



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

**TENNESSEE STATE LIBRARY  
STATE LIBRARIAN'S RECORDS (RETURN J. MEIGS)  
1841-1879**

**RECORD GROUP 188**

Processed by:  
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## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Record Group 188, the Return Jonathan Meigs, 1801-1891, Papers, 1820-1891 directly relate to his undertakings as the first Tennessee State Librarian from 1856-1860. The papers are largely composed of correspondence concerning the purchasing of books to create a State library. Found in the correspondence are lists of the books purchased along with the prices. Much of the correspondence is written by John Meigs, son of R.J. Meigs. Also included in the papers are original sketches of book bindings, accounts and receipts, financial records, court records and legislation affecting the library. A volume was later added to the record group that contains letters written by Meigs from 1854-1865 to acquire books for the newly established library. The back pages of this volume contain a book inventory for a law library, location unknown, for the dates 1869-1871.

R. J. Meigs was born April 14, 1801 in Clark County, Kentucky. He was the son of John and Parenthia Meigs and grandson of the famous Indian agent Jonathan Meigs of Hiawasse County. Prior to assuming the post as State Librarian he practiced law and served as Attorney General for Middle Tennessee, State Senator, and helped compile the first authorized Code of Tennessee. These are but a few of the many important positions he held; for a more complete list refer to the biographical sketch.

On March 4, 1854 the Tennessee General Assembly appropriated \$5,000 for books to establish a library and commissioned R.J. Meigs to make the purchases. Although the \$5,000 was inadequate to create a library that Meigs felt to be complete, he chose an interesting variety of rare books, many of which are written in several different languages. After spending the appropriated money, the legislation enacted a law that allotted \$500.00 annually for the library and designed rules for the functioning of the library and officially appointed Meigs to the position of State Librarian with an annual salary of \$500.00.

Meigs held the position of State Librarian until the outbreak of the Civil war. Being a Union sympathizer, he resigned in June 1860, but remained in office until June, 1861. During most of the war, the Tennessee Historical society tried to secure the protection of the books but had little effect; many were stolen and destroyed by the Federal troops. The State Library & Archives maintains today a fairly large collection of the original books purchased by Meigs for the library and also many books from his own personal library.

Meigs resigned as State Librarian and moved to Staten Island, New York. In 1863 he was called upon by President Lincoln and appointed clerk of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia where he served for 28 years until his death on October 19, 1891.

R. J. Meigs was a man ahead of his time whose progressive interest had a significant impact on the future of Tennessee. He was not only a prominent lawyer, a member of the Whig party, and the first State Librarian, but also believed in the importance of education. He established and served on several organizations promoting education in the state. Meigs was also an early advocator of turnpikes and the building of railroads. He opposed slavery and helped in the plight towards liberty for the black population, by incorporating the Colonization of the Free Negroes, and represented many slaves in court battles. As a member of the State Senate, Meigs enacted legislation to promote many of these beliefs.

## CONTAINER LIST

### **Box 1**

- 1 Accounts – Bills & receipts, 1856-1974
- 2 Correspondence – Adkisson, Samuel W. – Vatteman, Alexander, 1855-1973
- 3 Correspondence – Meigs, John to Bache, A.D. – Zollercoffer, Felix R., 1856-1860
- 4 Correspondence – Meigs, R. J. to Appleton, D. & Co. – Pickett, W. D., 1854-1961
- 5 Court Records – Requisition – Court Case – B.F. McGehee vs.  
Sewanee Mining Company 1879 & No Date
- 6 Financial Records – Bank Statements – Memoranda's, 1859
- 7 Legal Documents – Petition – Nomination for Engrossing Clerk –  
Oath of Office – Appointment of Commissioners, 1841-1854
- 8 Legislation – Bills, Resolutions, 1859-1860
- 9 Lists – orders for books, 1857
- 10 Printed Material – Circular – to the General Assembly, 1845,  
Letter of Alexander Vatteman to the Governors of the States, 1850 –  
Abridgement of the Debate of Congress, 1856 – Article – written by  
Frederick Eichbaum, 1859 – Book – clippings from the American  
Military Books, No Date
- 11 Sketches – drawings of book bindings, No Date
- 12 Volume – Letters, 1854-1865, and book inventory, 1869-1871

## NAME INDEX

This is a Name Index of correspondence in Record Group 188, state Librarian, R.J. Meigs Papers, together with the dates of the letters and information regarding their contacts. The figures in parentheses denote the number of letters. The last numbers refer to the box and folder in which the material is to be found.

Adkisson, Samuel W. to Tennessee general Assembly, (1), 1855, re: loaning a few books to the State Library which he later took away, 1-2.

Barry, Wm to John Meigs, (1), 1861 re: sending 4 books and 25 pamphlets, 1-2.

Cogswell, Joseph B. to R.J. Meigs, (1), 1858, re: gives information about an architect for fixing up Tennessee State Library and wants to get Tennessee legislation documents for the Aster Library in New York, 1-2.

