



State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives
403 Seventh Avenue North
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0312

**JEFF ROSS PAPERS
(1849-1928)
PAPERS
1818-1992**

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INTRODUCTION

This finding aid focuses on the papers of Jeff Ross, attorney and adventurer, of Hardin County, Tennessee. Although spanning the years 1818-1992, the papers are largely concentrated in the late nineteenth century. The most important part of the collection is composed of Ross' correspondence written during his years of residence in Europe and South America.

The Jeff Ross Collection is composed of approximately 4.5 cubic feet of material. The collection is composed of account books, receipts, correspondence, genealogical records, land and legal records, notebooks, writings and several miscellaneous items.

Jeff Ross (1849-1928) was born in Hardin County, Tennessee, the son of Morgan Hood and Lucinda Coffey Ross. By the time of the birth of Jeff, the Ross family had long been established in Hardin and Maury Counties. George Ross, the grandfather of Jeff, was a veteran of the American Revolution and one of the first settlers in Hardin County. George Ross came to Hardin County in the first years after its organization, bringing with him, among others, his two sons, John McCullough Ross and Morgan Hood Ross.

Morgan Hood Ross, the father of Jeff, married Lucinda Coffey, and to them were born several children. Unfortunately for the family, Morgan Ross was killed in 1864 by a band of Civil War guerilla fighters. His mother, taking over the operation of the farm, sent Jeff Ross to the local "common" school operating at that time. In the late 1860s, Jeff Ross entered Cumberland University Law School. At that time, Cumberland University was regarded as one the finest law schools in the South.

In 1872, Jeff Ross returned to Hardin County and began the practice of law. Within a year, he was appointed to fill out a term as district attorney general. Following his defeat in the next election, he decided to abandon his legal career and begin a life as a world traveler.

In December 1878, Ross left Savannah, Tennessee in the middle of the night in a canoe. As he recalled years later, "All the money I possessed was two silver twenty-five cent pieces, one with a large hole in the middle." After a trip across the country, Ross found himself in Baltimore, Maryland. While in Baltimore, he wrote a love story and after exhausting newspapers in Baltimore and New York, he finally sold it to a paper in Philadelphia for \$15.

Ending a short-lived career as an oyster fisherman, which ended in a fight and Ross' incarceration at Annapolis, he became a contractor for the construction of a telegraph line from Philadelphia to Washington D.C. Shortly thereafter, he ended up in the Northeast selling "magic solder for tin ware." Afterwards he joined a circus as part of his marketing strategy.

After his career with the circus, he left for England. In England, he traveled throughout the country selling his solder. A whirlwind tour of Europe ensued after which he settled down for over a month in Paris. Unable to sell his wares in the city of Paris, he took to the countryside and sold his "magic formula" door-to-door.

In Marseille, France, he met a man who offered him his passage to Rio de Janeiro in return for his assistance in conducting some business. In the course of the journey to Brazil, he visited Barcelona, Gibraltar, Madeira, and St. Helena. After arriving in Brazil, he joined an expedition into the jungles of western Brazil. A career in engineering and

railroading followed, and Ross became quite skilled at constructing rail lines in the jungles.

From 1822 until 1889, Brazil had been ruled by Emperor Pedro II. Even under Pedro's wise reign there were grave causes of dissatisfaction. Propaganda in favor of a republic had gained many recruits. Most serious, important elements in the army turned against the Emperor, largely because Pedro insisted they stay out of politics. A conspiracy was hatched by these disgruntled military elements, and on November 15, 1889, a revolt of part of the army was the signal for the collapse of the empire. During the next 14 months Brazil was ruled by a military autocracy, and then replaced by a civilian president. Growing opposition to this new government, and a desire to return to the old government resulted in a revolt by the navy in September, 1893. The harbor at Rio de Janeiro was blockaded, and an American naval squadron was sent in January 1894 to intervene, if necessary.

