

SCSL Digital Collections

Colin J. McRae collection: McRae Family papers (1824-1903) finding aid

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South Carolina Budget and Control Board

Colin J. McRae Collection: McRae Family Papers (1824-1903) Finding Aid

Creators: Colin J. McRae, John J. McRae, Catherine McRae Hempstead

Extent: 4 document boxes

1 oversize box

Location: SCCRRMM Archives

I. List of Series

Colin McRae Business Papers

Colin McRae Personal Papers

McRae Family Papers

Miscellaneous Papers

II. Biographical Sketch

The McRae Family Papers contain documents collected by Colin J. McRae (1813-1877) before and after his years of service with the Confederate Government, as well as documents collected by his brother John J. McRae and by his sister Catherine L. McRae Hempstead. These papers were discovered in the Kate Shepherd House with the McRae Business Papers. The McRae Family Papers are mainly comprised of the personal letters of McRae Family members as well as materials created and collected by Colin McRae, John McRae, and Catherine McRae Hempstead before and after the Civil War. A majority of the relevant wartime business documents and correspondence associated with the family are located in the Colin J. McRae Business Papers.

Colin J. McRae, a successful businessman in the Mobile, Alabama area, served as the chief Confederate financial agent to Europe from 1863-1865. Following the war he settled in Belize, British Honduras, where he lived until his death in 1877. John J. McRae served in the Mississippi State Legislature from 1847 to 1851 and in the United States Senate from 1851 to 1852. He was elected Governor of Mississippi in 1853, and served until 1857. He was elected to the US House of Representatives in 1858. Following the secession of Mississippi, McRae served in the Confederate Congress from 1862 to 1864. He died May 31, 1868 in Belize, British Honduras, while visiting his brother, Colin, who settled there in 1867. Catherine McRae accompanied her brother John on his visit to Belize and remained there following his death. She married Christopher Hempstead, a successful businessman and exiled Confederate living in Belize.

III. History of the Collection

After the war, McRae settled in Belize, British Honduras. McRae purchased land and continued running a plantation and mercantile business. Since he was never officially pardoned, McRae decided it was too risky to return to the former Confederate States. In May of 1868, McRae's sister, Catherine McRae (Hempstead), and brother, John McRae, visited him in Belize. John, the ex governor of Mississippi, was gravely ill but wanted to see his brother one last time. John died soon after arriving in Belize and was buried there. While in Belize, Catherine met and married Christopher Hempstead, a successful businessman and friend of McRae, who was an exiled Confederate. During 1875, McRae willed all of his property to his sister Catherine until his nieces and nephews from his other sister, Isabelle Armor, were of age. McRae died in February of 1877. It is unclear at what point between 1868 and 1877, or shortly thereafter, Colin McRae's business and family papers were brought to the family house, now known as the Kate Shepherd House, in Mobile, Alabama.

In 2003, William and Wendy James acquired the Kate Shepherd House and all of its contents. In early 2005, John Sexton revised an inventory of the collection, which became the backbone to the current finding aid and inventory. At this point, the collection was split into two collections: the McRae Business Papers and the McRae Family Papers. In 2006, the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum contracted with the James's to purchase the papers.

The collection has been in SCCRRMM possession since October of 2006. Since then, the McRae Business Papers have been re-inventoried on two occasions. The papers have been rehoused into archival materials and reorganized into the series and subseries described in this finding aid. Additionally, the papers were sent to a conservation lab for basic care and conservation. The papers contained mold spores that may affect researcher's allergies; no active mold was discovered.

An inventory of McRae Family Papers was completed in 2008 and final processing was finished in 2009. After the initial inventory, 207 documents were transferred to the

McRae Business Papers. The McRae Family Papers officially opened to the public in June of 2009.

IV. Description of Series and Subseries

Colin J. McRae Business Papers Series:

The McRae Business Papers Series is comprised of papers generated by Colin McRae and/or his business partners before and after the war. The documents in the series are divided into seven subseries: Boykin & McRae; Brooks & McRae; Pre-War Correspondence; Post-War Correspondence; Land Speculation; Timber Business; and Railroad Business. Documents within the subseries are arranged chronologically.