Deaderick, Jas. To W. T. Haskell (Mrs.), (1), 1874, re: acknowledges books received, 1-2.

Felton, C.C. to R. J. Meigs, (1), 1860, re: acknowledges receiving documents sent by Tennessee State Library, code of Tennessee; Ramsey's Annals, and other documents, 1-2.

Harrison, Horace H. to W. T. Haskell (Mrs.), (1), 1873, re: introduces Mr. Bradford, would like her to show him the Code of Pennsylvania, 1-2.

MacGregor, James to R.J. Meigs, (1), 1858, re: he went to Appleton & Co. to see if certain books had been sent by them to the State Library and found that they had, 1-2.

McFarland, Robert to W. T. Haskell (Mrs.), (1), 1873, re: ordering 33<sup>rd</sup> volume of Maryland reports from the State Librarian, 1-2.

Liggett, Wm. S. to R.J. Meigs, (1), 1873 re: inquires about how to mail books, C.O.D. or regular mail, includes cost, 1-2.

Meigs, John to A.D. Bache, (2), 1857, re: inquires about copy of catalogue and asking for copy of maps and charts of Coast Survey, acknowledging receipt of Coastal Survey, 1-3.

Meigs, John to James Beebe & Co. (3), 1857, re: asking them if they could do the inner-work for the Tennessee State Library, 1-3.

Meigs, John to J.W. Bouton & Co., (1), 1858, re: discuss the matter of purchasing a book at thirty dollars, 1-3.

Meigs, John to George Bruce, (1), 1858, re: asking for copies of their Specimen Type Books for State Library, 1-3.

Meigs, John to John P. Campbell, (1), 1859, re: number of books in State Library for his Directory of Nashville, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Messr's Childs & Peterson, (1), 1857, re: asking about Kane's First Grinnell Expedition, Alibone's Diey of Literature & Art and Brazil & the Brazilians, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Henry Clapp Jr., (1), 1859, re: sends order of one year subscription to the paper for Library, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Honorable (Secretary of Treasure) Howell Colb, (1), 1858, re: asking for the holdings of the Tennessee State Library, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Professor Joseph Henry, (1), 1856, re: holdings in the Tennessee Library, action of the Tennessee legislation appropriation act giving the Library \$5000 dollars for collecting books. List of books cataloged at the Tennessee library. Returns answers to the questionnaire that Smithsonian requested. 1-3.

Meigs, John to Jno. H. Hickson, (1), 1857, re: discuss the holdings of Tennessee State Library and the action of the Tennessee General Assembly, A sketch of the floor plan of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the capitol, discuss the position of the library, 1-3.

Meigs, John to John P. Jewett, (2), 1858-1859, re: they wish to sell a copy of Littells Living Age to the State Library. Inquires about condition, price, binding and number of volumes, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Little, Brown & Co., (9), 1857-1958, re: ordering Pooles' Index to Periodicals Literature, Works of Hippocrates, Bohne's Catalog, cost of set of Bibliotheca Sacra, Darlings Cyclopedia Bibliographica, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Lieut. M.F. Maury, (1), 1857, re: acknowledging receipts of Wind & Current Charts for State Library, 1-3.

Meigs, John to George W. Munford, (1), 1859, re: asking for a number of Virginia reports all before volume 11 of Grattan and after volume 13. 1-3.

Meigs, John to Charles B. Norton, (2), 1857-1859, re: asking him to send Terals Colbrum and Alexander L. Holley's new work, Railway Economy for the State Library and the Cyclopedia Bibliographica, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Jno. Pennington & Son, (3), 1858-1859, re: ordering Sydenham Society Publication, Camden Society Publication and Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church. Writers for Vatican Codices of Old & New Testaments, 4 volumes in

Old Testament and 1 in New Testament, edited by Cardinal Mai The Penny Encyclopedia, The Chalmen's General, Biographical Dictionary, The Brunets Manuel Du Libraire and the Holy Bible, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Dr. J.S.M. Ramsey, (2), 1856, re: asking him to send whole bill for his Annals, 1-3.

Meigs, John to James M. Safford, (1), 1857, re: asking for two copies of his colored Geological Map of Tennessee, 1-3.

Meigs, John Smith, Lloyd P. (1), 1857, re: about placing the Philadelphia Library Company among the institutions to whom the publications of Tennessee could be sent, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Alfred B. Street, (1), 1857, re: list of books sent from New York State Library to Tennessee State Library and prices, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Welch & Harris, (1), 1856, re: acknowledging the receipt of a book of Ramseys Annals, 1-3.

Meigs, John to Felix R, Zolliercoffier, (1), 1858, re: catalog of books to be sold by Barrys Brothers in New York, request Zolliercoffer to examine books. Suggests to Zolloercoffier to combine two bills that will expand the tariff exemption for books to include works of art, maps, etc. to the State Library and a tariff on postal, 1-3.

