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### RAPIER Family

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RAPIER FAMILY PAPERS  
Collection 84-1 to 84-5

Prepared & Revised by:  
Wilda D. Logan  
June 1980

## Scope Note

The Rapier family papers, a gift from Dr. & Mrs. James R. White, span two linear feet. The majority of the collection is correspondence between James Thomas Rapier, (1837-1883), (U.S. Representative from Alabama), John H. Rapier, Sr., John H. Rapier, Jr., (journalist, surgeon, and world traveler), Henry K. Thomas; James P. Thomas; Sarah Thomas. The correspondence dates from 1836 to 1883 and reflects the activities and travels of this family from Florence, Alabama to Western Canada, Jamaica British West Indies, and many cities in the United States during this period.

James T. Rapier was born of free black parents. The union between John H. Rapier, Sr., [James' father] and Sally, (James mother) produced four children, Richard, John Jr., Henry and James. However, John H. Rapier, Sr., and a slave woman named Lucretia produce five children, born slaves because of their mother's status. The second set of children named Rebecca, Joseph, Thomas, Charles and Susan were James T. Rapier's step-sisters and brothers. A family tree has been included to aid in research on this family.

The history of this free black family in Alabama is quite interesting. The correspondence details the activities, the business investments and tidbits of the times and travels of various family members.

As a Congressman, James Rapier fought for the rights of whites and Blacks against big landlords of the Black Belt. He also helped write the Alabama State constitution of 1867 that gave white and Black workers the right to vote.

## Scope Note

Also included in this collection are manuscripts of articles written by John H. Rapier, Jr., and his diary covering the period 1857 to 1859. Included in the diary is an index showing letters written and received, cash accounts, compositions, principal events of the days and clipping of his published articles.

The diary of James P. Thomas, (1827-1913) who was James T. Rapier's step-uncle is included in this collection. The autobiographical recollection of James P. Thomas covers the late 1800's and contains historical tidbits based on his travels and business activities.

NOTE: The published version of James P. Thomas's diary can be found in Moorland-Spingarn's Library Division. The complete citation is:

*From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur: The Auto-biography of James Thomas.* Edited by Loren Schweningen. Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1984. [call number MB9 T364a3]

## Biographical Sketch

James Thomas Rapier

- 1837 Born in Florence, Alabama, the son of John H. Rapier, Sr., a free Negro barber, and Susan Rapier, also a free Negro.
- 1844-1850 Lived with his slave grandmother, Sally, and slave uncle, James P. Thomas, while attending school in Nashville, Tennessee.
- 1854-1856 Went on the river gambling.
- 1856-1864 Attended school in Buxton, Canada West, and Toronto, living with his fugitive slave uncle, Henry K. Thomas.
- 1864 Received a teaching certificate and taught School at Buxton.
- 1864-1865 Returned to the South, worked for a time as a correspondent for a northern newspaper, and later, delivering a keynote address at the Tennessee Negro Suffrage Convention in Nashville.
- 1866 Returned to Florence, Alabama, rented several hundred acres of land, and became a successful cotton planter.
- 1867 Organized Negroes in northwest Alabama under the congressional reconstruction acts, attended the first state Republican convention, and won a seat at the Alabama constitutional convention.
- 1868 Campaigned in behalf of Ulysses Grant, but was driven from Lauderdale County by the Ku Klux Klan.
- 1869 Attended the first National Negro Labor Convention in Washington, D.C.
- 1870 Became the first Negro in Alabama history to run for state office (secretary of state), but was defeated.
- 1871 Received an appointment as Assessor of Internal Revenue and organized the Alabama Negro Labor Union.
- 1872-1873 Presided over the first meeting of the Alabama Negro Labor Union, defeated William C. Oates for a seat in the Forty-third Congress, and accepted an appointment as state commissioner to the Fifth World Exposition in Vienna, Austria, visiting Europe for five months.

## Biographical Sketch

1874-1876 Spoke in favor of the national civil rights bill in Congress, introduced legislation to improve America's commercial water lanes, and voted to regulate railroad rates, but was defeated in both of his bids for reelection in 1874 and 1876.

