

**The Beattie Family Papers,
1814-1884
MS 158**

Introduction

The Beattie Family Papers consist of lands deeds, correspondence, and various legal documents from the years 1814 to 1884. The collection primarily pertains to the activities of James Beattie of Ryegate, Vermont, and his sons, David, James, Thomas, and William, the latter of whom was involved with the emigration of the Creek Indians from Alabama between 1830 and 1837.

The papers were given to the Vermont Historical Society in two parts, the first in 1985 and the second in 1988, by Mrs. James H. Woods of Sun City, Florida (ms. acc. 85.33). They were inherited by Mrs. Woods from her mother, May Gillespie Beattie Lackie of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, in 1963. The collection occupies one box (.25 linear feet).

Biographical Note

James Beattie (1776 - 1866) was born in Ireland on the 12th of January. As documented in the collection, he first purchased lands in Ryegate, Vermont, in 1814. His wife, Margaret (1789 - 1862) was also born in Ireland. Her maiden name was Gillespie, and several letters in the collection are to and from members of the Gillespie family in New York City. James and Margaret Beattie settled in Ryegate and engaged in farming and timber harvesting. Their immediate family included their daughters, Jane, Margaret Ann (b. 1820), Hannah (b. 1824), Catherine, and Molly, and their sons, William (d. 1837), David H. (b. 1816), James Jr. (b. 1818), Thomas G. (b. 1822), and Alexander.

William J. Beattie, apparently the eldest child, went to the southern United States to pursue his business interests sometime between 1829 and 1830. As the collection indicates, the exact nature of his activities there are difficult to ascertain, due in part to his reluctance to share them with friends and family. The documents do reveal that his endeavors were intimately linked to the removal of the Creek Indians of Alabama, among whom he settled in 1830. He was a speculator in Indian land and a member of the Alabama Emigrating Company, a private business paid by the United States government to assist in the emigration of the Creeks.

William spent seven years in Fort Mitchell, Alabama, New Orleans, and the Arkansas Territories, never returning to Vermont. The correspondence indicates that he wanted the entire family to relocate to Alabama where he had purchased land. It is obvious from his letters that he considered the south a place of great opportunity. The Beattie family was suffering from financial difficulties at the time, yet father James Beattie apparently had a general suspicion of the south and a strong objection to the owning of slaves, and the family remained in Vermont.

In the late spring of 1836 hostilities between the Creeks and whites in Alabama intensified; this Creek “war” provided the justification for their forced emigration to the Indian Territories, situated in modern day Oklahoma. Over the following two years some 19,000 Creek Indians were removed from Alabama by the government and the Alabama Emigrating Company. While en route with a band of emigrating Indians, William died of fever on either December 1, 1837, or January 1, 1838. Shortly thereafter, his father and brother James Jr. went to the south to secure his estate. Upon his death, William was in possession of nearly \$30,000 dollars; there was disagreement whether it belonged to him or the Alabama Emigrating Company. James Beattie did not return to Vermont until early in 1839, having made a settlement for over \$20,000. James Jr. remained behind to untangle and sell William’s apparently large real estate holdings. He was joined by his brother David in October of that year, and the two did not return to Vermont until sometime after 1841.

Eventually, David Beattie and his brother Thomas would find their fortunes in the north of Vermont. They became involved with the lumber industry around Maidstone, Vermont, in the middle of the century. They became quite involved with that community, David holding office as a sheriff from 1855 - 1857 and Thomas as a state representative from 1854 - 1857, and subsequently as a state senator until 1861.

Scope & Content

The Beattie Family Papers, 1814-1884, are essentially involved with two broad subjects. One is the commerce of land and timber in Vermont by James Beattie and his sons, David and Thomas, from 1814 to 1867. The other is the activities of William J. Beattie in the southern states from 1830 to 1837. His mercantile business and involvement with emigrating Creek Indians from Alabama set him ranging abroad from Florida to Texas and provides a glimpse of a controversial chapter in American history. Further correspondence also represents the efforts of William’s family to secure his estate after his death in 1837.

The activity of James Beattie in and around Ryegate, Vermont, is primarily represented by land deeds ranging from 1814 to 1855. From the deeds and several related documents, including a legal action against Beattie and his associate Stephen Holman for cutting timber on someone else’s land, his interest in the lumber business is evident. An 1867 memorandum concerning the delivery of lumber to Portland, Maine, by David and Thomas Beattie of Maidstone indicates the family’s ongoing business interests.

