Guide to the William McKendree Gwin Papers, 1833-1897

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Note
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Collection number: BANC MSS C-B 378

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Collection Summary
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Abstract: Mainly correspondence relating to political affairs in Mississippi, California and Mexico, to property in Panama for the Isthmus Pacific Railway, and to Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian claims. Includes letters from Jefferson Davis, 1875.

Languages Represented: English

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Gwin Papers, 1833-1897

William McKendree Gwin, born October 9, 1805, in Tennessee, first studied law, then medicine. He practiced medicine in Clinton, Mississippi until President Jackson appointed him U.S. Marshal for the district of Mississippi in 1833. Elected to Congress in 1840 as a Democrat, he declined renomination, and was appointed under James K. Polk, to superintend the building of a new custom house at New Orleans. In 1849, he left for California. Here he took an active part in forming the state government and was elected to a convention held in Monterey in September 1849 to frame the state constitution. Elected U.S. Senator in 1850 and re-elected in 1856, he served until March 3, 1861. As senator he became a member of the finance committee and chairman on the committee of naval affairs, secured the establishment of a mint in California, a survey of the Pacific Coast and the construction of the Mare Island Navy Yard, and carried a bill through the Senate providing for steamers between San Francisco, China and Japan. He was arrested by order of General Sumner at the beginning of the Civil War on suspicion of disloyalty and was imprisoned at Fort Lafayette from November 18 until December 2, 1861. In 1863 he went to Paris, where he met Napoléon III and interested the Emperor in a scheme to colonize Sonora with Southerners. He drew up plans for the project which were approved by Napoléon and submitted to Maximilian. Gwin followed Maximilian to Mexico in 1864, bearing a letter from Napoléon to General Bazaine requesting his full cooperation. Gwin met with no success, however, and returned to France in 1865 to see Napoléon who sent him back to Mexico with re-iterated orders for Bazaine to assist Gwin. As he again failed to receive cooperation, he abandoned the plan. Upon reentering the United States, he was arrested and held prisoner in Fort Jackson for eight months. He remained active in politics, and in 1876 campaigned for Samuel Jones Tilden. He married twice. His first wife, Caroline Sampson, died before 1834. His second wife was Mary Bell. There were two children by the first marriage and four by the second. Gwin died in New York on September 3, 1885.

The material has been arranged chronologically in each of its three parts. Part I in Box I consists of original manuscripts: Correspondence to Gwin, drafts of letters and proposals written by Gwin and business contracts regarding the Isthmus Pacific Railway. Included are letters from: Andrew Jackson who counseled Gwin in his early political career; James Buchanan, concerning the adverse effect on California of a proposed Nicaragua treaty; John Charles Frémont, about the title to Mariposa Mines; Jefferson Davis, concerning the use of "Hirsch Model" ships in the shallow waters at the mouth of the Mississippi, the possibility of transporting grain economically from California to Europe by correlating services of railroads and ships, and the Southern Pacific Railroad; John Francis Hamtramck Claiborne, about his proposed History of Mississippi and his autobiography, pointing up Gwin's role in politics. An incomplete draft in Gwin's handwriting requests California's admission to statehood. Letters from Gwin to Napoléon III and drafts of various proposals for the colonizing of Sonora reveal his plans and hopes for the area, and the obstacles that finally caused him to withdraw completely. Letters from Collis P. Huntington, William Sharon, E. H. Carmick, Sylvanus C. Boynton, William Clark Pomeroy, Wilkinson Call, A. H. Garland, Smith M. Weed, F. De Soto Money, R. T. Colburn, and Joseph Richardson all deal with Gwin's project of founding the Isthmus Pacific Railway in the Panama.

Part II in Box II contains negative photostats of most of the items in Part I.

Part III consists of negative photostats of original documents from various sources: the Department of Interior Archives, Pasadena Public Library, the Library of Congress (Corwin Papers, Claiborne Papers, Polk Papers), the Pennsylvania Historical Society (Buchanan Papers), the Archives of the Foreign Office at Moscow, Vienna National Archives, the New York Public Library (Tilden Papers), the State Department Archives, the Treasury Department Archives, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Permission must be obtained from the New York Public Library, the Pennsylvania Historical Society, or the Pasadena Public Library to publish or to reproduce in any way material photocopied from their holdings. Sources of all the photostats in this section are noted on the individual folders. Miss MacPherson, in her dissertation, William McKendree Gwin, Expansionist, lists the material she obtained from each repository.

