge (15 October 1861); Battle of Blackwell Station (15 October 1861); Battle of Fredericktown (20 October 1861); capture of steamboat Maria Denning; raid on Commerce, Missouri; and letter to Governor Thomas Fletcher.
- f. 5 January-June 1862. Disbanding of the Missouri State Guard; Thompson's trip to New Orleans, Louisiana, and Richmond, Virginia; Mississippi River defense fleet; poetry; and correspondence to Major General Earl Van Dorn.
- f. 6 June-December 1862. Mississippi River warfare; troop supplies; poetry; and skirmishes in Missouri and Arkansas.
- f. 7 January 1863-April 1864. Skirmishes in Missouri and Arkansas; Thompson's capture; Gratiot Street prison, St. Louis; Alton, Illinois, penitentiary; Johnson's Island, Ohio, prison; Fort Delaware prison; and poetry.
- f. 8 April-November 1864. Union prison ship Dragoon, South Carolina; exchange for Union prisoners; Thompson's return to Missouri; operations with Generals Joseph O. Shelby and Sterling Price; and poetry.
- f. 9 November 1864-June 1865. Arkansas; military correspondence and general orders; troop discipline; orders to surrender; surrender procedure (25 May 1865); and poetry.
- f. 10 Map, 1861. An 8" x 10" photographic copy of an 1861 map of Missouri's first military district. Thompson commanded this southeastern Missouri district, which included the counties of Pemiscot, New Madrid, Mississippi, Scott, Cape Girardeau, Perry, Ste. Genevieve, St. Francois, Washington, Iron, Madison, Bollinger, Stoddard, Wayne, Reynolds, Carter, Ripley, Butler, and Dunklin.
- f. 11 Speech, n.d. A handwritten, undated speech entitled "Missouri Battles." The speech was delivered by an unidentified descendant of M. Jeff Thompson to a chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The speech contains general information about Civil War battles in Missouri, Thompson, and Sterling Price.
- f. 12 Correspondence, 1861-1867. Personal and military correspondence of M. Jeff Thompson. Included are letters to his daughter Martha, military reports sent to General Earl Van Dorn, orders returning Thompson to active duty in 1864, and a copy of an 1867 letter in which Thompson discusses the reasons why he fought for the Confederacy and his views of Reconstruction.
- f. 13 Newspaper Clippings, 1919-1935, n.d. Clippings from various newspapers, partly identified and dated, regarding Thompson's life in St. Joseph before the Civil War and his military career. They also contain biographical and genealogical information about Thompson. Included are obituaries for M. Jeff Thompson and for his father, Meriwether Thompson.
- f. 14 Business and Legal Papers, 1854-1873, n.d. Land deeds, business agreements, court documents, and miscellaneous papers pertaining to Meriwether Thompson and M. Jeff Thompson. Included are sales agreements and articles of co-partnership regarding a mitre bevel gauge invented by M. Jeff Thompson, conditions of the charter, of the St. Joseph Extension Company and the St. Joseph Improvement Company, and a transfer of paternity of M. Jeff

Thompson's daughter, Martha, to his sister, Betty Abell. The miscellaneous papers include a DAR application for Marcie Thompson Abell Bailey and a Civil War poem written by her.

- f. 15 Genealogy. A printed copy of an 1897 Williams family genealogy. The related families include the Bailey family. Thompson's daughter, Marcie, married William Albert Bailey.
- f. 16 A typed copy of a Broadus family genealogy, the maternal ancestors of M. Jeff Thompson. Included are photographs of several ancestral homes in Virginia and various members of the Broadus, Thompson, and Bailey families, including M. Jeff Thompson.

INDEX TERMS

Subject	Folders	Image
Abolitionists--Attitudes toward	2,12	
Arkansas (Gunboat)	6	
Autobiographies	2-9	
Bailey family--Genealogy	15	
Bailey, Betty A. (1882-1908)	16	y
Bailey, Charles Albert	16	y
Bailey, Marcie Abell	16	y
Beauregarde (Gunboat)	5,6	
Bragg (Gunboat)	5,6,12	
Broadus family--Genealogy	14,16	
Broadus, William F. (-1830)	16	y
Campbell, Jamie	14	
Carondelet (Ironclad)	5	
Civil War	1-11	
Civil War--Arkansas	3,5-7,9	
Civil War--Autobiographies	2-9	
Civil War--Battle of Belmont, 1861	4	
Civil War--Battle of Big River Bridge, 1861	4	
Civil War--Battle of Blackwell Station, 1861	4	
Civil War--Battle of Boonville	11	
Civil War--Battle of Fredericktown, Missouri	4	
Civil War--Battle of Westport	11	
Civil War--Battle of Wilson's Creek, 1861	11	
Civil War--Illinois, 1861	3	
Civil War--Louisiana, 1862	6	
Civil War--Maps	10	