The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence. One series of letters is to and from William J. Beattie while he was in the southern United States between 1830 and 1837. From the correspondence, including letters from his father, siblings, and friends, William’s involvement with the emigration of the Creek Indians to lands west of the Mississippi is evident. A folder of legal documents associated with this subject contains several interesting items, including the appointment in 1833 by the “Chiefs and Headmen

of the Creek Nation” of William J. Beattie to receive all communications from the federal government regarding their emigration. Also included are articles of agreement for the speculation of Indian lands and titles.

Another series of correspondence consists of letters sent to Ryegate by James Beattie and his sons, James Jr. and David, from 1838 to 1841, all of whom traveled to Alabama after William’s death in 1837. The letters reveal their efforts to secure his estate, which was tied up in a morass of land speculation and with the Alabama Emigrating Co.

The collection also contains several miscellaneous items, primarily correspondence on family matters and business receipts from 1844 to 1884. Most of the letters are to and from Margaret Beattie in Ryegate, and the business receipts are signed by Thomas Beattie of Maidstone.

Organization of the Papers

The papers are organized in following series and subseries:

- I. Vermont Land Deeds, 1814-1855
 - A. Associated Legal Documents, 1817-1867
- II. William Beattie Letters, 1828-1837
 - A. Associated Legal Documents, 1832-1838
- III. James Sr./Jr./David Beattie Letters, 1838-1841
- IV. Family Letters/Business Receipts, 1844-1884

Series Description

I. Vermont Land Deeds (1814-1855)

This series consists of land deeds in and around Ryegate between 1814 and 1855. The earlier deeds involve land bought and sold by James Beattie, the first being land purchased by him and Stephen Holman in Ryegate, Vermont. Of note is his sale of land to William in 1829, previous to William’s departure for the south, and his subsequent re-purchase of the land in 1835, handled by William’s attorney, Alex Harvey Esq. Also noteworthy is the sale of land to James Gillespie, a member of Margaret Beattie’s family in New York. The deeds reveal the family interest in the timber industry, such as a 1834 deed for the cutting of pine by James Beattie on the land of John Nelson of Lyman, N. H., or again in 1845 on the land of James Liddle of Ryegate. Later deeds include land bought and sold by Thomas and David Beattie of Maidstone.

A. Associated Legal Documents (1817-1867)

This sub-series contains documents of a legal nature associated with the Beattie family’s activities in land and timber. The first is a legal action taken against James and his partner Stephen Holman for harvesting timber on land belonging to John and Robert Hunter. Other documents include the payment by James Beattie of a debt owed by a Peter Gilchrist of Ryegate, Vermont, and a letter from William to his attorney, Alex

Harvey, for the aforementioned sale of land to his father. Also present is a complaint against a John Woods for \$1,000 owed to James Beattie (a March 20th, 1841 deed for Wood's land as a lien on this debt is included in series I). The sub-series ends with an agreement by David and Thomas Beattie to deliver lumber to Lynch Parker of Portland, Maine.

II. William Beattie Letters (1828-1837)

This series primarily contains correspondence to and from William Beattie from his arrival in the southern United States in 1829 to his death in 1837. Through these letters a picture emerges of William's activities in the south, namely his involvement with the emigration of the Creek Indians during that period. In a letter dated 1830, William indicated that he had settled among the Creek Indians on the Chattahoochee River, which lies on the border between Alabama and Georgia. He later informed his family that he had a job emigrating Indians. The letters addressed to him by friends and family range from Fort Mitchell, Alabama, to New Orleans, to Little Rock and Fort Smith, Arkansas Territory, locations which correspond to one of the principle routes used for emigrating the Creeks from 1832-1838. Letters sent to him from the north reveal a wide range of sentiments concerning this subject, running from sympathy to hatred for the Indians. William's perspective of the situation emerges as one wherein he sees endless profits to be made and the south as a land of vast opportunity.

A prominent theme of the correspondence is how the opportunities of the south beckoned to Vermonters. William desired that his family relocate to the south, and letters to him from a friend named McNab, a resident of Ryegate, are consumed with plans for his own move to Alabama. However, hand in hand with this enthusiasm is a Yankee's suspicion of such distant lands. Especially prominent in letters from Jane Beattie and McNab are their criticisms of Vermont and eagerness to move south, tempered by concerns about slavery, disease, or hostile natives. For 19th century Vermonters, the deep south was in many respects still a little known frontier, with all its incumbent opportunities and dangers.

In letters that were found in the summer of 2009 that had not been processed, William's motivation for moving South is documented. Some newly added papers relate to William's purchase of goods in New York, evidently where he was going to go into the dry goods business, in 1829. In a letter he wrote in 1830 he says; "You will see that I have been burnt out, and have lost all with the exception of a small part insured.... and think that I can do better by going to the South ... I have about made up my mind to go to Alabama and try for a fortune among the natives ..."

