

PALFREY FAMILY PAPERS

(Mss. 333, 334, 1409, 1442, 1632, 2076, 2580, 2773, 2857)

Inventory

Compiled by
Randy Penninger

Updated 2008 by
Leslie Bourgeois

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
Louisiana State University Libraries
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Contents of Inventory

Summary	3
Biographical/Historical Note	4
Scope and Content Note	5
Series Descriptions	6
Index Terms	8
Container List	10

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Summary

- Size.** 2.55 linear feet (21 volumes, 377 manuscript items, 1 microfilm reel [negative], and 11 newspapers).
- Geographic locations.** Louisiana, Massachusetts.
- Inclusive dates.** 1776-1918.
- Bulk dates.** 1806-1875.
- Languages.** English, French, Spanish.
- Summary.** Correspondence, journals, diaries, ledgers, newspapers, and land records documenting the Palfrey family of Boston and Cambridge, Mass., and St. Mary and St. Martin parishes, La.
- Sources.** Acquired by means of purchases, loans, and gifts between 1933 and 1974.
- Related.** Weeks (David and Family) Papers (Mss Group 528).
Palfrey Family Papers, Harvard University.
- Access.** Unrestricted.
- Copyright.** Copyright is retained by the descendants of writers of items in these papers (U.S. Copyright Law).
- Citation.** Palfrey Family Papers, Mss. 333, 334, 1409, 1442, 1632, 2076, 2580, 2773, 2857, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries.
- Stack designations.** 77:83, 77:89; H:22; Mss.Mf: P; 99. OS:P
Please consult the Container List for specific locations when requesting materials.

Biographical/Historical Note

John Palfrey (1768-1843) was born in Boston, the son of merchant William Palfrey. He moved to New Orleans in 1803 after pursuing several business ventures in Boston and South America. Initially employed as a ship chandler, Palfrey later managed his brother-in-law's plantation near New Orleans. He assumed control of this plantation in 1809, but bankruptcy forced him to sell in 1810. Palfrey settled on Bayou l'Albaye near St. Martinville. Four of his five sons eventually settled in Louisiana: Edward and Henry William in 1810; George and William Taylor in 1815. Eldest son John Gorham remained in Boston.

John Gorham Palfrey (1796-1881) graduated from Harvard University in 1815. He studied theology at Harvard, and then accepted the pastorate of Boston's Brattle Street Congregational-Unitarian Church in 1818. He resigned in 1830 to accept the chair of sacred literature at Harvard and remained there through 1839 as dean of faculty and as one of the three preachers at University Chapel. From 1835 to 1843 he served as editor of the *North American Review* and early allied himself with the anti-slavery movement. In 1842 he was elected to the Massachusetts legislature and served until 1843. From 1844 to 1848 he was secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and also served in Congress, 1847-1849. He served as Boston's postmaster, 1861-1867, and attended the anti-slavery congress in Paris as an American delegate.

Henry William Palfrey (1798-1866) initially worked for the counting houses of William Simpson and the House of Chew & Relf in New Orleans. In 1820 he set up the merchant and cotton factor firm of Taylor and Palfrey. He served as American Commissioner to the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855. He died en route to Europe in 1866 when his ship sank in a storm.

William Taylor Palfrey (1800-1868) became a successful planter on Bayou Teche in St. Mary Parish. He also served as a parish judge, sheriff, and as a state senator in 1855. He married Sidney Ann Conrad (1806-1839) in 1825. They had six children. Palfrey remarried in 1858. He and his second wife, Susan Cornelia Gates Barnard (b. ca. 1836), had two children.

Edward Palfrey (d. 1816) was employed by the mercantile firm of Smith, Dorsey, & Company in New Orleans. He died in 1816 after contracting yellow fever.

George Palfrey (d. 1824) moved back to Boston in 1816. He died in 1824 of complications after being wounded in a duel.

[Additional information on the Palfrey Family can be found in: Hannah Palfrey Ayer, *Legacy of New England*; Bernard Broussard, *A History of St. Mary Parish*; Frank Otto Gattell, *John Gorham Palfrey and the New England Conscience*; Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South*; Charles C. Roland, *Louisiana Sugar Plantations During the American Civil War*; and J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country*.]

Scope and Content Note

Chiefly personal and business papers of John Palfrey (1768-1843), a planter in St. Martin Parish from 1810 to 1843. Mostly drafts of letters to his sons and associates pertaining to the rearing and education of his sons and the operation of his plantation, Forlorn Hope. Topics discussed in the letters include the Embargo, West Florida Controversy (including the capture of Baton Rouge), War of 1812, slavery, cotton and salt manufacturing, banking, and John Gorham Palfrey's education at Harvard and ordination in the Unitarian Church.