Exactly how Ross became involved in this Brazilian naval revolt is unclear. But by his own admission, he spied for both sides, playing one off against another. When his actions were discovered, with the help of the American Consul, he slipped out of Brazil ahead of his pursuers.

Arriving in New York, he continued to work on behalf of both sides. Probably his greatest feat in espionage chicanery came when he bought a gunboat, armed it and hired a crew to sail it to Brazil for use by the navy. At the same time, he paid certain members of the crew to sabotage the entire effort for the government. Knowing he would eventually be caught, he abandoned his efforts and finally, some sixteen years after he left, returned to Savannah, Tennessee. The *Savannah Courier* noted on May 24, 1894, "Jeff Ross, who has been in South America for 15 years, landed at his old home Tuesday evening."

After his many adventures, life in Hardin County must have proved rather tame. In later years, he took up writing, and recorded his views on many subjects. Living the life of a gentleman farmer, he and Ike Ross built a mill on his land in 1901. The mill was named "Sockwad."

Ross lost his sight in his later years. When he died in 1928, the *Savannah Courier* noted, "He was a unique character." The "Walker Community" correspondent to the same issue was less succinct. "This community deplores the loss of one of our oldest and most intellectual citizens."

The Jeff Ross Collection was presented to the Tennessee State Library and Archives in 1997 by Jim Ross of Savannah, Tennessee. There are no restrictions on the material. Single photocopies of unpublished materials in the Jeff Ross Collection may be made for individual or scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Jeff Ross Papers containing approximately 3.5 cubic feet of material and one oversized box span the period 1818 through 1992, although the materials are concentrated in the late nineteenth century. The collection is composed of account books, accounts, certificates, clippings, correspondence, a diary, financial records, genealogical records, invitations, land records, legal records, military records, notebooks, photographs, printed materials and writings.

The most significant portion of the collection is the correspondence. Ross' interesting and varied adventures are well documented in the correspondence written to family and friends. The two primary recipients of the letters were his mother, Lucinda Ross and his cousin, Laura Holt. These letters give a weekly itinerary of his travels in Europe and South America. Also in the collection are photocopies and transcriptions of all the letters.

Included in the land and legal records are deeds, property taxes, and various receipts. There are some legal papers pertaining to the career of Ross while he was an attorney in Savannah. There are a few deeds pertaining to George Ross and the estate sale papers of Morgan Hood Ross. Three items of interest include the militia commission for Morgan Ross, original land grants, both signed by Governor William Carroll, and slave bills of sale. Of Civil War interest are the two military passes granted to Morgan Hood Ross in 1864. The genealogical records deal with the Ross family and other allied families.

Jeff Ross was an amateur writer and wrote on wide ranging and varied topics. These writings are reflected in his notebooks and manuscripts. The notebooks are the notes and daybooks he made while researching and the manuscripts are generally typewritten copies. It is not believed that he published any of his manuscripts. Although they comprise the bulk of the collection, they may be of limited use primarily because they are unnamed with no page numbers, and incomplete. It is regretted that he did not compose his memoirs instead of expending energy on his "philosophical writings."

It may be said that Jeff Ross did not conform to the prescribed life of the young men of his generation. This fact is well documented in this small collection. This collection provides an important social history of a prominent family of Hardin County, Tennessee.

Oversize Box 9 contains an Annual Catalogue for Ross Academy in Savannah, Tennessee, dated 1886-1887, a deed to William Armstrong for 1 3/4 acres and 30.5 poles in Williamson County from Ennis Murray, dated 1859, an indenture to Morgan H. Ross for land in Hardin County, dated 1848, and a synopsis of "Blue Ivy," a history of a West Tennessee farm town, told through its residence. Also included in this box are four land grants. Peter Buran, assignee for the heirs of William Henson, received a land grant from the State of Tennessee for 38 acres in Hardin County, dated 1834. Moses G. Couch received a land grant from the State of Tennessee in 1849 for 208 acres in Hardin County. There is a land grant for Morgan H. Ross who also received 30.5 acres of land in Hardin County from the State of Tennessee. Lastly there is a land grant for William B. Ross and his heir for 23 acres in Hardin County, dated 1826. This box was added later and therefore was not included in the microfilm.