In this section are to be found many letters from Gwin. The thirty-eight letters to John Francis Hamtramck Claiborne reveal the state of economics and politics in Mississippi as well as various business arrangements and partnerships with Claiborne, and follow Gwin's political career in Congress. Two letters from Claiborne to Gwin request Gwin's payment of a longstanding debt. Letters to James Knox Polk discuss tariff bills, the upcoming national convention with Calhoun and Van Buren. Letters
to Walker and McClintock Young deal with materials for the construction of the Customs House at New Orleans. A letter to Lewis Cass stresses the profit to California of Pacific Region trade with Siberia. Baron Stoeckl makes a detailed report of these negotiations in his letter to Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Gorchakov. There are also letters to James Buchanan and Samuel Jones Tilden. Letters involving John Hamtramck Claiborne, Thomas Hartley Crawford, P. Clayton, Pitman Colbert, R. G. Cortin, Orlando Brown, Thomas Ewing, John Canfield Spencer, Reverdy Johnson, D. C. Soddard and Gwin concern Gwin's claims for payment for services rendered as Marshal in the Chotaw and Chickasaw Indian claims settlements.

Since the material in each section is arranged chronologically, an alphabetical list of contents for Part I and III is appended.

Bancroft, George, (1800-1891)
  To Sylvester Mowry (copy) (1830-1871) ca. 1860
Bassano, Napoléon Joseph Hugues Maret, Duc de, (1803-1898)
  To Mary (Bell) Gwin Feb. 29, 1866
Bayard, William
  To Gwin Aug. 15, 1850
Boynton, Sylvanus C.
  Proposed memorandum of agreement with Collis P. Huntington. 1864
  Copy of agreement with Gwin and Sharon re Panama projects. Feb. 4, 1884
  Agreement with wife to share with Gwin property on Isthmus of Panama, translated
  into Spanish and certified in Washington. Mar. 5, 1884
  To Gwin June 24, 1884
  Aug. 28, 1885
  To Gwin (son), written and signed by W. H. Ritter and Andrew Wesley Kent
  (photocopy only) Apr. 10, 1895
Buchanan, James, (1791-1868)
  To Gwin Feb. 18, 1849
  May 15, 22, Dec. 26, 1850
  Mar. 30, 1853
Call, Wilkinson, (1844-1910)
  To Evan J. Coleman (copy) (photocopy only) Sept. 30, 1885
  To Gwin (son) and Evan J. Coleman (son-in-law) (photocopy only) Sept. 15, 1885
  To William Collins Whitney (copy) Aug. 14, 1885
Carmick, E. H.
  To Gwin Nov. 9 (incomplete), 17, 26, Dec. 7, 19, 1883
  Apr. 21, Dec. 2, 4 (2 letters), 6, 9, 1884
  Jan. 6, Feb. 11, 16, Mar. 11, 27, 30, Apr. 4, 6, 1885
Claiborne, John Francis Hamtramck, (1809-1884)
  To Gwin Sept. 14, 1878
  Mar. 4, 1879
Colburn, R. T.
  To Gwin Feb. 18, 28, Mar. 1, 1884
Davis, Jefferson, (1808-1889)
  To Gwin Nov. 27, Dec. 6, 1875
Everett, Edward, (1794-1865)
  To Gwin Mar. 7, 1854
Farragut, David Glasgow, (1801-1870)
  To Gwin Jan. 20, Aug. 8, 1857?
Field, Stephen Johnson, (1816-1899)
  To Gwin May 17, 1884
Fillmore, Millard, (1800-1874)
  To Gwin Dec. 21, 24, 1850
Frémont, John Charles, (1813-1890
To Gwin May 8, ca. 1850
Oct. 20, 1852