1878-1883 Appointed Collector of Internal Revenue for the Second District of Alabama, and became an active emigrationist.

1883 May 31 Died at the age of forty-five, buried in St. Louis.

John H. Rapier, Jr. (1835-1865?)

John H. Rapier, Jr. was the brother of James T. Rapier. John was educated in Ohio and Michigan and he traveled extensively in this country and the Caribbean. He re-entered medical service to the U.S. Government during the Civil War and was stationed at Freedman's Hospital in 1864 as acting assistant surgeon with the rank of 1st Lieutenant. Diversity, of interest led John to write articles on cotton planting for the press while in Jamaica and to the study of tooth manipulation under Dr. Beckett from Canada. He made a campaign with General Williams Walker's army (The Nicaraguan Rangers) from Nicaragua. John Rapier reported the events of the day in a series of eight articles he wrote entitled "Reminiscences of a filibuster" which were published in The Pioneer and Democrat, St. Paul, Michigan in 1859. John H. Rapier, Jr. was granted his M.D. degree in June 1864 from Iowa State University.

## Series Description

### **Series A**

Box 84-1  
to Box 84-2

#### **Correspondence**

The majority of this collection is correspondence dating from -1830s to 1870s, between members of the Rapier family. The letters are arranged in sub series by person. All letters to that particular person are then arranged in alphabetical and then chronological order.

The first sub-series is correspondence belonging to Congressman James T. Rapier. Most of these letters are between James T. Rapier and his brother John H. Rapier, Jr. The largest sub-series belongs to John H. Rapier, Jr. Correspondents in this group include John H. Rapier, Sr. (John Jr. and James T. Rapier's father); and Henry K. Thomas and James P. Thomas (whom John Jr. addressed as uncle). Smaller sub-series by name and incomplete signatures are also included. Subject scope of the majority of the letters include detail insight on family and individual interests in various business ventures such as cotton, gold, farming, hotel and land speculation. However, the bulk of the letters are from John Jr. revealing tidbits of history from his extensive travels in this country and the Caribbean. For example see folder #61 for a 20 plus page letter on life in Haiti in 1861; see #50 on reaction to rumor of a slave revolt in Illinois; see #56 on gold speculation; see #76 on John Jr's work at Freedman Hospital in Washington, D.C. and his reaction in meeting Frederick Douglass. The above examples are a few representative samples in topics found in the correspondence. Please see the xerox copy of John's diary in the section entitled, "Letters Written," and "Letters Received," for the years 1857 to 1859 to see supplementary notes and synopsis of his correspondence.

### **Series B**

Box 84-2

#### **Manuscripts**

Most of the manuscripts are by John H. Rapier, Jr. The manuscripts are holographic and arranged in alphabetical order by title. The "Mulattoes in Haiti," manuscript is quite interesting and incorporates historical tidbits and statistics on mulattoes in Haiti. The manuscript by Feldman on James T. Rapier gives an excellent insight into James T. Rapier's political philosophy and activities. An excellent bibliography, especially on primary resources, on James T. Rapier is located at the end of this manuscript. Manuscript notes are on slavery, politics and the military. Several unidentified manuscripts are also included. See Rapier's diary for more holographic and published manuscripts.

### **Series C**

Box 84-2

#### **Document**

A portion of a notarized certificate signed by James Stryker in 1836.

## Series Description

### **Series D      Cards**

Box 84-2      Several cards from various places of business in St. Louis, Mo.

