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Roy Bird Cook Collections Riches Revealed

Roy Bird Cook (1886-1961) is a name well known to all who have delved into the history of the Mountain State in any detail. This is especially true for students of the Civil War era. Cook was not only a leading authority on the subject, but also one of the foremost collectors of original manuscripts and documents pertaining to the war as it relates to West Virginia history.

The legacy of Cook's lifelong efforts as an author and antiquarian survive today in the West Virginia and Regional History Collection's priceless Roy Bird Cook Collections. Consisting of more than twenty-seven linear feet of letters, diaries, manuscripts and other archival resources, the Cook Collections are perhaps the most significant gathering of West Virginian a ever assembled by a single individual. The West Virginia Collection is pleased to announce that a newly updated finding aid to this superlative resource is now available to researchers via the WVRHC's online Guide to Archives and Manuscripts.

A native of Lewis County, Cook was a pharmacist by trade, and a figure of national prominence in that field. He held the presidency of both the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy and the American Pharmaceutical Association, and was a recipient of the latter organization's coveted Remington Medal, the highest honor accorded by his profession. Yet, Cook was equally passionate about his avocation, the study of West Virginia history, and his contributions in that field were no less remarkable.

The future "Stonewall," Thomas J. Jackson was a young lieutenant, aged 23, when this picture was taken in Mexico City in 1847.

Cook became enamored with tales of the lives and deeds of the early settlers of his native county when he was still just a lad. By the time he was in his early twenties he was an authority on the subject. He demonstrated his mastery of the topic by publishing a series of "Pioneer Sketches of Lewis County" in the Weston Independent in 1916 and 1917.
Reared in "Stonewall" Jackson country, Cook took a special interest in the famous military leader and endeavored to learn all he could about the general's local roots. Drawing upon reminiscences of elderly neighbors who had known Jackson, and data culled from local records and manuscripts, Cook wrote a book on The Family and Early Life of Stonewall Jackson which became the foundation for all subsequent accounts of Jackson's early life. Published in 1924, that volume, and another of the same year, Lewis County in the Civil War, earned Cook an enduring position in the annals of West Virginia Civil War scholarship.

Cook would continue to play a prominent role in the study and preservation of West Virginia history for the next three and a half decades. Among other activities, he was the first editor of the quarterly journal West Virginia History, he served on numerous history-related committees at both the state and local levels, and played a key role in the development of the State 4-H Camp at Jackson's Mill. Cook was also a tireless advocate of libraries and archives across the state. His many contributions in this regard won him a merit award from the West Virginia Library Association just four years before his death.

The Cook Collections

The Roy Bird Cook Collections at the WVRHC are both extensive and diverse. Information resources in literally all information formats of Cook's era are represented including correspondence, diaries, legal and financial papers, military records, newspapers, pamphlets, photographs and more. As noted above, the Civil War, "Stonewall" Jackson and family, and the history and genealogy of North-Central West Virginia are among the Collections' greatest strengths. While fueled by a collector's passion for manuscripts, Cook's acquisitions were also informed by a historian's perspective, evidenced by the hundreds of pages of typescript copies of letters and diaries in the Collections. While Cook loved original documents, he realized that preserving information, regardless of its form or generation, was paramount.

Rather than arriving as a single unit, the Cook Collections came to the WVRHC in installments over a period of a quarter century (1937-1962). Those installments retain their distinct identity and accession numbers to this day.

The first acquisition to arrive, A&M 81, consists of a little more than a foot of material regarding the Tavenner family, prominent early settlers in western Virginia. The family was related by marriage to many other regional pioneer clans including the Withers family. Included in this accession is information on key figures like Alexander Scott Withers (1792-1865) who penned the first history of white settlement in western Virginia, Chronicles of Border Warfare (1831). The Tavenners were sympathetic to the
Confederate cause during the Civil War. One member of the family, William Cabell Tavenner, served in the Confederate army. His extensive letters represent one of the most significant parts of this component of the Cook Collections.

The two largest installments of the Cook Collections, A&M 1528 and A&M 1561, arrived in 1961 and 1962 respectively. Included in the former is a wealth of Civil War-related material including the regimental records of the 31st Virginia Infantry (Confederate) and smaller groups of documents regarding other Confederate units active in western Virginia including Bryan’s Battery, Lowry’s Battery, the Hardy Blues, and the Jefferson Guards. This accession also includes extensive information on the history and genealogy of Greenbrier County including material on the life and career of Brigadier General Alexander W. Reynolds, CSA, who hailed from Lewisburg.