Boykin & McRae Subseries

This subseries contains fifty-three items generated by the firm of Boykin & McRae (later Boykin, McRae & Foster) from 1837 to 1869. It includes letters, account statements, receipts, notes, and other memoranda. Associated names in the subseries: James Boykin, Colin J. McRae, J.E. Armor, Armstrong, F. Dolharde, H. Foster, C. Haile, Jacob Marsh, A. Mayer, R.S. Weir, and T.D. Weir.

Brooks & McRae Subseries

This subseries contains twenty-eight items relating to a business venture McRae undertook with A. Brooks from 1853 to 1855. Associated names in the subseries: A. Brooks, C.J. McRae, T. Donahew (Donahoe), Justus Elmer, and N.H. Elmer.

Pre- War Correspondence Subseries

While most of the fifty-two letters in this subseries deal with Colin McRae's real estate investments and other business ventures, some also concern family matters. Most of these documents are arranged chronologically. The letters of certain individuals with whom Colin McRae or the McRae Family had extended contact and whose names appear in documents from other series have been separated into their own subfolders.

Correspondence, 1838-61

Associated names: J.M. Bean, C. Bellmason, J. Bond, J.M. Boyles, W.A. Champlin, C. Clegg, W. Crawley, E.S. Dargan, R. Davis, W.J. Duffy, H. Foster, F. Hodge, J.H. Horne, George Ketchum, McAfee, Malcolm McRae, J.B. Parker, P. Phillips, W.A. Selph, Charles Walsh, and N. Woolverton.

Correspondence, J.E. Armor, 1853

Colin McRae's brother in law, James Armor, also acted as an agent who assisted with family business. Associated names: Catherine McRae and Isabelle McRae.

Correspondence, W.H. Champlin, 1860-61

Associated names: Robert & Bessie Files, Elizabeth McRae, Malcolm McRae, and Taylor McRae.

Correspondence, J. Echols, 1857-61

Associated names: McAfee and John J. McRae.
Correspondence, W. Primrose, 1852
Associated names: Lackey, Barbaric and Malcolm McRae.

Correspondence, L. Randall, 1842-58
Lyman Randall appears to have been an agent employed by Colin McRae and his mother Elizabeth. Associated names: J. Bradford, Griffin, and Elizabeth McRae.

Undated Pre-War Correspondence
Associated names in the subseries: M. Breland, George Moore, F. Smith, and T. Smith.

Post-War Correspondence Subseries

As with the pre-war letters, most of the 101 documents in this series are arranged chronologically. Persons with whom Colin McRae had extended contact and whose names appear in documents from other series have been separated into individual subfolders. There is also a subfolder for letters written by Colin McRae and a subfolder of documents generated in resolving a trade dispute between the firm of Benjamin, McRae and Omoa, British Columbia Customs officials.

Letters, 1865-66

Associated names: O.W. Longley, J.E. MacFarland, and R.M. Walls.

Letters, 1867

Associated names: Baily; Boykin & McRae; J.F. DeCros; R. Ferguson; J.E. MacFarland; D. Renner; Young, Harrison & Burn; and Young, Harrison & Bevane.

Letters, 1868

Associated names: E. Barksdale, J. Boyles, H.O. Brown, E.H. Foster, L. Gibbons, W. Harrison, J.S. Howse, R. Goldsmith, J.L. Linae, and Josephine Roberts.

Letters, 1869

Associated names: H.O. Brown, J.S. Jons, H.A. Lockwood, and W. Robinson.

Letters, 1870

Associated names: J.J. Blockly, John Jackson, T.L.H. Marns, R. Otis, F.E. Richardson, W. Robinson, J.L. Scott, J. Stamper, and M. Turner.

Letters, 1871-72

Associated names: C.J. Boykin, R.J. Boykin, R. Goldsmith, W.T. Meckley, W.L. Mechling, J.T. Morgan, George Solomon, and James Stevens.