### **Series E      Biographical Material**

Box 84-3      This series includes 3 manuscripts. One manuscript consist of notes by an  
to Box 84-5      unidentified author on values, mores, and customs of the times and the quirks of  
social standards in the antebellum South. There is also a diary dated 1857 to1859  
by John H. Rapier, Jr. The first pages of the diary describe the types of materials  
located in the diary plus an index. Topics cover business ventures, weather  
conditions, travel, and purchases and financial transactions. Items of interest  
are published newspaper clippings of published articles written by John H.  
Rapier, Jr. Poems, and lists of correspondents and their place of residence for  
1857 to 1859 is indicated. In a section called "Letters Written", and "Letters  
Received", there are more notes and comments on his correspondence.  
And there are some autobiographical notes of James P. Thomas. James P. Thomas  
traveled extensively over the U.S. and Central America. His autobiographical  
recollections cover the spectrum of political, economic, social and military history  
of the U.S., and historical tidbits from his travels to Central America. For example,  
from page 133 to 138, James discussed the South from 1850 to 1860. Topics  
highlight the Dred Scott case and individuals like John Brown and Jefferson Davis.  
Starting on page 144 to 158, James details the political and military struggle in  
Nicaragua. Pages 208 and following, reveal James personal impression of the  
Freedman's Banking system. A description of his wedding is quite interesting on  
pages 159-160 and 285-286. The above are a few representative samples of topics  
discussed in his text.

(ORIGINAL ITEMS FRAGILE PLEASE USE XEROX COPY)



Container List

**Series A**  
**Box**  
84-1

**Correspondence**  
**Folder**

- 1 James T. Rapier (mostly correspondence between James and his brother, John, Jr. Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, Jan.27 Buxton, Canada West
- 2 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, March 5, Buxton, Canada West
- 3 Rapier, James T. to John Rapier, Jr. 1857 March 6, Buxton, Canada West
- 4 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, March 9 Buxton, Canada West
- 5 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. (1857), April 21, Buxton, Canada West
- 6 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, June 26, Buxton, Canada West
- 7 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, July 29, Buxton, Canada West
- 8 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, Aug. 29 Buxton, Canada West
- 9 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James T. Rapier, 1857, Sept. 18 St. Paul, Minn.
- 10 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1858, Feb. 28, Florence, Ala.
- 11 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr., July 16, Buxton, Canada West
- 12 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr., 1858, Sept. 27, Florence, Ala.
- 13 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1859, Jan. 29, Buxton, Canada West  
James T. Rapier (mostly correspondence between James and his brother, John, Jr.)
- 14 Rapier, James T. to John H. Rapier, Jr., 1862, March 17, Chatham, Canada West
- 15 Rapier, James T. to Henry K. Thomas, 1869, Sept. 8, Florence, Ala.
- 16 Rapier, James T. to Sarah (de S.) Thomas 1872, Jan. 10. Montgomery, Ala.

John H. Rapier, Jr.

- 17 Armistead, Marlo C. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, June 25, Cedar Grove, Ala.
- 18 Bowdicke, R. C. to John, 1857, April 2, Watab, Minn. Terr.
- 19 Bowdicke, R. C. to John, 1857, April, Watab, Minn. Terr.
- 20 Campbell, H. to John H. Rapier 1858, July 24, Chicago, Ill.
- 21 Church, E. C. to John Rapier no year, March 6, Little Falls
- 22 Curtis, Orris to John H. Rapier, 1857, March 15, St. Paul, Minn. Terr.
- 23 Dickson, Moses to Rapier, 1849, Nov. 20, St. Paul, Minn. Terr.
- 24 Dickson, Moses to Rapier 1856, Nov. 9. St. Paul, Minn. Terr.
- 25 Dickson, Moses to Rapier, 1857, Feb. 10, St. Paul, Minn. Terr.
- 26 Rankin, John M. to John H. Rapier, Jr., 1858, April 2, Nashville, Tenn.

Container List

**Series A**

**Correspondence**

Correspondence between John, Jr. & John Sr.,(son father)