Also in letters added in the summer of 2009 are documents related to William's ownership of at least one slave and involvement with others. On July 21, 1832, William writes to his father and tells him that his life is threatened and that he has made out a will. He tells his father "I have one negro man that I wish you never to part with." He attaches a copy of the will to the letter. The first thing he mentions in his will is in it he writes, "one negro man named Sam about forty years of age" which he gives to his father. He underscores this point later in the short will by reiterating, "My negro man Sam to be sent

or taken to my father's residence in Vermont." It is an interesting transfer on William's part because in a letter from William's sister, talking about their father and the possibility that he might move to Alabama, she says that her father wants to be sure he can hire farm labor "for he says it is a settled point with him that he will keep no slaves." Folder 3 contains other correspondence in which the recovery of stolen slaves is mentioned.

A. Associated Legal Documents (1832-1838)

This sub-series contains documents of a legal nature associated with William Beattie's activities between 1830 and 1837. They include two articles of agreement dated 1832 for a partnership between William, the states of Alabama and Georgia, and several other individuals. The purpose of this partnership was the purchase and sale of Indian property. Also included are two declarations dated 1833 by the Chiefs and Headmen of the Creek Nation. They are in William's handwriting and were presumably copied by or dictated to him. The first is from Creek Indians living in the Province of Texas, advising their oppressed brethren in Alabama to join them. The second is by Alabama Creeks, criticizing both their exploitation by the whites and their government allotted lands in Arkansas. Instead, the Creek's intention was to relocate to Texas, to which end they appointed William Beattie to assist them. Among other things, this interesting sub-series also contains a government receipt for the "removal and subsistence of Indians" and a list dated 1835 of property stolen or destroyed by the Creeks in 1789. A map was added to this collection in the summer of 2009 that shows the extensive lands in Alabama that William was dealing with.

III. James Sr./Jr./David Beattie Letters (1838-1841)

This series contains correspondence from William's father James, and his two brothers James and David, from 1838 to 1841. It begins with a letter dated March 29, 1838, from the postmaster of Fort Gibson, Arkansas (the predominant terminus point of the Indian removals) to James Beattie, informing him that William had died either on December 31, 1837, or January 1, 1838, at the mouth of the Arkansas River. He was accompanying a band of emigrating Indians.

Several months later James Sr. and Jr. arrived in Alabama to secure William's estate, and their letters to the family in Ryegate are focused on their efforts to reach an agreement with the Alabama Emigrating Company. A letter dated January 7, 1839 is from James to his wife, written from Washington DC, as he returned home with nearly \$20,000. Another letter dated October 13, 1839, marks the arrival of David Beattie to Columbus, Georgia. He and his brother James spent the next two years there and their correspondence relates their efforts to secure and sell William's real estate holdings.

A new folder, folder 6A, was added to the collection in the summer of 2009 to contain additional papers relating to the settlement of William's estate.

IV. Family Letters/Business Receipts (1844-1884)

This series contains some miscellaneous correspondence and business receipts between 1844 and 1884, focusing on family matters and business in Ryegate and Maidstone, as well as some letters from the Gillespie family of New York to the Beatties,

such as a letter dated September 1, 1944, from Mr. Gillespie accompanying several Bibles he sent to Vermont. There are two letters from Margaret Beattie to her daughter Hannah discussing family matters, and the final letter of the collection, dated May 3, 1861, is from A. Gillespie of New York to her sister Margaret James Beattie, noting the outbreak of the Civil War. Also included in the series are several business receipts signed by Thomas Beattie, whose 1880 letterhead declares him a “manufacturer and dealer in every variety of lumber.”

Inventory

I. Vermont Land Deeds (1814-1855)

MSA 158: 1 Deeds, February 1814 - April 1855

A. Associated Legal Documents (1817-1867)

2 Legal Documents, May 1814 - February 1867

II. William Beattie Letters (1828-1837)

3 Letters, May 1828 - August 1833

4 _____, July 1834 - September 1837

A. Associated Legal Documents (1832-1838)

5 Legal Documents, February 1832 - July 1838

III. James Sr./Jr./David Beattie Letters (1838-1841)

6 Letters, March 1838 - April 1841

6A William's estate matters

IV. Family Letters/Business Receipts (1846-1884)

7 Letters, April 1844 - May 1961; receipts, February 1848 - November 1884

Brett Whalen
Summer 1996
revised summer 2009