

**ROBERT BURNS PAPERS**

**Part of the Jeffery M. Leving Collection**

Mss. 5406  
Inventory

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

2025

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**SUMMARY**

<b>Size</b>	0.3 linear ft., 1 OS folder
<b>Geographic Locations</b>	Michigan
<b>Inclusive Dates</b>	1850-1917
<b>Bulk Dates</b>	1865-1891
<b>Languages</b>	English
<b>Summary</b>	Robert Burns (1832-1891) was a lieutenant colonel in the Union Army during the Civil War, and his regiment led the pursuit and capture of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in May 1865. The Robert Burns Papers primarily consist of correspondence and statements collected by Burns from his military colleagues concerning their eyewitness accounts of the Davis escape. Newspaper clippings, articles, and a political cartoon referencing the Davis incident are also present, as well as other personal papers.
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	None.
<b>Reproduction Note</b>	May be reproduced.
<b>Copyright</b>	For those materials not in the public domain, copyright is retained by the descendants of the creators in accordance with U.S. Copyright law.
<b>Related Collections</b>	Jefferson Davis Cartoon, Mss. 3271, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge, La.  A.F. Whelan Diary, Mss. 4747, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge, La.
<b>Citation</b>	Robert Burns Papers, Mss. 5406, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge, La.
<b>Stack Location(s)</b>	34:120, OS:B

**BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE**

Robert Burns was born in Geneva, New York, in 1832 and received a degree in civil engineering from Geneva College in 1851. He worked as a railroad and canal construction supervisor in New York, Michigan, and Canada for several years; however, he ultimately decided to join his brother in the legal field and was admitted to the bar in 1859. Burns joined the 4th Michigan Volunteer Cavalry as a first lieutenant in 1862 and rose to lieutenant colonel by the war's end. He participated in over fifty skirmishes throughout Kentucky and Tennessee and was commended for his "gallant conduct" during a battle in Selma, Alabama. Although he personally was not involved, a group of soldiers from Burns' cavalry regiment was directly responsible for the pursuit and capture of Jefferson Davis, the former president of the Confederate States of America, whom they apprehended in Georgia in May 1865.

After the war, Burns formed a law practice with his brother in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he remained until his death. He married the former Annie Talman of Rochester, NY, and they had seven children. Burns became a member of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) in 1884. He died in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in December 1891.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The Robert Burns Papers consist primarily of correspondence and recollections sent to and from Burns and his military colleagues concerning their eyewitness accounts of the escape and subsequent capture of Jefferson Davis, former president of the Confederacy. Burns began soliciting the accounts from his former regiment beginning in 1875. General James H. Wilson was the most prolific correspondent, sending Burns three missives between 1877 and 1879. Also included in the correspondence are announcements of meetings and invitations to reunions sent to Burns from various military societies and organizations.

Printed material in the collection consists of articles and newspaper clippings about the Davis incident collected by Burns, including a copy of a paper reproduced by MOLLUS in 1888 titled "The Capture of Jeff Davis" (folder 11) and a full-page newspaper article titled "How They Caught Jeff" (OS folder 1). Also included in the printed material is an issue of *Atlantic Monthly* from 1865 with an article titled "Running of the Heads: Being an Authentic Account of the Capture of Jefferson Davis" written by George W. Lawton, which has a tipped-in handwritten manuscript on the Davis capture written by Burns (folder 10). The last printed item is a program from an 1890 music concert that shows Burns as a participant (folder 11).

Graphic material consists of a photographic print reproduction of Burns before the war (circa 1850) and an 1865 political cartoon of Jefferson Davis escaping in women's clothing (folder 9). Additional papers include notices of posthumous commendations for Burns and his military pension documents (folder 12).

**INDEX TERMS**

**Materials relating to these people, places, and things can be found throughout the collection.**

<b>Burns, Robert, 1832-1891.</b>
<b>Davis, Jefferson, 1808-1889.</b>
<b>Davis, Jefferson, 1808-1889--Caricatures and cartoons.</b>
<b>United States. Army. Michigan Cavalry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> (1862-1865). Company C.</b>
<b>United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.</b>
<b>Clippings (information artifacts)</b>
<b>Letters (correspondence)</b>
<b>Newspaper columns.</b>
<b>Political cartoons.</b>

**CONTAINER LIST**

<b><u>Stack</u></b> <b><u>Location</u></b>	<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Contents (with dates)</u></b>
<b>34:120</b>	1	1	Correspondence, July 1872-October 1877
		2	Correspondence, November 1877-July 1879
		3	Correspondence, August 1879
		4	Correspondence, September 1879-October 1883
		5	Correspondence, February 1885-July 1887
		6	Correspondence, November 1889-May 1891
		7	Correspondence, November 1891
		8	"Recollections," 1877, undated
		9	Graphic material: photograph, circa 1850; political cartoon, 1865
		10-11	Printed material, 1865-1890
<b>OS:B</b>	--	OS 1	Newspaper, undated
<b>34:120</b>	1	12	Commendations and pension documents, 1891-1917