CONTAINER LIST

Microfilm Roll #1

Box 1

1. Accounts -- Ross Family
2. Accounts -- Ross Family
3. Accounts -- Ross, George, 1821-1845
4. Accounts -- Ross, Jeff, 1925
5. Account Books -- Ross, Morgan Hood, n.d.
6. Account Books -- Unnamed, 1867
7. Certificates -- Soldier's Certificate for voting, Ross, J.F., 1866
8. Certificates -- Tax Assessor Appointment, Ross, Franklin, 1867
9. Clippings -- Miscellaneous
10. Correspondence -- Alexander-Blanchet
11. Correspondence -- Brashear, Charles Ross
12. Correspondence -- Brashear, Charles Ross-Bryson
13. Correspondence -- Cargile-Coffee, Isaac Newton
14. Correspondence -- Coffey, Jacob-Curry
15. Correspondence -- Davis-Gilbreth
16. Correspondence -- Hackney-Holt, Laura
17. Correspondence -- Holt, Laura-Hurst
18. Correspondence -- Jo (unidentified)-Primm
19. Correspondence -- Ross, Ann Eliza-Ross, E.W.
20. Correspondence -- Ross, Frank-Ross, J.F.
21. Correspondence -- Ross, Jeff, 1880-1882
22. Correspondence -- Ross, Jeff, 1884-1886
23. Correspondence -- Ross, Jeff, 1886-1888
24. Correspondence -- Ross, Jeff, 1890-1894
25. Correspondence -- Ross, Josie-Ross, Lucinda
26. Correspondence -- Ross, Lucinda
27. Correspondence -- Ross, Montague S.-Ross, Morgan Hood
28. Correspondence -- Scott-Virginia
29. Correspondence -- Weeks-Williams

Box 2

1. Diary -- Ross, Jeff, 1872
2. Financial Records -- Promissory Notes, Ross, Morgan Hood and Jeff Ross, 1837-1920
3. Financial Records -- Receipts, Militia court martial fine payment, Marchison, Simon, 1832
4. Financial Records -- Receipts, Ross, Jeff, 1874
5. Financial Records -- Receipts, Ross, Morgan Hood

6. Financial Records -- Receipts, Ross, Morgan Hood
7. Financial Records -- Receipts, Ross, Morgan Hood
8. Financial Records -- Tax Payment Receipts, 1802-1809
9. Genealogical Records -- Bennett Family
10. Genealogical Records -- Brashear/Walker/Shaver Families
11. Genealogical Records -- Coffey/Coffee Family
12. Genealogical Records -- Coffey/Coffee Family

Microfilm Roll #2

13. Genealogical Records -- Gantt/Stoddert Families
14. Genealogical Records -- Harden Family
15. Genealogical Records -- Primm Family
16. Genealogical Records -- Ross Family
17. Genealogical Records -- Ross Family
18. Genealogical Records -- Ross Family
19. Genealogical Records -- Ross Family
20. Genealogical Records -- Ross Family
21. Genealogical Records -- Ross Family
22. Genealogical Records -- Ross Family
23. Genealogical Records -- Ross/Walker Families
24. Invitations -- Miscellaneous
25. Land Records -- Deeds, miscellaneous, 1823-1839
26. Land Records -- Deeds, miscellaneous, 1878-1895
27. Land Records -- Deeds, Ross Family, 1827-1848
28. Land Records -- Deeds, Ross Family, 1852-1873

Box 3

1. Land Records -- Deeds, Ross Family, 1881-1910
2. Land Records -- Deeds, Ross, George, 1818-1838
3. Land Records -- Deeds, Ross, Morgan Hood, 1838-1854
4. Legal Records -- Bills of Sale, Ross, Morgan Hood, 1843-1848
5. Legal Records -- Bills of Sale, Ross, Morgan Hood, 1849-1859
6. Legal Records -- Contracts, Ross, Jeff, 1891-1894
7. Legal Records -- Contracts, Ross, Jeff, n.d. (Spanish and Portuguese)
8. Legal Records -- Court Cases, Ross, Jeff
9. Legal Records -- Court Decrees (Tennessee Supreme Court), *Margaret Ross vs John B. Ross*, 1848
10. Legal Records -- Estate Settlements, Ross, Morgan Hood, 1864
11. Legal Records -- Estate Settlements, Ross, Morgan Hood, 1868
12. Legal Records -- *Euphence Coffey vs Calvin Coffey*, " 1858
13. Legal Records -- Execution Judgments, 1841
14. Legal Records -- Passports, "Peris de Sejour," Ross, Jeff, 1880
15. Legal Records -- Wills, Ross, Jeff, 1919

16. Maps -- Miscellaneous, unidentified
17. Military Records -- Commissions, Ross, Morgan H. ca. 1830
18. Military Records -- Passes, Ross, Morgan Hood, 1864
19. Military Records -- Passes, Ross, Morgan Hood, 1864
20. Notebooks -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
21. Notebooks -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff

Microfilm Roll #3

Box 4

1. Notebooks -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
2. Notebooks -- Miscellaneous, South American Notebooks, Ross, Jeff

Microfilm Roll #4

3. Notebooks -- "The Negroes Destiny," Ross, Jeff

Box 5

1. Notebooks -- "Rebuilding Rome," Ross, Jeff

Microfilm Roll #5

2. Notebooks -- Ross, Morgan Hood (son of Jeff Ross)
3. Notebooks -- "Wild Quotations, Brazil, 1882"
4. Poem -- "Lines in Commemoration of the Naming of Captain John H. Freeman's Bull Calf," 1876
5. Printed Material -- Booklets, "The Miracle Tree," by Blanche E. Little
6. Printed Material -- Booklets, Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, 1923-1925
7. Printed Material -- School Catalogues, Savannah (Tennessee) Institute, 1916-1917
8. Printed Material -- Tribute, "Dr. Robert A. Hardin," 1905
9. Subject Files -- Fox Hunter's Association, 1942-1949
10. Subject Files -- Fox Hunter's Association, 1942-1949
11. Subject Files -- Railroad distances in Uruguay? n.d.
12. Subject Files -- Ross Academy, Hardin County

Box 6

1. Writings -- "Christian Philosophy," Ross, Jeff
2. Writings -- "Jeff's Own Story"
3. Writings -- "Jeff's Own Story"
4. Writings -- "Jeff's Own Story"
5. Writings -- "Jeff's Own Story"
6. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
7. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
8. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
9. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
10. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff

11. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
12. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
13. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff

Microfilm Roll #6

Box 7

1. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
2. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
3. Writings -- Miscellaneous, Ross, Jeff
4. Writings -- "The Negro Destiny," Ross, Jeff
5. Writings -- Philosophical Writings, Ross, Jeff
6. Writings -- "Rainfall" (Brazil)
7. Writings -- "Sockwad Foundation," Ross, Jeff

Box 8 - Photographs

1. Photographs -- Ross School, Savannah, Hardin County
2. Photographs -- School Group, unidentified
3. Photographs -- School Group, Graduation? Unidentified
4. Photographs -- School Group, Graduation? Unidentified

Box 9 - Oversize (Not Microfilmed)

1. Catalogue -- Ross Academy, 1886-1887
2. Deeds -- Armstrong, William, 1859
3. Indenture -- Ross, Morgan H., 1848
4. Land grants -- Buran, Peter, 1834
5. Land grants -- Couch, Moses G., 1849
6. Land grants -- Ross, M. H., 1831
7. Land grants -- Ross, William B., 1826
8. Writings -- "Big Ivy," undated