Letters, 1873-75

Associated names: R. Goldsmith, W.T. Meckley, J.W. Merridey, C.M. Scott, G. Solomon, and N. Taibo.

Letters, A.B. Cammack, 1867-70

Associated names: Charlie Cammack, Rachel Goldsmith, Hall, John J. McRae, and Selph.

Letters, R.C. Hall, 1867-68

This folder contains letters discussing the Liverpool cotton market.

Letters, Christopher Hempstead, 1870-72

Letters mainly deal with the Belize mahogany trade. Associated names: Catherine McRae Hempstead.

Letters, F. Stewart, 1868-70

Letters mainly deal with McRae family properties, US politics. Associated names: Catherine McRae and John J. McRae.

Correspondence, Letters of Colin McRae, 1869-74

Associated names: Daughdrill, J. Forrester & T.J. Blokely, F. Fox, C. Hempstead, J.J. MacLachlan, Meckley, and M.F. Smith.

Dispute – Omoa Customs & Benjamin, McRae, Aug – Sep 1870

Associated names in the subseries: Benjamin & McRae, Don Hose Meria Medina, and Don Jose Rodrigues.

Land Speculation Subseries

The 202 items in this subseries are divided between four subfolders: materials related to Hanson Alsbury; documents related to real estate in the Bernody Tract of land in Mobile; Deeds, Letters, and Receipts relating to other real estate investments; and Related Documents. Materials are arranged chronologically within individual folders.

Hanson Alsbury, 1836-62

H. Alsbury appears to have been a friend & occasional business partner of C.J. McRae. Associated names: C.J. McRae, Davis McRae, Asa Hartfield, and H.K. Moss.

Bernody Tract, 1853-73

Materials in this folder refer to purchases of land in Mobile County, AL. Associated names: C.J. McRae, J.E. Armor, Brooks & Ketchum, Delchamps, D. Finn, H. Foster, G.H. Horne, A.G. Sheppard, F. Stewart, and J.M. Taylor.

Deeds, Letters & Receipts, 1824-69

Materials in this folder include letters referring to real estate sales, property tax receipts, deeds of sale, and related memoranda. Associated names: C.J. McRae, J.J. McRae, J.E. Armor, J. Boykin, A. Brooks, W. Broyles (Boyles), F.H. Clairborne, J.H. Daughdrill, J. Doyle, J. Echols, H. Foster, J.H. Horne, and M. McNeill, and F. Stewart.

Related Documents, 1831-67

Timber Business Subseries, 1848-58

This subseries contains twenty-nine items, mainly letters, receipts, account statements, and memoranda related to C.J. McRae's pre-war timber investments. Associated names in the subseries: C.J. McRae, Aikman, John Gibson, J.A. Griffin, J.K. Hawthorn, and Lyman Randall.

Railroad Business Papers Subseries, 1849-1857

This subseries contains thirteen items. Associated names in the subseries: C.J. McRae, Dargan, P.H. Goodwyn, Guille & Moore, McAfee, Mobile & Ohio RR, Central RR, Mobile & New Orleans RR, and Port Chartrain Rail Co.

Colin J. McRae Personal Papers Series

The Colin McRae Personal Papers Series consists of four subseries: Family Letters; Pre-War Personal Papers; Post-War Personal Papers; and Receipts and Accounts. Documents are arranged chronologically within the subseries.

Colin J. McRae's Letters to Family Subseries

This subseries contains forty-four letters from Colin McRae to family members dating from 1852 through 1875.

Colin McRae's Letters to Catherine L. McRae Hempstead, 1862-75

Letters deal primarily with property, family finances, and health issues. Associated names: Colin Boykin, E.M. Boykin, R.H. Boykin, Charles Hempstead, and F. Stewart.

Colin McRae's Letters to Elizabeth McRae, 1857-63

Associated names: Bessie & Robert Files; nephews Colin, Malcolm, and Taylor.

Colin McRae's Letters to John J McRae, 1856-68

Letters deal primarily with family finances, real estate investments, railroad business, and politics. Associated names: Isabelle Armor, James Boykin, Matthews, McAfee, Elizabeth McRae, and James McRae.