The last Cook installment to arrive, A&M 1561, is by far the largest. Consisting of nearly 20 linear feet of material, this component includes Cook’s priceless “Stonewall” Jackson collections and a wealth of other letters, manuscripts, records, pamphlets, diaries, clippings and typescripts regarding the Civil War in West Virginia. Less well-known in this accession are voluminous resources on countless other subjects in state and local history. For example, there is much information regarding the history of medicine and pharmacy in West Virginia. Indeed, this is an exceedingly rich and broad resource.

Digitizing and Reprocessing the Collections

In the half-century that has passed since the Roy Bird Cook Collections arrived, the staff of the West Virginia Collection has continually endeavored to care for these unparalleled resources to ensure that future generations of researchers can benefit from their existence. As technology has evolved through the decades, steps have also been taken to improve accessibility to the Collections’ content.

A noteworthy step in the latter regard began approximately a decade ago when the WVRHC embarked on its very first ever “digital collections” project, an effort to scan, catalog and make available on the internet the complete military records of the 31st Virginia Infantry. Formed at the beginning of the war to secure rail lines in northwestern Virginia, the 31st was recruited in Taylor, Marion, Harrison, Monongalia, and Barbour counties. The regiment saw action in most of the early regional engagements of the war. Though primitive by today’s standards for digital collections in terms of image resolution and metadata, the Documents of the 31st Virginia website continues to provide access to more than 1600 pages of military discharges, furloughs, correspondence, orders, lists of officers, payroll and clothing distribution records, morning reports, and muster rolls of one of the first military units mustered within what would soon become the state of West Virginia. (See http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/collections/exhibits/Roy_Cook_JPG/index.htm)

A more ambitious digital collections project involving the Cook Collections began in 2005 when a long-term effort was undertaken to provide online access to visual images in the WVRHC. West Virginia History OnView now provides researchers with the opportunity to browse nearly 500 photographs and illustrations in the Cook Collections in the comfort of their own homes. Included are nearly 200 images relating to “Stonewall” Jackson, including portraits, places and objects associated with the Confederate general. (These images may be accessed at http://wvhistoryonview.org by going to “search this collection” and entering “A&M 1561” and/or “Roy Bird Cook” in the search bars.)

This 1891 view of Charleston is one of many views of West Virginia’s capital city in the Cook Collections.
Jackson's Mill, Lewis County, ca. 1890. Young Thomas J. Jackson resided here from the age of seven until entering West Point in 1842.

The launch of the WVRHC's online Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in 2006 ushered in a new era of accessibility in terms of finding aids at the WVRHC. The automated Guide project led to a new adherence to emerging professional standards for archives cataloging and description known as EAD (Encoded Archival Description) and DACS (Describing Archives, a Content Standard). By utilizing a common basic framework for describing their collections, archives across the world are now able to more effectively share information about their holdings via the internet. Accessibility of bibliographic and inventory data regarding the Cook Collections in the Guide has improved accordingly.

As the above “access” projects have unfolded, efforts to improve the preservation, arrangement and description of the Cook Collections have also been undertaken. Physical reprocessing steps have included replacing old acidic archival storage boxes and folders with new acid-free containers, removal of metal paper clips in favor of corrosion-free plastic clips, and reformatting of brittle newspaper clippings by scanning and/or photocopying them onto acid-free paper. Large format "oversized" documents, including muster rolls, newspapers, and maps, that were formerly stored in standard-size containers in a folded state, have been unfolded and placed into large flat storage boxes.

The reprocessing and revision of cataloging of the Cook Collections have resulted in many significant improvements in the depth of description of the Collections. The creation of new or upgraded folder-level descriptions of content throughout the Collections has been a routine part of the reprocessing project. In many cases, new item-level descriptions have been created resulting in substantially more description than was previously available. For example, the recent reprocessing of A&M 1561, which included creating item-level descriptions for a series of bound notebooks, yielded an inventory of approximately 150 pages.

These new finding aids make plumbing the depths of the Cook Collections a simple matter for the first time. With computer-facilitated searching one can now quickly ferret out genealogical data that would have required many hours of pawing through box after box in the past. Military buffs will appreciate the enhanced description of the Civil War content in the Cook Collections. The new inventories reveal the tremendous wealth of Civil War era diaries and letters, written by both soldiers and civilians, in the Collections. In A&M 1561, for example, one will find the diaries of John A. Mastin, 62nd Virginia Infantry, Company B (Confederate), and those of James F. Ellis, of the 15th West Virginia Infantry, Company B. There is also a diary of Henrietta Fitzhugh Barr of Ravenswood, (West)
Virginia, daughter of the town's founders and staunch supporter of the Confederacy.