Meigs, R.J. to D. Appleton & Co., (3), 1856, re: ordering copies of Giswold's Washington, Irving's Washington and De Witt's Life of Washington and Sergeant's History of Bradoch's Expedition, and Col. Benton's Congressional Debates, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to A.D. Bache, (1), 1857, re: sending copy of Catalogue, and asking for copy of maps and charts of coast Survey, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to J.W. Bouton & Co., (1), 1858, re: inquires about Hippocrates Opera and Erotian Glossaria in Hippocrates, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to A.D. Bache, (1), 1857, re: sending copy of Catalogue, and asking for copy of maps and charts of coast Survey, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to J.W. Bouton & Co., (1), 1858, re: inquires about Hippocrates Opera and Erotian Glossaria in Hippocrates, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to Judge John Catson, (1), 1857, re: inquires about Congressional Globe, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to Idle & Dutton, (5), 1856, re: enclosing check for \$4.30 for maps, sending pay for raised Maps, order for relief Maps, orders Kiepert's Map, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to J.B. Lippincott & Co., (1), 1857, re: inquires about volume IX of Smithsonian Contribution to Knowledge, 1-4.

Meigs, John to Little, Brown & Co., (7), 1857, re: ordering Poole's Index to Periodical Literature & Bohn's Catalogue last edition, also sending money for Library and for self. Asking for names of contributors to the North American Review, gives list of books purchased from the Company. Request - copy of Boeckh's Public Economy of the Athenians 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to Wm. M. Morrison, (2), 1857-1858, re: in answer to judge Catson's letter, orders 24 volumes of Viner's Abridgments, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to J. Pennington, (1), 1858, re: inquires about purchasing English Encyclopedia – New French Dictionary – Genius Dictionary, 1-4.

Meigs, R.J. to W.D. Pickett, (1), 1861, re: gives the opinion of the Supreme Court, in the case of McGeehee & Gould vs. The Sewanee Mining Company, 1-4.

Panisi, Signor A. to R.J. Meigs, (1), 1859, re: Acknowledges receipt of books sent to the London Library from the Tennessee State Library, 1-2.

Perot, Wm. To John Meigs, (1), 1857, re: would like to get a profile likeness of Wm. Carroll for modeling a medallion for the Tennessee State Library fixtures. Got C.C. Hughes to take an ambrotype of the oil portrait of Mr. Carroll, in possession of Historical society and sent it to Philadelphia by Mr. Wm. T. Cooper who is now returning from the East, 1-2.

Senter, D.W.G. to Dr. Wharton, (4), 1869-1970, re: requests books to be loaned out to a R.W. Worthen, Samuel A. Rodgers and Judge J.O. Shackelford, 1-2.

Strickland, F.W. to R.J. Meigs, (1), 1857, re: sends a list of architectural and other works, for which he offers a modest price, 1-2.

Vatteman, Alexander to Isham G. Harris, (1), 1859, re: acknowledging receipt of books sent by the Library of France, says exchange will be made, 1-2.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**  
**RETURN JOHNATHAN MEIGS**

- 1801 April 14, born in Clark County, Kentucky, the son of John and Parthenia Meigs. Grandson of Colonel Jonathan Meigs, the Indian Agent at the Hiawasse Garrison in Eastern TN.
- 1822 Attended Law school on Frankfort, Kentucky
- 1823 Began law practice in Athens, McMinn County, TN
- 1825 Married Sally Keys Love
- 1831-1833 Helped incorporate the Colonization of the Free Negroes.
- 1835 Moved to Nashville and started law practice with James Rucks
- 1836 Candidate for delegate to the Constitutional Convention in TN, advocating “gradual emancipation”. First president of the Tennessee Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge.
- 1838 Appointed Attorney General & Court reporter for the State of Tennessee
- 1841 Appointed U.S. Attorney for Mid – TN
- 1844 Commissioner for the receipt of stock subscriptions to help develop the advocates Library of Nashville
- 1847 Elected State Senator for Davidson County, TN
- 1849 Tennessee Historical Society was formed, Meigs appointed as librarian and corresponding secretary, he was also first life time member.
- 1853 Helped compile first authorized code of TN with W.J. Cooper, On Board of Capital Commissioners for the building of the State Capital
- 1856 Appointed first State Librarian
- 1860 Resigned as State Librarian because of his belief in the Union, but held office until June 1861
- 1861 Moved to Staten Island, New York
- 1863 Lincoln appointed Meigs as Supreme Court Clerk in Washington, D.C. where he served for 28 years
- 1891 October 19, died in Washington, D.C.



Between 1791 – 1856

Prepared the Meigs Digest of Tennessee court decisions. Trustee of the State University where founded a classical library, also trustee of the common schools system in Nashville and for the stat's school for the blind, and member of the Board of Education.