Colin McRae's Letters to Other Family Members, 1852-74

Associated names: C.S. Boykin, E.M. Boykin, Bessie Files, Colin McRae Boykin (nephew), James McRae, Malcolm McRae, and Mary McRae.

Pre-War Personal Papers Subseries

This series contains twenty-one items. Contents include slave documents, court records, personal finance records, and documents referring to the Aransas Bay and the Shelby County coal & coke partnership. Also included are two subfolders which contain documents generated in resolving personal disputes. Associated names in the subseries: H. Allsbury, Anderson & Boyles, J.A. Campbell, W.A. Champlin, H. Foster, Joel Jones, Elizabeth McRae, Taylor McRae, Morgan, M. Raby, and J.G. Selph.

Dispute – Hopkin & McRae

This subfolder contains messages exchanged in an effort to resolve an argument between Hopkin & McRae in June of 1843. Associated names: Charles Hopkin, H.G. Humphries, and C.J. McRae.

Dispute – Yancey & Humphries

This subfolder includes items generated in the resolution of a dispute between Capt. Humphries and Capt. Yancey in October of 1861 in which McRae appears to have been a mediator. Associated names: S.J. Humphries, B.C. Yancey, Shepherd, McRae, and Blewitt.

Post-War Personal Papers Subseries

This series contains fifteen items. Contents include documents relating to the establishment of McRae's business in Belize and the Belize mahogany trade, personal finance records, court documents, and CJ McRae's will/indenture. Associated names: JE Armor, Catherine McRae Hempstead, Charles Hempstead, JL Smith, and James Turner.

Receipts and Accounts Subseries

This series contains 186 items. These are primarily household and personal receipts, but this folder also contains some records related to McRae's business ventures.

McRae Family Papers Series

The Family Papers Series is comprised of eleven subseries. These are devoted to the papers of Catherine McRae Hempstead, John J. McRae, James E. and Isabelle McRae Armor, Burwell and Elizabeth Mary McRae Boykin, Robert and Bessie Files, A.R. and Mary McRae Kelly, John and Elizabeth McRae, James McRae, Malcolm and Mary McRae, Colin McRae Selph, and other/un-named family. Documents are arranged chronologically within subseries/subfolders.

Catherine ("Kate") McRae Hempstead Papers Subseries

This subseries contains eighty-four items related to Catherine McRae Hempstead.

Letters from Catherine, 1856-1880

Associated names: Isabelle Armor, Belle, E.M. Boykin, P.H. Brinton, Christopher Hempstead, Mary McRae Kelly, Colin J. McRae, Elizabeth McRae, and John J. McRae

Letters to Catherine, 1855-1894

Associated names: P.H. Brinton, Christopher Hempstead, Mary M. Kelly, James McRae, and F. Stewart

Receipts, 1852-1907

John J. McRae Subseries

This subseries includes 202 documents related to the business, government, and family associated with John J. McRae.

Letters by John J. McRae, 1842-68

Letters contain discussions of financial matters, real estate investments, railroad business, and personal health matters. Associated names: Catherine McRae, Charles McRae, J.D. Raglin, J.A. Rindge, C.M. Selph, W.L. Sharky, and James Whitfield.

Letters by John J. McRae to Colin J. McRae, 1852-68

Topics covered include real estate investments, financial matters, and family news. Associated names: J.E. Armor, Daughdrill, J. Echols, Hopkins, Daniel Matthews, Samuel Matthews, McAfee, Catherine McRae, Orne, Torry, and Inman Williams.

Letters to John J McRae, 1842-68

Letters contain discussions of real estate investments, railroad business, and financial matters. Also includes two subfolders consisting of letters from employees of McRae. Associated names: J.E. Armor, Richard Brown, J. Echols, O.W. Longley, Samuel Matthews, and H. Rauth.

A.C. Daniels Correspondence Subfolder

This folder contains letters dealing with supplies/groceries for J.J.M.'s estate and household finances in 1866.

J.E. Matthews Correspondence Subfolder

This subfolder contains letters discussing improvements made to J.J.M.'s land in 1857.