Papers relating to other members of the Palfrey family include correspondence of John Gorham Palfrey, Henry William Palfrey, Sidney Conrad Palfrey, and the children of William T. Palfrey. Other materials include plantation records of William T. Palfrey and business records of his son, George D. Palfrey. William T. Palfrey supplies eyewitness accounts of Civil War battles in St. Mary parish, as does his son, Edward, the bombardment of Vicksburg. Other materials include land documents, copies of the *Planters' Banner* (Franklin, La.), and marriage certificates from St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Franklin and the Church of the Epiphany (Episcopal) in New Iberia.

Correspondents in the Palfrey Family Papers include Alexander Conrad, Charles M. Conrad, Alexander de Clouet, and Alexander Porter.

Papers relating to John Gorham Palfrey's professional career and family life are preserved in The Houghton Library at Harvard University. [An index to the Palfrey Family Papers at Harvard University is filed with the accession folder.]

List of Series

- Series I. Correspondence, 1806-1875, undated
- Series II. Account Books, 1834-1918
- Series III. Land Documents, 1776-1860
- Series IV. Newspapers, 1837-1838
- Series V. Marriage Certificates, 1865-1869

Series Descriptions

Series I. Correspondence, 1806-1875 (304 items and 1 volume; (.50 linear feet)

Most of the correspondence is written by John Palfrey and John Gorham Palfrey. Also contains substantial correspondence written to William Taylor Palfrey. There is no correspondence for the period 1822-1827.

The correspondence (1806-1840) of John Palfrey deals mostly with the rearing and education of his sons; operation of his plantation; effects of the Embargo and the War of 1812; and relations with overseers, slaves, and factors.

The correspondence of John Gorham Palfrey covers the anti-slavery movement and conditions at Harvard University. In letters (1832-1868) to his brother, William T., he relates his literary and historical activities, negotiations for borrowing money, emancipation of slaves inherited from his father, and estrangements from family over his abolitionist sentiments.

The correspondence of Henry William Palfrey consists of a volume of transcribed letters written to his family during his trip to Paris in 1855, where he served as American Commissioner to the Exposition Universelle.

Letters received by William T. Palfrey relate to plantation economy, the Civil War, the Confederate government, and Reconstruction in St. Martin and St. Mary parishes. Correspondents include Alexander Porter, U.S. Senator from Louisiana (1833-1837) and State Supreme Court Judge (1821-1833); Alexander de Clouet, Confederate congressman; Alexander Conrad, delegate to the Confederate Provisional Congress in 1861; and Charles M. Conrad, Palfrey's brother-in-law, Senator (1842-1843) and Representative (1849-1850) from Louisiana, Secretary of War in the Cabinet of President Millard Fillmore (1850-1853), delegate to the Confederate Provisional Congress and to the First and Second Confederate Congresses (1862-1864).

Letters (1829-1836) from Sidney Conrad Palfrey to her husband, William T. Palfrey, are concerned principally with the welfare of her husband and children during her summer visits with relatives in New Iberia and St. Martinville.

Letters from the children of William T. Palfrey to their father relate activities while attending school in New Haven, Ct., Washington, D.C., and Lexington, Ky. Edward Palfrey (ca. 1836-1862) writes his father with news of Civil War activities, including the federal occupation of New Orleans, military movements in the Teche and Berwick Bay regions, and the bombardment of Vicksburg (June-September, 1862). Edward died in the battle.

Series II. Account Books, 1834-1918 (20 volumes; (1.8 linear feet)

Business and plantation records of William T. Palfrey, owner of Ricahoc Plantation on Bayou Teche, and of his son, George D. Palfrey.

Volumes 1-11, 1832-1868, pertain to the partnership of Palfrey with his brother-in-law, David Weeks, in the joint ownership of a plantation purchased from the estate of Dr. John Towles. The partnership became W. T. Palfrey and Company in 1843. Includes Palfrey's personal business records.

Volumes 12-15, 1852-1854, 1899-1904, and 1915-1918, contain entries for the Jeanerette General Store of Iberia Parish and for the Franklin Brick Yard, of which George D. Palfrey was proprietor. Includes personal business records of George D. Palfrey.

Volume 16, 1841-1842, contains records for the Clinton and Port Hudson Railroad Company.

Volumes 17-18, 1842-1864, are plantation diaries of William T. Palfrey. Volume 17 contains an article from the *Planters' Banner* about a destructive storm that occurred on Last Island, La. in August 1856. Volume 18 mentions the federal occupation of Louisiana and provides Palfrey's eyewitness accounts of battles between Union and Confederate forces that took place on his plantation in April 1863. Palfrey also discusses combat on Bayou Teche between the **CSS Cotton** and federal gunboats.

Volume 19, 1843-1865, is a register of slave births on William T. Palfrey's plantation.