Garland, Augustus Hill, (1832-1899)
To Wilkinson Call (copy) Aug. 12, 1885

Gwin, William McKendree, (1805-1885)
To Chester Alan Arthur (draft) 1884
To Thomas Hart Benton (draft) Dec. 1853?
To William Eaton Chandler (draft) 188?
To Mr. & Mrs. Gwin (parents) (photocopy only) Oct. 10, 1833
To Carrie Gwin (photocopy only) June 30, 1885
To William M. Gwin (son) (photocopies only) July 6, 1884
Mar. 21, July 7, 1885
To James Buchanan Jan. 31, 1859
To A. A. Kincannon Feb. 17, 1847
To Gregory Yale Mar. 19, 1860
To ? July 24, 1850
To E. Curtis July 13, 1851
To ? Oct. 26, 1853
To J. W. Maudeville Mar. 18, 1857
To ? Apr. 13, 1844
Incomplete draft of memorial from the Senators and representatives elect from California requesting admittance of California as a state 1850?
Incomplete draft of proposed agreement concerning the construction of a railroad across the Isthmus of Panama 188?
Estimated cost of the Isthmus Pacific Railway, with a copy with some changes in figures in S. C. Boynton's handwriting 1884?
To Board of directors of the Isthmus Pacific Railway Co. (photocopy only) July 30, 1884
To Charles Jean Tristan Montholon, Marquis de Montholon (incomplete draft) Oct. 15, 1865
To Napoléon III (drafts) Jan. 5, Sept. 12 or 21, 1864
July 3, 1865
Rules and regulations for carrying into effect the treaty between France and Mexico (3 drafts) 1864?
Éclaircissement sur le projet de colonisation des états de Sonora et de Chihuahua (French translation of plan for colonizing Sonora) Mar. 1864
Memorandum on the colonization of Sonora [prepared for Napoléon] Mar. 1864?
Memorandum on the colonization of Sonora [prepared for Napoléon] (draft of a French translation) Mar. 1865?

Gwin, William McKendree, Estate of
Contract with Sylvanus C. Boynton (photocopy only) May 29, 1886

Hamblen, Samuel
To Dr. W. M. Gwin at Fort Jackson near New Orleans 1865-1866, typescript extract from Hamblen's autobiography ca. 18?

Haviland, John Von Sontag?
Metrical description of a fancy ball given in Washington 19th Apr. 1858, dedicated to Mrs. Senator Gwin (printed book) 1858

Huntington, Collis Porter, 1821-1900
To Gwin Nov. 30, 1883

Jackson, Andrew, 1767-1845
Friend (printed newspaper extra) 1835
To Gwin July 3, 1834 (photocopy only)
Dec. 25, 1840
Jan. 27, May 17, June 15, 1841
Jan. 16, 1843
May 9, 1845

Keasbey, A. Q.
To Gwin Nov. 22, 1884
May 7, 1885
Loysel, C.
   Military Passport for Gwin Jan. 18, 1865
MacGinnis and Blackwell
   To Gwin (son) (photocopy only) Mar. 17, 1897
Mann, Ambrose Dudley, 1801-1889
   To Gwin Aug. 29, 1876
Money, Hernando de Soto, 1839-1912
   To Gwin Apr. 17, 1885
Morny, Charles Auguste Louis Joseph, Duc de, 1811-1865
   To Gwin Mar. 6, 1865
Napoléon III, 1808-1873
   To Gwin Mar. 10, 1866
Paris. Corps Municipal
   Invitation for the Gwin family to the Fête de la Ville June 1867
Pomeroy, Samuel Clarke, 1816-1891
   To Gwin Aug. 24, 1884
   Sept. 1, 1885
Prentice, George Denison, 1802-1870
   To Mary (Bell) Gwin Apr. 2, 1866
Richardson, Joseph
   To E. H. Carmick Feb. 20, 1884
   To Samuel Clarke Pomeroy Oct. 28, 1884
Ringgold, Cadwoleoer(?), 1802-1867
   To Gwin May 26, 1853
Rucks & Yerger, firm
   To F. S. Hunt Jan. 14, 1843
Sharon, William, 1821-1885
   To Chester Alan Arthur (copy) ca. 1884
   To Gwin Jan. 18, 1884
Slidell, John, 1793-1871
   To Gwin Apr. 22, 1850
Tyler, John, 1793-1862
   To Gwin Dec. 12, 1850
Tyler, John A.
   To Gwin Mar. 18, 1853
U.S. Treasury Dept.
   To Gwin. Signed by James Guthrie. From the T. W. Norris Collection Oct. 3, 1854
Vera Cruz (District) Mexico. Prefectura Politica
   Passport for Gwin from Vera Cruz to Mexico City June 28, 1864
Walker, Robert John, 1801-1869
   To Gwin Feb. 20, 1849
Webster, Daniel, 1782-1852
   To Gwin Dec. 31, 1850
   Jan. 31, 1851
Weed, Smith M.
   To Gwin July 6, 1885
Wise, Henry Alexander, 1806-1876
   To Gwin Dec. 25, 1850
   Galley proof of biographical sketch of Gwin published in: Alonzo Phelps: Contemporary Biography of California's Representative Men... ca. 1880