Personal Documents

Papers in this folder include real estate deeds and leases, power of attorney documents, financial papers, and political materials from 1832 through 1878. Associated names: J.F.H. Clairborn, Delmas, Colin McRae, Malcolm McRae, Taylor McRae, and Reafield.

Receipts, 1835-68

Isabelle & JE Armor Subseries

This subseries contains ten items, mainly letters of Colin McRae's sister Isabelle Armor from 1862 to 1879. Also contains financial documents and tax receipts. Associated names: Frank Boykin, James Boykin, James McRae, Elizabeth Boykin, James Boykin, Catherine McRae, Mary McRae, and Emile Armor.

Elizabeth Mary & Burwell Boykin Subseries

This subseries contains thirty-seven items dated between 1857 and 1877. Most of the documents are the letters of Colin McRae's sister, E.M. Boykin, discussing family/household matters and events in Pascagoula. Associated names: Colin J. McRae, Catherine McRae, John J. McRae, Isabelle McRae Armor, Hunter Boykin, Mary McRae Kelly, R.M. Nelson, and James Boykin.

Bessie & Robert Files Subseries

This series contains seven items from 1858 through 1860. A majority of the letters discuss the marriage of Colin McRae's cousin Bessie to Robert Files. Also includes a slave document. Associated names: Colin J. McRae and Malcolm McRae.

Mary McRae Kelly Subseries

This series contains thirty-six items, mostly letters by Colin McRae's sister, Mary McRae Kelly discussing family/household matters and family finances from 1841 to 1878. Associated names: Charles McRae, Colin J. McRae, Catherine McRae, J.E. Armor, Isabelle McRae Armor, Malcolm McRae, Elizabeth McRae, and A.R. Kelly.

Elizabeth & John McRae Subseries

The fifty-nine papers of Colin McRae's parents, John and Elizabeth McRae are divided into four subfolders: Letters, Personal Documents, Agents' Accounts, and Receipts.

Letters folder

This folder contains letters written by Elizabeth McRae to her children discussing family matters and events in Mobile. Associated names: Colin J. McRae, John J. McRae, James McRae, Boykin, Armor, and T.B. DuBarry.

Personal Documents folder

This folder includes real estate & personal property documents, slave documents dated from 1832 to 1863. Associated names: Colin J. McRae, John J. McRae, Malcolm McRae, L. Randall, and W.P. Philips

Agents' Accounts

This folder contains account statements from 1855 to 1861. Associated names: A.E. Lewis and L. Randall.

Receipts, etc.

James McRae Subseries

This series contains slave documents; tax receipts; and letters with news of family, timber business, property matters. Associated names: Elizabeth McRae, Colin J. McRae, A.E. Lewis, John J. McRae, Catherine McRae, Mary McRae Kelly, and A.R. Kelly.

Malcolm & Mary McRae Subseries

The 134 papers of Colin McRae's brother, Malcolm McRae, are divided into four folders: Letters, Personal Documents, William Primrose Papers, and Receipts.

Letters

This folder contains letters by Malcolm McRae discussing primarily property, family matters, and debts. Associated names: Colin J. McRae, Elizabeth McRae, F. Kent, J. Baptist, J. Bloodgood, and O.S. Smith.

Personal Documents

This folder contains property deeds, slave documents, court settlements, shipping contracts, and financial papers.
Associated names: John J. McRae, Colin J. McRae, J. Baptist, A.E. Lewis, J. Rogers, R.H. Long, A. Ramsay, A.H. Delmas, and Robert and Bessie Files.

William Primrose Papers

This folder contains letters and legal documents relating to the settlement of the estate of Malcolm McRae, in which Primrose appears to have acted as an agent for the McRae Family.

Receipts, etc.

This folder contains 75 items dated from 1837 to 1859).

Colin McRae Selph Papers Subseries

The twenty-nine papers of Colin M. Selph, the ward of Colin J. McRae, are divided into two folders: Selph at the University of Virginia, and Post-War Letters.