Volume 20, 1844-1845 and 1900-1902, is William T. Palfrey's estimate of the estate of his father. Also contains subscription entries from 1900 to 1902 for St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Franklin.

Series III. Land Documents, 1776-1860 (73 items; (.15 linear feet)

Chiefly land documents, deeds and patents, pertaining to property acquired by William T. Palfrey and his partnerships on Bayou Teche in St. Mary parish. Includes documents in French and Spanish during the colonial period in Louisiana and a copy of the will of David Weeks, 1834 (folder 12).

Series IV. Newspapers, 1837-1838 (11 items; (1 folder)

Issues of the *Planters' Banner* of Franklin, La. These issues announce land transactions of William T. Palfrey.

Series V. Marriage Certificates, 1865-1869 (43 items (.10 linear feet)

Marriage certificates from St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Franklin, and the Church of the Epiphany, New Iberia. Marriages were performed by the Reverend Charles Whitehorn Hilton, rector of St. Mary's Church (1865-1870) and of the Church of the Epiphany (1865-1867).

Index Terms

Materials related to this topic

Can be found in Series:

Abolitionists	I
Account Books	II
Baton Rouge (La.), Capture of (1810)	I
Bayou Teche	I, II
Cholera (St. Mary Parish, La.)	I
Church of the Epiphany (New Iberia, La.)	V
Clinton and Port Hudson Railroad	II
Confederate States of America--Government	I
Confederate States of America--History	I, II
Confederate States of America--Military	I, II
CSS Cotton	II
Conrad, Charles Magill (1804-1878)	I
Cotton growing--Louisiana	I, II
De Clouet, Alexander (1786-1844)	I
Deeds	I, III
Diaries	II
Embargo, 1807-1809	I
Episcopal Church--Louisiana--History--19th Century--Sources	II, V
Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1855	I
Fort Pillow (La.), Fall of (1862)	I
Franklin (La.) Brick Yard	II
General stores--Louisiana	II
Harvard University	I
Hilton, Charles Whitehorn	V
Iberia Parish (La.)--History--19th Century	II
Jeanerette General Store	II
Last Island (La.)--Storm	II
Marriage Certificates	V
New Orleans--Federal occupation, 1862-1865	I
<i>North American Review</i>	I
Palfrey, Alfred C.	I
Palfrey, Edward (d. 1816)	I
Palfrey, George (d. 1824)	I

**PALFREY FAMILY PAPERS
1776-1918**

(Mss 333)

Palfrey, George D. (b. 1860)	I, II
Palfrey, Henry William (1798-1866)	I
Palfrey, John (1768-1843)	I
Palfrey, John Gorham (1796-1881)	I
Palfrey, Sidney A. Conrad (1806-1839)	I
Palfrey, William Taylor (1800-1868)	I, V
Plantation life--Louisiana	I, II
<i>Planters' Banner</i> (Franklin, La.)	IV
Porter, Alexander (1786-1844)	I
Reconstruction--Louisiana	I, II
Ricahoc Plantation	I, II
St. Martin Parish (La.)--History--19th century	I, II
St. Mary Parish (La.)--History--19th century	I, II
St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Franklin (La.)	II, V
Salt industry and trade--Louisiana--19th century	II
Slaveholders--Louisiana	I, II
Slave records--Louisiana	II
Sugar--Manufacture and refining--By-products	I
Sugar growing	I, II
Travel--Europe (England, France)--19th century	I
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Red River Expedition, 1864	II
United States--History--War of 1812	I
Vicksburg (Ms.), Bombardment of (1862)	I
Yellow Fever--Louisiana	I
Weeks, David	I, II
West Florida Controversy	I

Container List

<u>Stack</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder(s)</u>	<u>Contents (with dates)</u>
			Series I: Correspondence
77:83	1	1-13	Correspondence (1806-1832)
77:89	2	1-13	Correspondence (1832-1840)
	3	1-13	Correspondence (1840-1875, undated)
OS: P		1	Correspondence (1810-1811, 1860)
Mss.Mf:P			Sidney A. Palfrey Letters (1829-1836)
			Series II: Account Books
H:22		Vol. 1-20	Account books, diaries and slave register of William T. Palfrey (1834-1868) and George D. Palfrey (1899-1918)
			Series III: Land Documents
77:89	4	1-2	Darby Land Documents (1782-1847)
		3-4	Grevenberg Land Documents (1782-1836)
		5-6	Norton Land Documents (1808-1845)
		7-8	Johnson (Reeves) Land Documents (1809-1837)
		9	Land Documents (1811-1860)
OS: P		2	Darby (1830-1848), Grevenberg (1811), and Norton (1815, 1845) Land Documents
			Series IV: Newspapers
99			Newspapers (1837-1838)
			Series V: Marriage Certificates
77:89	4	10-11	Marriage Certificates (1865-1869)