As noted earlier, "Stonewall" Jackson and family are well represented in A&M 1561. For example, there are no fewer than ten original letters of recommendation written by assorted authors in support of Jackson's application for a position on the faculty of the University of Virginia in 1854. A letter by C.H. Mahan, one of Jackson's former West Point instructors, reads:

I recollect Major Jackson well as a pupil under me. He was then distinguished for an earnest and zealous devotion to his duties and evidenced vigorous mental powers which clearly and tenaciously grasped the subjects presented to them. This early promise has been fully realized by his subsequent career. Whilst in the military service he was considered one of the best officers of his grade; and, from personal observation, I can testify to his efficiency and success as an instructor in the Virginia Military Institute.

Such nuggets as the above are common in the West Virginia history goldmines known as the Roy Bird Cook Collections!

**In Memorium**

The West Virginia and Regional History Collection, and indeed, friends of West Virginia history everywhere lost a valued colleague when Larry Sypolt passed away at the age of 62 in January 2012. Larry contributed much to the effort to reprocess the Roy Bird Cook Collections which is described in this newsletter. But that was just the most recent of his many contributions to the West Virginia Collection and West Virginia University over the course of many years. Larry worked for the WVRHC on full-time basis for several years during the 1980s. He played a key role in locating and microfilming historic newspapers as part of the West Virginia Newspaper Project which was funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities.

After the project's conclusion, he served as an archivist for WVU's Institute for the History of Technology and Industrial Archaeology and also taught archives management for WVU's Cultural Resources Management program among other pursuits. Larry returned to the WVRHC as a part-time archivist in 2005. He made many significant contributions in the ensuing years, not only to the collections on which he worked, but also to his co-workers and community. A consummate archivist, Larry was also a consummate person. Upbeat and genuine, and never too busy to say hello, he lifted the spirits of everyone around him. He made the world a brighter place.

To make such a gift happen, have your attorney use the wording of “to the West Virginia University Foundation, Inc. (FEIN 55-6017181) for the benefit of the WVU Libraries' West Virginia and Regional History Collection.” Additional wording can specify how the gift is to be used, such as for acquisitions, resource conservation, staffing support, or general purposes.

Another helpful option is to make the WVU Foundation the after-death beneficiary of a life insurance or annuity policy. Then an agreement stating how the funds are to be used will assure the best results.

Contact Monte Maxwell, the Libraries' development officer, at 304-293-0306 or monte.maxwell@mail.wvu.edu to learn more about campaign support options.

As time passes, and the number of documents and historic objects preserved in the West Virginia and Regional History Collection continues to grow, so do the obligations of maintaining the most significant gathering of information about the heritage of our state. Providing for collections care and taking steps such as those described in this newsletter to make these priceless treasures accessible to all who have an interest in them, is vital work. It is work that comes at a cost.

Private gift support from those who recognize the value of what we do at the Regional History Collection has always had a direct effect on the WVRHC's success in meeting goals that have grown more ambitious as the years have passed. As the collections continue to grow, such funds will be even more important in the future.

During A State of Minds: The Campaign for West Virginia's University, future gift support provided by individuals through their wills or revocable trusts will be counted toward the historic $750 million goal for any donor who will reach age 70 by the end of the campaign on December 31, 2015.

**LEAVE A LEGACY**

*Make A Difference In The Lives That Follow*

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Selected Recent Accessions


Papers of C.F. Tucker Brooke, West Virginia University’s first Rhodes Scholar, and later a professor of English at Yale University. Includes family photographs, newspaper clippings, genealogy, diplomas, sketches, and artifacts. Subjects of the family photographs and sketches include C.F. Tucker Brooke, his wife Grace Drakeford Brooke, children (Elizabeth Grace Tucker Blackburn, Henry St. George Brooke, and Alfred Drakeford Brooke), grandchildren (Alfred Brooke Blackburn; Elizabeth Tucker Blackburn; George Stebbins Blackburn, Jr.; Henry St. George Brooke), and in-laws (Sophia and Alfred Drakeford). Other highlights include three wood relief carvings by Brooke’s son, Henry St. George Brooke; a Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee bulletin; and Anne Washington Brooke’s application to the Virginia Society of the Colonial Dames of America (undated), which records her ancestors, including Augustine and Lawrence Washington.


