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**EWING, FINIS (1773-1841)
PAPERS, 1823-1841**

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INTRODUCTION

The papers of the Reverend Finis Ewing, one of the founders of Cumberland Presbyterian Church, are the property of the Tennessee Historical Society. The donor was Anna Ewing Newsom (granddaughter) of Springfield, Missouri.

The materials in this collection measure .42 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials.

Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Finis Ewing Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Finis Ewing Papers, consisting of sixty-four items covering the years 1823 to 1841, are composed entirely of incoming correspondence to the Reverend Finis Ewing of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which he founded along with others in 1810.

The largest number of letters (20) is from James Smith, nephew of the Reverend Ewing, and editor of the *Revivalist*, a publication of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The majority of Smith's letters is in regard to publishing Ewing's lectures, and answering Ewing's criticism of some of his articles. One, undated, concerns Smith's regret "that General Jackson joined the Church when he did and as he did..." Smith describes the situation that prevailed. "...he had been much exercised on the subject of religion. The last time I prayed in his family the old gentleman wept like a child...from my intimacy in the family I am prepared to say that General Jackson has made the Bible the man of his council reading it every day from the time of his return from Washington."

In his letter, dated Nashville, Tennessee, October 9, 1835 (?), Smith comments on immersion in baptism; on December 24, 1835, he speaks again of baptism and answers Uncle Finis's criticism of his church history; on March 5, 1836, he writes of the successful camp meetings; June 2, 1836, he asks for Ewing's pecuniary assistance to redeem Cumberland College; in January 1837, he discusses the state of his church writing that "it appears to me she is under the influence of an eclipse.... Methodism stalking at noon day among the preachers making converts to its heterodoxy; and on June 2, 1837, Smith writes of his inability to go on printing the Cumberland Presbyterian journal, the expense and the money owed to him. "...it is a hard matter to labor for the benefit of brethren for years and then be ruined by them..." In an undated letter, he speaks of the heresies existing in his church writing that "many of our best men hold that Christ was not the Son of God until his incarnation among them..." February 19, 1838, Smith unburdens his heart to his uncle, telling him of his enemies. "It is whispered I live in splendor..." "My job business amounted last year to near \$20, 000 and if I did live in splendor Cumberland Presbyterians did not pay for it.... I must quit this business.... my feelings are goaded beyond measure."

There are eight letters in the collection from Franceway R. Cossitt, first president of Cumberland College, Princeton, Kentucky. February 14, 1826, he writes to Ewing that their commissioners have located their college at Princeton and he describes the farm they have purchased, the land, the buildings and the price. In his letter of January 25, 1840, he laments that "we are in trouble" and speaks of his enemies and the fact that the Episcopalians want the college if the Cumberland Presbyterians do not sustain it. He tells why he became a Cumberland Presbyterian "...convinced that truth in Divinity must be between the two extremes between the Scylla of Calvinism and the Charibdis of Armenianism."

There are 13 letters from David Laury, minister, writer and teacher of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In his earliest letter, March 13, 1824, he describes the great revival in Russellville, Kentucky, and also comments on the prejudice of the old Presbyterians towards the Cumberland Presbyterians. On January 22, 1829, he writes from Cumberland College, lamenting Ewing's remote situation which deprived them of his valuable counsel "at this critical period of our religious body." On October 10, 1831, he writes Ewing "... a history of our church is demanded...you know this burden ought to devolve

on you.” On January 10, 1832, he writes that “the present is an important crisis to our church and I am almost out of patience with the stupidity of many of our preachers.” When in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, Laury writes on December 21, 1836, about his probable return to Nashville, Tennessee, to write for his church’s paper. He knows the expenses of Nashville and quotes what it would cost to live there. January 16, 1841, he describes his position teaching the Winnebago Indians at Prairie du Chien, and his ideas for teaching them.

There are three letters from John Young in St. Louis, Missouri, August 22, 1825, he comments that the General Assembly in Philadelphia declared “our Society of Cumberlanders to be free and independent.” He also discusses and describes in a most favorable light William C. Carr, candidate for governor in Missouri after the death of Governor Bates. October 12, 1825, he writes to Ewing saying, “I want you to have Pitty on us and use all your exertions to get one of our preachers to settle here it is a place which is calling the attention of almost all other denominations even the Church of England has settled a Preacher here who is esteemed much as a Divine and an Orator.”

Other letters include those from ministers of the Presbyterian Church such as William Barnett, Robert Bell, A. Benton, H. Chamberlin, George and Robert Donnell, Salmon Giddings, W. Hypay, B.H. Pierson, and William S. Potts.

There is a letter from Cyrus W. Allen in regard to the Missouri and Illinois Tract Society, and two from William A. Hallock, correspondence secretary of the American Tract Society. Included is a letter from Thomas T. Skillman in regard to subscriptions to the *Western Luminary*; and one from F.A. Anderson in regard to the publication, the *Revivalist*.

Biographical Note

Finis Ewing

- 1773 Born, Bedford County, Virginia
- 1793 Married Peggy Davidson; settled near Nashville
- 1803 Became Presbyterian minister
- 1810 He and others formed the nucleus of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church
- 1814 He helped make the Confession of Faith
- 1820 Moved to Kentucky, and later to Missouri, where he preached for sixteen years
- 1841 Died

CONTAINER LIST

Incoming Correspondence

1. Allen, Cyrus W.
- 1a. Ewing, Finis Young
2. Anderson, F.A.
3. Barnett, William
4. Bell, Robert
5. Benton, A.
6. Chamberlin, H.
7. Cossitt, Franceway R.
8. Donnell, George
9. Donnell, Robert
10. Giddings, Salmon
11. Hallock, William A.
12. Hylpay, W.
13. Laury, David
14. Pierson, B.H.
15. Potts, William S.
16. Skillman, Thomas D.
17. Smith, James
18. Young, John
19. Genealogical data – Ewing and allied families
20. Minutes – General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, May, 1825
21. Obituaries

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Anderson, F.A., 1834, re: the *Revivalist* and *Amicus*, 2
Barnett, William (4), 1823-1825, re: the Synod, the Assembly, and size of the church, 3
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Chamberlin, H., 1831, re: his letter about his travels in Missouri that made all denounce him as a slanderer, 6
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Young, John (3), 1825-1826, re: William C. Carr; need for one of their preachers to settle in St. Louis, etc.