

C Helm, John B. (1797-1872), Papers, 1818-1868
589 .5 linear feet

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INTRODUCTION

Papers of a merchant, lawyer, judge, and builder in Kentucky and Hannibal, MO. Consists of correspondence relating mainly to business interests; financial and legal documents such as receipts, promissory notes, contracts and legal briefs; and account books.

DONOR INFORMATION

The papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by W. Raymond Usher on 7 August 1970 (Accession No. 706).

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John B. Helm was born in 1797 in Marion County, Kentucky, and became a successful businessman involved in merchandising and building construction, the law, and public service. Continuing a family tradition, Helm was the last of four generations of judges. He studied law in Frankfort, Kentucky.

In 1824, in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, he married his cousin Jane Helm. While in Elizabethtown, he and his brother Lewis owned and operated the John B. and Lewis Helm Company, a general store which carried a wide variety of products such as whiskey, tobacco, hardware, clothing, groceries, books, and farm implements. Two of his customers were Nancy Lincoln and her son Abraham. President Lincoln later remarked that John B. Helm was one of the first men he ever admired because he was so well dressed.

In 1833, Helm and his family moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky. There he successfully practiced law and served as postmaster and State Commissioner of Internal Improvements. While on the commission, he superintended the construction of locks and dams on the Green and Barren rivers. His wife Jane died in 1840, and he remarried in 1842 to a Mary A. Pollard.

Helm moved once more, in 1852, to Hannibal, Missouri, where he practiced law, was elected a judge of the Hannibal Court of Common Pleas, and became a director of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad Company. In Kentucky, Helm was interested in real estate, renting and leasing property, and continued these activities in the Hannibal area. Turning to construction also, he was responsible for the erection of over eighty buildings. In 1864, he laid out an addition to Brookfield, Missouri. John B. Helm died in 1872 at the age of 74.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers mainly documents John Helm's careers as businessman, lawyer, and public servant. The collection has been arranged chronologically into the following three series: **Correspondence**, **Financial and Legal Documents**, and **Account Books**.

Correspondence for the years 1823 to 1836 mainly concerns the activities of the John B. and Lewis Helm Company of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, a general store which carried a wide variety of products. The letters, from and to wholesalers supplying the company, include invoices, shipping instructions and freight rates, and acknowledgments of received goods and services. Researchers interested in frontier merchants and business and economic conditions of the period will find useful material here.

The correspondence from 1843 to 1852 and 1865 to 1867 reflects Helm's other interests. This section primarily includes legal correspondence with scattered documents regarding the maintenance of locks and dams on the Green and Barren rivers, and correspondence regarding contracts and land sales. There are also a small number of letters referring to Helm's duties as postmaster in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

The **Financial and Legal Documents** series, 1818 to 1868, which includes receipts, contracts, promissory notes, leases, and legal briefs, also provides information about general business and economic conditions of the period. Of limited value are the **Account Books** which list, with a few exceptions, only names and money owed or paid.

See also the **Helm-Davidson Family, Papers, 1824-1970 (C3434)**.

FOLDER LIST

Correspondence Series

- f. 1-8 Correspondence, 1823-1836, regarding the John B. and Lewis Helm Company, mostly from and to wholesalers acknowledging merchandise and goods, invoices, prices, and freight rates. Letters from Lewis Helm while on purchasing trips.
- f. 9-12 Legal correspondence, reports regarding the construction and maintenance of locks and dams on the Green and Barren rivers, land sales, and letters illustrating Helm's business interests in real estate and construction in Kentucky and Missouri, 1843-1852 and 1865-1868.
- f. 13 Undated materials. Letters from family members, manuscripts advocating railroad construction and outlining Helm's ideas about representative government, and Green and Barren rivers commission material.

Financial and Legal Documents Series

- f. 14-26 Receipts and documents, 1818-1835, pertaining primarily to the operation of the John B. and Lewis Helm Company; and some contracts and promissory notes.
- f. 27-42 Contracts, promissory notes, and legal papers, 1836-1868, relating to Helm's careers as lawyer and judge; leases and other documents reflecting his business interests in real estate and construction in Kentucky and Missouri; and Green and Barren river commission materials. Undated material is in the last folder.

Account Books Series

- f. 43 A record of notes due by listed individuals, 1820-1825, with most entries

- undated, and five page catalog of John B. Helm's books.
- f. 44 Receipt book, 1830-1845, with alphabetical arrangement of names and amounts received; most entries are undated.
- f. 45 "Wood Book," 1845-1847. Includes wood purchases and prices.

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