Nitrate negatives of photographs taken by Arch Ellis of Weston, West Virginia, mainly regarding 4-H Camps held at Jackson’s Mill. The photographs mainly depict campers at the various 4-H Camps (Boys, Girls, Farm Women’s, and Volunteer) participating in camp activities. These activities include musical performances by campers; metalworking, weaving, hat making, and other arts and crafts activities; swimming, archery and other sports; and dancing, among other activities. Other subjects include camps in other locations, county fairs, a livestock auction, “Mine Safety Day”, and portraits, among others. Contains 62 negatives and 2 prints.


Family photographs of Joyce T. Hathaway (b. 1927). Photographic material includes ca. 75 prints, ca. 17 photographic postcards, ca. 141 strips of 35 mm negatives, and ca. 750 digital images. The 35 mm negatives were created by Grantsville native David Barr Hathaway (1924-2009), Joyce’s husband. The digital images are positive scans of the 35 mm negatives. In addition to friends and family, subjects of the photographs include people, places, and activities of Calhoun County and the town of Grantsville, West Virginia in the early 1900s (prints and postcards) and 1940s (prints and 35 mm negatives). Highlights of the 35 mm negatives include the West Virginia Baptists Assembly, a WWII scrap convoy, the fire at Calhoun County High School in February of 1942, and the laying of the courthouse cornerstone in Grantsville in 1942, among others. The collection also includes printed material pertaining to the West Virginia Teachers’ Institutes, the Calhoun County Centennial, Grantsville, and Concord College (5 items).


Records of the Institute for the History of Technology and Industrial Archaeology (IHTIA) pertaining to its work on Blair Mountain, Logan County, WV, the site of the Battle of Blair Mountain. Fought in 1921, this battle involved the largest civil uprising since the Civil War, featuring the confrontation of mine workers with state police and volunteer militia. The collection includes correspondence, typescripts, maps, clippings, photographs, and artifacts that pertain to the Blair Mountain reconnaissance survey, cultural resource survey and recording project, and symposium. Highlights include typescript copies of a report on the Blair Mountain Cultural Resource Survey and Recording Project, typescript copies of documentation related to Historic American Engineering Records project HAER WV-50, and shell casings found on Blair Mountain that might date to the battle. A listing of artifacts can be found in box 5, folder 21; artifacts are in box 6.

This collection consists of 31 photographs, 4 diplomas, and 1 piece of sheet music mostly documenting West Virginia University. Many of the photographs are of sports teams, including football and baseball team group portraits. There are also 3 photos of fraternities, and 1 photo of faculty members.

Papers of the Charles William Cramer family of Morgantown. He was born in 1876 in Piedmont, West Virginia; graduated from Law School at West Virginia University in 1897; served in the 6th Cavalry Regiment in the Spanish-American War; and moved to Morgantown in 1901. Includes 176 page narrative by Cramer regarding his life from 1876 to ca. 1905, covering his student days at West Virginia University and his service during the Spanish-American War. There is a photo of Charles Cramer; and photos and other material of his wife Elizabeth Irene Littleton (Cramer), and daughter Kathryn Virginia Cramer (Morgan).


Black and white photographs taken by Julius Monroe, a surveyor who worked to establish the boundary between Maryland and West Virginia as decided by the Supreme Court in Maryland v. West Virginia in 1910. The court ruled in West Virginia’s favor, concluding that the Deakins Line was the official and correct demarcation between the states. Monroe and other commissioners were thereafter appointed to locate, establish, and permanently mark the boundaries with monuments. There are 55 photographs taken at dates during 1911 showing the progress of the survey. Most of the photographs have a date and identification number recorded onto them. A small number of photographs also include a caption. Subjects of the photographs include markers, campsites, and men working.


Incoming business letters to broker Charles E. Pride of Clarksburg, West Virginia. Charles E. Pride (1857-1905) worked as a merchant, broker, and traveling salesman before settling in Clarksburg in 1895 to work as a broker. The incoming letters in this collection document his brokerage work involving a variety of companies and commodities. Companies include: the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad; D.C. Wilhelm, Breeder of Short Horn Cattle; J.K. Armsby Company, Chicago; and P. Duff and Sons, Pittsburgh; among others. Commodities include: cement; gas, oil, and coal; seeds, grain, hay, and straw; fruits and vegetables; seafood; and coffee, tea, and sugar; among others. The letter of 20 March 1903 references insider trading.
The "other" Civil War general from Lewis County, WV, Gen. Joseph A.J. Lightburn, USA.

Name That Town! The WVRHC preserves hundreds if not thousands of historical photographs the content of which is currently unidentified. We would appreciate hearing from anyone who can identify the place depicted in this turn of the 20th century photo. Note the beehive coke ovens in the background and the company housing above the ovens.