Subject	Folders	Image
Civil War--Maryland, Point Lookout	7,8	
Civil War--Mississippi River	5,6	
Civil War--Mississippi, 1862	6	
Civil War--Missouri	1-13	
Civil War--Missouri, Andrew County	11	
Civil War--Missouri, Buchanan County	2,11	
Civil War--Missouri, Cape Girardeau County	3	
Civil War--Missouri, Cooper County	8	
Civil War--Missouri, Iron County	4,8	
Civil War--Missouri, Jackson County	8	
Civil War--Missouri, Lafayette County	8	
Civil War--Missouri, Madison County	4,8	
Civil War--Missouri, Mississippi County	3	
Civil War--Missouri, New Madrid County	3-5,7	
Civil War--Missouri, Pemiscot County	5	
Civil War--Missouri, Pettis County	8	
Civil War--Missouri, Scott County	3,5	
Civil War--Missouri, St. Francois County	4	
Civil War--Missouri, Stoddard County	3,4,7	
Civil War--Naval operations	5,6,12	
Civil War--Ohio, Johnson's Island	7	
Civil War--Poetry	2,3,5-9	
Civil War--Prisoners and prisons	7,8,12	
Civil War--Tennessee, 1862	5	
Clark, Henry	3,7	
Conestoga (Gunboat)	3	
Confederate States of America. Navy	1,5,6,12	
Dolmen, John A.	14	
Doniphan, Alexander W. (1808-1887)	2	
Dragoon (Prison Ship)	8	
Fletcher, Thomas Clement (1827-1899)	4	
Fort Delaware Prison, DE	7, 8	
Fremont, John Charles (1813-1890)	3, 4, 11	
Gratiot Street Prison, St. Louis, Missouri	7, 8	
Hall, Willard Preble (1820-1882)	11	
Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway	2	
Hardee, (William Joseph) (1815-1873)	3, 11	
Hughes, Bela M.	2	

Subject	Folders	Image
Jackson, Claiborne Fox (1806-1862)	1-4, 11	
Jeff Thompson (Gunboat)	5, 6	
Johnson's Island, Ohio	7	
Kelly, Thomas	14	
Kitchen, Sol	4	
Lexington (Gunboat)	3	
Little Rebel (Gunboat)	5, 6	
Lovell (Gunboat)	5, 6	
Lowe, Adin	3, 4	
Maps--Civil War, First Military Area, 1861	10	
Maps--Missouri, 1861	10	
McCann, John	3	
McCreary, Elijah	14	
McCreary, Nancy Jane	14	
McDowell, Drake	4	
McDowell, Joseph	3	
McNeil, John	7	
Meathany, Jacob and William	14	
Miller, Charles A.	14	
Missouri State Guard	2-4	
Missouri, Sedalia	8	
Missouri, St. Joseph	2, 13	
Missouri. Convention, 1861	2	
Parsons, Mosby Monroe (1822-1865)	2	
Pillow, Gideon J. (1806-1878)	3, 11	
Poetry, 1860s	2, 3, 5-9, 14	
Polk, Trusten (1811-1876)	3, 11	
Prentice, Clarence	3, 4	
Prentice, George D. (1802-1870)	1, 12	
Price, Sterling (1809-1867)	1, 2, 5, 8, 11, 12	
Railroads, Missouri	13	
Reconstruction (1865-1876), Attitudes toward	1, 12	
Reynolds, Thomas C. (1821-1887)	3	
Ridenbaugh, William	14	
Shelby, Joseph O. (1830-1897)	8, 9, 11, 12	
Sikeston Race	5	
Slavery, Addresses and essays	2	

Subject	Folders	Image
Slavery, Attitudes toward	2, 12	
Smith, F. W.	2, 11	
Smith, Jack	5	
St. Joseph Extension Company, St. Joseph, Missouri	14	
St. Joseph Improvement Company, St. Joseph, Missouri	14	
Steamboat, Cadet	3	
Steamboat, Dan Conway	5	
Steamboat, Daniel Morgan	3	
Steamboat, Maria Denning	4	
Steamboat, Mexico	5	
Sterling Price (Gunboat)	5, 6	
Stewart, Robert M. (1815-1871)	2, 11	
Sumpter (Gunboat)	5, 6	
Swamp Fox	1, 3	
Thompson family--Genealogy	16	
Thompson, M. Jeff (1826-1876)	1-16	y
Thompson, Meriwether	13, 16	y
Van Dorn (Gunboat)	5, 6	
Van Dorn, Earl (1820-1863)	5, 6, 11, 12	
Van Gundy, Johas	14	
Waugh, A.	2-4	
Williams family--Genealogy	15	
Yorke, L. Eugene	14	