Selph at the University of Virginia

This folder contains correspondence and receipts relating to Selph's schoolwork, tuition and other expenses from 1856 to 1859. Associated names: Colin J. McRae, F.R. Winden, and A. Maupin.

Post-War Letters

Subjects which appear in these letters include Selph's health, local news, and the establishment of McRae's and Selph's post-war businesses.

Other Family Subseries

This subseries contains thirty-seven documents related to McRae family members, from 1849 through 1889.

Christobelle Hempstead

This folder contains letters to mother Catherine Hempstead describing travels, etc.

Colin Boykin

This folder contains letters to Colin McRae & Catherine Hempstead about family matters, property, & finances.

Harriett McRae Phillips

This folder contains legal documents between H. McRae and husband Lawrence Phillips concerning slaves.

Taylor McRae

This folder contains a letter to Colin McRae concerning law school, career in Texas.

Malcolm McRae Jr.

This folder contains letters to Colin McRae concerning family finances, F. Stewart, arrangements for estate of John J McRae.

Miscellaneous Family

Associated names: Angeline Armor, James Armor, Katie Armor, and Charles McRae.

Unknown Family

This folder contains unsigned or incomplete letters.

Miscellaneous McRae Family Papers Series:

The Miscellaneous Series consists of 138 documents organized into seven subseries, the contents of which do not fit into any of the preceding series.

Isadore Hesse Subseries

This series contains documents from 1848 through 1849. Hesse appears to have been employed by one of the McRae brothers. Memoranda in this folder relate to the baking of bread.

Household receipts & accounts Subseries

I.O.U.'s Subseries

This series contains promissory notes between various parties; none of the McRae family members are mentioned in the documents.

Letters Subseries

This series contains correspondence unsigned, unaddressed, or signed by/addressed to parties not directly related to the McRae Family from 1846 to 1868. Associated names: Thomas Woolverton, R.N. Hough, C.C. Taylor, J. Harris, Capt. K. Barnett, Capt. B.A. Pitfield, Dekalb Bond, W.W. Mordecai, and F. Boykin.

Miscellaneous Papers Subseries

This series contains poems, lists, scratch paper, etc., the authorship of which is uncertain.

Newspaper Clippings Subseries

This series contains newspaper clippings from 1849 to 1903.

Receipts Subseries

These documents appear to be primarily business related and date from 1846 to 1904.

V. Container List

Box 1 -- Colin J. McRae Business Papers Series

Box 2 -- Colin J. McRae Personal Papers Series

Box 3 -- McRae Family Papers Series: Catherine M. Hempstead Papers Subseries and John J. McRae Papers Subseries

Box 4 -- McRae Family Papers Series (continued) and Miscellaneous Series

Oversize Box -- Oversize related to Boxes 2, 3, and 4 (other oversize items located in McRae Business Papers Collection, Oversize Box B)

VI. Related Collections and Materials at the SCCRRM

The McRae Business Papers -- This collection contains documents collected by Colin J. McRae (1813-1877) during his years of service with the Confederate government and the immediate post-war years. McRae was actively involved in establishing the Selma Foundry and served as the chief Confederate financial agent to Europe from 1863-1865. The McRae Business Papers are mainly comprised of accounting ledgers, receipts, letters, and loan drafts.

McRae Supplemental Series -- This collection of documents has been acquired by the SCCRRMM through donations and purchases separate from the "McRae Collection" purchase from the Shepherd House. The McRae Supplemental Series has a separate inventory.

McRae Research Files -- The research files contain photocopied documents and secondary source articles pertaining to McRae, Huse, English companies, financing the

Confederacy, blockade running, Selma, Mobile, and the goods being purchased in Europe. The research files are not comprised of original materials.

Library Books -- The SCCRRMM has a number of books pertaining to the topics covered by the McRae exhibit. These are available for use in the library and are not for check out.

VII. Arranger's Notes

Care was taken to achieve the most accurate spelling of names and the most accurate description of content. If you find an error, please let the archivist know.

Processed by: Brad Whitehead

Date Completed: January 28, 2009

Preferred Citation: *Colin J. McRae Collection at the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum*