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SMITH, JAMES (1798-1871)
PAPERS, 1836-ca. 1900

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INTRODUCTION

The papers of James Smith, minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, church author and editor, and United States consul in Dundee, Scotland, are the property of the Tennessee Historical Society. These papers were obtained through the agency of the Rev. William Alexander Provine of Nashville, Tennessee.

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

Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the James Smith Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The James Smith Papers, 1836-ca. 1900, consisting of approximately 80 items, are composed almost wholly of letters from and about the Rev. James Smith, minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church; nephew of Finis Ewing, one of the founders of the church; one-time editor of the *Revivalist*, a church paper published in Nashville, Tennessee; and United States Consul in Dundee, Scotland; and are family letters written in the main to his daughter, Katherine, and her husband, the Rev. Neil M. Gordon, in Keene, Kentucky, from 1849 to 1871.

From these family letters, one has a picture of the minister and family man. In Smith's letter of December 29, 1851, among other things he expounds his views on the propriety of a man's marriage to his deceased wife's sister; and comments on his church in Springfield, Illinois, writing that "My flock here are a very peaceable orderly kindhearted set of folks. In things spiritual they are very cold and indifferent. It seems to me that from Sabbath to Sabbath I feel myself contending with a granite rock, thoroughly convincing me that it is not by might nor by power but by my spirit saith the Lord. It is consoling to know that the Spirit can soften even the hardest heart." In a letter of consolation to his son-in-law on the death of his child, Smith writes in his long, would-be comforting letter, "... all was predetermined by your Heavenly Father." On May 18, 1853, he writes that he can hardly make ends meet and speaks of the incessant conflict between the two Presbyterian churches in Springfield. "We are on the eve of a great conflict – my church being arraigned before Presbytery for dishonesty and acting in bad faith in relation to certain pecuniary matters...unfounded in truth...acts done before I had any connection with it. I am strongly tempted to abandon my position when this trial is over."

Smith writes, July 1853, of his labors for Peoria University and the money he has raised for it, and in November 1855, says its trustees again appointed him their agent. On February 7, 1854, he comments on the news that in St. Louis there has lately been constituted a Presbyterian church in which no choir is allowed. May 24, 1854, he writes "Temperance gained a great victory here on yesterday a majority of our citizens voting for entire prohibition. For this we have great cause of thankfulness."

Smith writes on May 31, 1855, that "the Cumberland Elders have made a most violent and malignant assault upon me growing out of my speech on the subject of church extension." And in a happier frame of mind, May 24, 1856, he says, "My church is in a very pleasant and prosperous condition..." The following month he says they have been engaged for the last three weeks "in the labors of a protracted meeting with the pastor of the Methodist Church...the result is a very pleasant and profitable season."

In September 1856, Smith writes that his "nervous system is deranged: and that he does not like his sedentary life. He again speaks of the meager living his church gives him. In October 1856, he decides "after long and prayerful deliberation" to ask the Presbytery to dissolve his pastoral connection with his church. He says that from a feeble church he has brought it to be the largest of the denomination in Illinois, and that it is out of debt, yet there has been no increase for him.

In 1861, President Lincoln appointed Smith United States Consul in Dundee, Scotland. Smith's letters from Dundee to his daughter and son-in-law in Kentucky concern her move, and that of his wife, to Scotland. He writes, "Your mother need not

fear the sea voyage it will not be like it was when we went to America..." In 1866, he writes "...with regard to the difficulties in the Presbyterian Church I am with Dr. R. I. Breckenridge 'heart and soul'." Smith complains more and more about his declining health, and his physical condition seems to be reflected in his handwriting which is hardly more than an almost illegible scrawl.

In February 1867, Smith writes to his son-in-law commenting on Lincoln's assassination and speaks of Lincoln as the man "I esteemed above all others and the dearest and kindest friend I ever had during my long residence in the United States."

Included with these papers is one letter from the Rev. W. L. Breckenridge in Louisville, Kentucky, dated February 24, 1858, inviting Smith to come and join them in a special service.

There are six letters from a granddaughter, Nettie E. Smith, which give some biographical data about James Smith; and one letter from another granddaughter, Eliza C. Gordon. These seven letters were addressed to the Rev. W. A. Provine in Columbia, Tennessee, who was preparing to write a biography of James Smith.

Several letters from Mrs. Smith (Elizabeth Black Smith) include one of May 1865, in which she complains of her poor health in the damp and cold climate of Scotland; and one in 1867, writing that Mr. Smith is determined to send her back to the United States even though she does not wish to leave him in Scotland without her. Smith died in his native Scotland and is buried in the same graveyard with his parents.

Miscellaneous items include an 1836 (?) notice of a funeral sermon to be given by the Rev. James Smith; and a clipping in regard to the friendship of Abraham Lincoln with Smith, mentioning the effect of his book, *A Christian's Defense*, on Lincoln.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

James Smith

- 1798 May 11 – Born in Glasgow, Scotland, son of Peter and Margaret (Bruce) Smith. Orphaned young and raised by an uncle, a businessman
- Studied at the University of Glasgow, Scotland
- ca. 1816 Married Elizabeth Black (1799-1872); received his patrimony; turned down his offer in uncle's business
- ca. 1816 Emigrated to the United States
- 1820-ca.1826 Lived in Cincinnati; daughters Eliza, Margaret, Katherine born
- ca. 1828 Lived in Indiana; daughter Mary born; converted to Presbyterian faith
- ca. 1829 Ordained a minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church
- ca. 1832-1841 Lived in Nashville, TN; 1838, son Hugh born; 1840, son James B. born; editor of the church paper, *The Revivalist*; 1836, established quarterly, *The Cumberland Magazine*
- ca. 1842-1861 Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Illinois
- 1856 Appointed director for life, American Bible Society
- 1861 Appointed by President Lincoln United States Consul, Dundee, Scotland.
- 1871 July 3 – Died in Scotland; buried in same graveyard with parents in Glasgow
- 1872 His wife died in the United States and is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois

CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

1. Correspondence – Breckinridge, W. L., 1858
2. Correspondence – Gordon, Eliza C., 1900
3. Correspondence – Smith, Elizabeth, 1865-67
4. Correspondence – Smith, James, 1849-1860
5. Correspondence – Smith, James, 1862-1871
6. Correspondence – Smith, Nettie, E., 1897-99
7. Miscellaneous