**Box**

**Folder**

84-1

- 27 Rapier, John H. Sr., to John H. Rapier, Jr 1856 May 13, Florence, Ala.
- 28 Rapier, John H. Sr., to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1856, Sept. 15, Florence, Ala.
- 29 Rapier, John H. Sr., to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1856, Oct. 27, Florence, Ala.
- 30 Rapier, John H., Sr. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1856, Dec. 13, Florence, Ala.
- 31 Rapier, John H., Sr. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, March 17, Florence, Ala.
- 32 Rapier, John H., Sr. to John H. Rapier, Jr., 1857, June 21, Florence, Ala.
- 33 Rapier, John H., Sr. to John H. Rapier, Jr., 1857, Aug. 6., Florence, Ala.
- 34 Rapier, John H., Sr. to John H. Rapier, Jr., 1857, Sept. 16, Florence, Ala.
- 35 Rapier, John H., Sr. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, June 18, Florence, Ala.
- 36 Rapier, John H., Sr. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.), 1858, Nov. 29, Florence, Ala.
- 37 Rapier, John H., Sr. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, Dec. 28, Florence, Ala.
- 38 Rapier, John H., Sr. to (John R. Rapier, Jr.) 1859, Feb.14, Florence, Ala.
- 39 Rapier, John H., Jr. to John H. Rapier, Sr. 1860, Dec. 31, St. Marc, Haiti
- 40 Shelton, Frances to John (H. Rapier) 18--, Sept. 15, Nashville, Tenn.

Correspondence between John, Jr. & Henry K. Thomas

- 41 Rapier, John H., Jr. to (Henry K. Thomas), 1855, June 14, Florence, Ala.
- 42 Thomas, Henry K. to John H. Rapier, Jr., 1856, Sept. 14, St. Paul, Minn. Terr.
- 43 Thomas, Henry K. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1856, Oct. 29, Buxton, Canada
- 44 Thomas, Henry K. to John H. Rapier, Jr. 1857, March 13, Buxton, (Canada West)
- 45 Thomas, Henry to (John R. Rapier, Jr.) 1857, Sept. Buxton, Canada West
- 46 Thomas, Henry K. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1859, Jan. 16, Buxton, (Canada West)
- 47 Thomas, Henry K. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) no year. Oct. 27, Buxton, Canada West

John Rapier Jr. (mostly correspondence between John Jr and James Pi Thomas

- 48 Thomas, James P. to John H. Rapier, 1856, Oct. 3, Nashville, Tenn.
- 49 Thomas, James P. to John H. Rapier, 1856, Nov. 23. Chicago, Ill.
- 50 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1856, Dec. 23 Emporium City Hall
- 51 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1857, Jan. 31, Carro, Ill
- 52 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1857, July 27, St. Louis, Mo.
- 53 Thomas, James P. to John H. Rapier, 1857, Oct. 7, St. Louis, Mo.

Container List

**Series A**

**Correspondence**

Correspondence between John, Jr. & John Sr.,(son father)

**Box**

**Folder**

84-1

John H. Rapier, Jr. (mostly correspondence between John Jr. and James P. Thomas

- 54 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.), 1858, May 3, St. Louis, Mo.
- 55 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1958, June 14, St. Louis, Mo.
- 56 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, July 17, St. Louis, Mo.
- 57 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, Aug. 14, St. Louis, Mo.
- 58 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, Oct. 20, St. Louis, Mo.
- 59 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, Dec. 18, St. Louis, Mo.
- 60 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1859, Jan. 8, St. Louis, Mo.  
removed from John Rapier scrapbook
- 61 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1861, Jan. 29, Port-au-Prince, Haiti
- 62 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1861, Feb. 25, Port-au-Prince, Haiti
- 63 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1861, April 30, Kingston, Jamaica
- 64 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1861, July 5, Kingston, Jamaica
- 65 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1861, July 28, Kingston, Jamaica
- 66 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, Oct. 17, Mandeville, Jamaica
- 67 Rapier, John H. Jr. to (James P. Thomas), 1861, Nov. 4, Mandeville, Jamaica
- 68 Rapier, John H. Jr. to (James P. Thomas), 1861, Dec. 1, Kingston, Jamaica