Claiborne, John Francis Hamtramck, 1809-1884
   To Thomas Hartley Crawford, 1786-1863 Aug. 25, Nov. 5, 1843
   To Ralph Graves Aug. 25, 1843
To Gwin Mar. 10, 15, 1845
To James Madison Porter, 1793-1862 Nov. 5, 1843
Clayton, P.
   To Orlando Brown, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Mar. 30, 1850
Colbert, Pitman
   To Orlando Brown Mar. 27 (2 letters)
   Mar. 30, 1850
Corwin, R. G.
   To Orlando Brown Jan. 24, 1850
Crawford, Thomas Hartley, 1786-1863
   To Gwin Jan. 11, 1843
   Memorandum to John Canfield Spencer, 1788-1885 Jan. 21, 1843
Davis, Jefferson et al
   To John Buchanan Floyd, 1807-1863 Dec. 16, 1851
Eugénie, Empress Consort of Napoléon III, 1826-1920
   To Charlotte, Empress Consort of Maximilian (excerpts), 1840-1927 Sept. 28, 1865
Ewing, Thomas, 1789-1871
   To Orlando Brown Mar. 8, June 26, 1850
Gwin, William McKendree, 1805-1885
   Bill to U.S. for mileage allowance June 1847
   To James Buchanan Jan. 8, 26, 1848
   Dec. 29, 1850
   Mar. 27, May 2, Dec. 22, 1853
   July 23, 1854
   Dec. 5, 1856
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   To Lewis Cass June 4, 1858
   To John Francis Hamtramck Claiborne June 3, 11, Sept. 25 (2 letters), 28, Oct. 9 (2 letters), 14, Nov. 5, 26, 1839
   Jan. 22, Feb. 1, 8, June 11, Aug. 13, Nov. 7, 25, 1840
   Jan. 10, May 8, Aug. 8, 24, 31, Sept. 8, Oct. 5, Nov. 8, 1841
   Mar. 10, 19, July, Dec. 19, 1842
   Jan. 3, 18, 23, Feb. 19, Apr. 11, May 13, June 4, 10, 22, 28, 1843
   1844?
   Articles of copartnership entered into by J. F. H. Claiborne, John D. Freeman and Gwin Oct. 14, 1839
   Promissory note Oct. 14, 1839
   Legal paper delegating power of attorney to Claiborne for firm of Halsey & Gwin Oct. 15, 1839
   Legal transaction for firm of Gwin and Freeman Oct. 24, 1839
   Marshal's report Feb. 20, 1840
   Appointing Claiborne as deputy marshal Apr. 3, 1840
   Instructions for Col. Claiborne Aug. 57, 1842
   Memorandum of agreement signed by Gwin, Claiborne & Halsey May 28, 1844
   To Crawford, Thomas Hartley Aug. 19, 1842
   Jan. 3, July 4, Dec. 31, 1843
   To Corwin, Thomas Jan. 13, Mar., Apr., June 14, 1851
   To John D. Freeman Jan. 9, 1844
   To Halleck, Peachy & Van Winkle firm Nov. 29, 1855
   To Abram Stevens Hewitt Hodge Oct. 3, 1876
   Feb. 18, 1858
   To A. A. Kincannon Jan. 28, 1843
   May 1, 1844
   To Daniel Lowe Aug. 29, 1842
   To William Learned Marcy Sept. 12, 1853
   To H. Northrop Feb. 5, 1842
To James Knox Polk Aug. 27, Nov. 5, 1842
July 11, 30, 1844
To John Cook Rives May 22, 1854
Feb. 16, 1860
To J. S. Skinner Nov. 16, 1841
To R. Smith Sept. 19, 1847
To Jesse Speight Apr. 20, 1845
To John Canfield Spencer Jan. 13, 1843
To Samuel Jones Tilden Nov. 21, 1875
July 26, Aug. 7, 8, Nov. 22, 1876
To U.S. Treasury Dept. Dec. 6, 1848
To Robert John Walker Aug. 28, 1847 (2 letters)
To Daniel Webster Dec. 23, 1841
Jan. 3, 1842
Dec. 12, 1851
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Johnson, Reverdy, 1796-1876
To Thomas Ewing Jan. 3, 1850
McCulloh, James William
To Gwin June 24, 1848
Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico, 1832-67
To Napoléon (excerpts) Dec. 27, 1864
Murray, James
To Gwin July 15, 1842
Soddard, D. C.
To Orlando Brown Jan. 12, 1850
Stoeckl, Eduard de, Baron
To Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Gorchakov Jan. 4, 1860
Tilden, Samuel Jones, 1814-1886
To Gwin Aug. 12, 1876
U.S. Treasury Dept.
Report to Thomas Ewing Jan. 1, 1850
Walker, Robert John, 1801-1869
To Denis Prieur & Alcée La Branche May 7, 1847
Wayne, Anthony, 1745-1796
Certificate commending Lt. Col. Louis de Fleury (copy) July 25, 1779