John H. Rapier, Jr. (mostly correspondence between John Jr. and James P. Thomas

- 69 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1861, Dec. 27, Kingston, Jamaica
- 70 Rapier, John H. Jr. to (James P. Thomas?) (1861) (Kingston, Jamaica)  
incomplete
- 71 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, (1861) (Port-au-Prince, Haiti?)
- 72 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas Feb. 3, Kingston, Jamaica
- 73 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1862, Feb. 18, Kingston, Jamaica
- 74 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1862, March 6, Kingston, Jamaica
- 75 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P Thomas, 1863, July 8, Fort Wayne, In.
- 76 Rapier, John H. Jr. to James P. Thomas, 1864, Aug. 19, Washington, D.C.
- 77 Rapier, John H. Jr. to (James P. Thomas?) Feb. 28, (Port-au-Prince, Haiti)
- 78 Thomas, James to (John H.- Rapier, Jr.) no year, March 1, Louisville, Ky.
- 79 Thomas, James P. to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) no year, May 11, Kansas
- 80 Thomas, Sarah to John Rapier (year obiterated) March 10, (1857) Buxton,  
Canada West
- 81 Sarah to John H. Rapier, 1858, June 17, St. Paul, Minn. Terr
- 82 Rapier, John H. to Cousin (Sarah Thomas) 1859, May 5, St. Paul, Minn. Terr.

## Container List

### Series A Correspondence

John H. Rapier, Jr. (mostly correspondence between John Jr. and James P. Thomas)

#### Box Folder

- 84-1 83 Rapier, John H. Jr. to Sarah Thomas, 1863, Nov. 12, Ann Arbor, Mi.  
84 Rapier, John H. Jr. to Sarah, Des Thoms, 1864, Feb. 7, Ann Arbor, Mi.  
85 Anonymous to (John H. Rapier, Jr.) 1858, July 1, St. Paul, Minn.  
86 Anonymous to John, n.d. John H. Rapier, Sr.  
87 Rapier, John H. Sr. to Richard Rapier, 1845, April 8, Florence, Ala.  
88 Rapier, John H. Sr. to Henry K. Thomas, 1843, Feb. 28, Florence, Ala.  
Henry K. Thomas
- 84-2 89 Simpson, to Henry K. Thomas 1841, Dec. 15, Mine Point  
90 Sumner, A. M. to Henry K. Thomas, 1836, May 26, Cincinnati, Ohio  
91 Underwood, Jordan to Henry K. Thomas, 1851, July 31, San Francisco, Ca.

James P. Thomas

- 92 Rapier, Richard to (James P. Thomas) 1877, Dec. 14, Auburn  
93 Anonymous to (James P. Thomas) 1857, May 27, Nashville, Tn.

Incomplete Names

- 94 Sallee to Charly, 1863, June 5, Normal  
95 Anonymous to Sarah, 1871, May 14, Detroit, Mi.  
96 Anonymous to (unsigned) 1856, Dec. 21, Nashville Tenn.

### Series B Manuscripts

- 97 Rapier, John H. "Ancient History" - n.d.  
98 Rapier, John Jr. "Bear Hunt in the West" n.d.  
99 Rapier, John H. "Mulattoes in Haiti" - n.d.  
100 Rapier, John H. - "Societe Haitienne", - n.d.  
101 Rapier, John H. - "True Happiness", - n.d.  
102 "Protestation of Faustin "I to Gen(ral) Griffle (?) n.d.  
103 Feldman, Eugene - "James T. Rapier, Negro Congressman from Alabama  
104 Manuscripts Notes  
105 Notes by James P. Thomas  
106 (writer unknown) to (addressee unknown) incomplete manuscript - no year  
April 30, St. Paul, Mn.

Container List

<b>Series C</b>	<b>Document</b>
<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
	107 Certificate - incomplete portion of notarized certificate signed by James Stryker, 1836, March 1, New York
<b>Series D</b>	<b>Cards</b>
	108 Cards
<b>Series E</b>	<b>Biographical Material</b>
	Xerox copies
84-3	109 Autobiographical notes and recollections
	110 John H. Rapier Jr. Diary 1857-1859
	111 John H. Rapier Jr. Diary 1857-1859
	112 James P. Thomas Autobiographical Notes
84-4	Biographical Materials (originals) RESTRICTED
	113 Autobiographical notes and recollections
	114 John H. Rapier Jr. Diary 1857-1859
	115 James P. Thomas Autobiographical Notes
84-5	116 James P. Thomas Autobiographical Notes Part I
	117 James P. Thomas Autobiographical Notes Part II
	118 James P. Thomas Autobiographical Notes Part III