Overview of the Collection

Creator | Napton Family
Title  | Napton Family Papers
Dates   | 1825-1901 (inclusive)
Quantity | 3 reels of microfilm
Collection Number | Mss 452 (collection)
Summary | William Barclay Napton was an attorney in Missouri; his sons Thomas and Wellington were early Montana settlers. This collection includes an edited typescript of William Barclay Napton's personal journal between the years 1825 and 1883; legal documents generated by or administrated by Thomas L. Napton and Wellington Napton during their years of Montana residence; as well as various legal documents and political papers with no obvious connection to the rest of the collection.

Repository | University of Montana, Mansfield Library, Archives and Special Collections
           | Archives and Special Collections
           | Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library
           | University of Montana
           | 32 Campus Dr. #9936
           | 59812-9936
           | Missoula, MT
           | Telephone: 406-243-2053
           | Fax: 406-243-4067
           | library.archives@umontana.edu
Access Restrictions | Researchers must use collection in accordance with the policies of Archives and Special Collections, the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, and The University of Montana--Missoula.
Languages | English
Sponsor | Funding for creating this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Historic Publications and Records Commission. Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

William Barclay Napton was born March 23, 1808 near Princeton, New Jersey. He studied law at the University of Virginia and was conferred his degree in 1830. He moved to Fayette, Missouri, and established a general practice in 1832. Though he owned several different properties in western Missouri, Mr. Napton remained a resident of Saline County for the remainder of his life. Mr. Napton was very active in state and local politics, serving as the editor of the Boone's Lick Democrat for several years as well as State Attorney General from 1836-39. He was appointed to the Missouri Supreme
Court in 1839 and served until 1851—the year state judiciary positions became elected offices. Justice Napton lost his bid to remain on the state court. Subsequently, he was elected to the Missouri Supreme Court in 1857 and served until 1861. In 1861 the Missouri Legislature rewrote the oath of office for all state officials to include a pledge of loyalty to the Federal Union. Justice Napton refused to recite the amended oath of office and was forced to resign his position. He was again elected to the Missouri Supreme Court in 1873 (without a loyalty pledge) and served until 1880. Throughout his years of private practice and public service William Barclay Napton was a proponent of strict constructionist and state rights doctrines. William Barclay Napton married Melinda Williams in 1838 and the couple raised nine children.

Several of the Napton's sons moved to Montana during the territorial period, though only two permanently settled in the area. Thomas L. Napton, the second oldest son, was a soldier in the Confederate Army and relocated to Anaconda, Montana, soon after the Civil War ended. He prospected in several locations around Deer Lodge County but eventually moved to Missoula near the turn of the century to operate a dentistry practice. Thomas L. Napton died April 4, 1938 and is buried in the Missoula City Cemetery. The Napton's seventh son, Wellington Napton, followed his brother to Anaconda in the spring of 1873. He studied law under Judge W.W. Dixon of the Territorial District Court and gained admittance to the Missouri bar in 1875. He began a private law practice in Anaconda and became District Judge for Deer Lodge, Powell, and Granite counties in 1896, serving until 1904. Wellington Napton returned to private practice and remained in Anaconda for many more years.

Content Description

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Mr. William Barclay Napton's journal presents an array of personal notes and descriptions of significant state and national political developments. Personal entries include: family events, weather patterns at Elk Hill (the family country residence in Saline County), personal financial assessments, favorite literature passages, thoughts on theology and philosophy, and personal book reviews. State and national political entries incorporate descriptions of and comments on: Missouri legislative debates, dealings with U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton, the Missouri Know Nothing Party, Missouri Democratic Party strategies, slavery in the newly admitted territories, state rights, Congressional attempts to rewrite the Missouri Compromise, and developments of the Civil War (including military tribunals for Missouri public officials).

B. F. Bowen & Company (Indianapolis, Indiana) published "Past and Present of Saline County, Missouri" by the Honorable William Barclay Napton in 1910. This manuscript may be based upon the journal contained within the Napton Family Papers.

The Napton family papers are a diverse collection of legal and political materials. This set is primarily composed of legal documents establishing Napton family mining claims and property deeds in Montana, legal documents administrated by Wellington Napton as District Court judge, as well as several other legal and political documents with indeterminate connection to the rest of the collection. These additional materials include an unsigned copy of Marcus M. Daly's last will and testament (adjudicated by Wellington Napton as District Court Judge), a property deed witnessed by Granville Stuart, several property deeds from the Kansas and Nevada territories, and two letters regarding Martin Maginnis' tenure as Montana Territorial delegate to the U.S. Congress (1872-84).
The transfer of William Barclay Napton's journal into typescript format introduced several chronological errors. Though the typescript pages are numbered consecutively, two sections of the journal are significantly out of chronological order. In addition, posthumous clarification notes were inserted into the journal and marked by the initials "H.P.N." The author's identity is indeterminate. The materials on reel 3 of this collection suffer from poor microfilm reproduction quality. Several documents are cropped at the top, eliminating or obscuring valuable identifying information, and a few others are so faint as to be virtually unreadable.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

Researchers are responsible for using in accordance with 17 U.S.C. and any other applicable statutes. Copyright status unknown.

Preferred Citation

[Name of document], Napton Family Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, The University of Montana--Missoula.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

Single series on three roles of microfilm. Roles 1 and 2 present an edited typescript of William Barclay Napton's journal. Role 3 contains legal and political documents associated with Thomas L. and Wellington Napton, as well as other historical documents from territorial and early statehood years in Montana.

Location of Originals

The location of the originals from which the microfilm was produced is unknown.

Acquisition Information

Date and source of acquisition unknown.

Processing Note

The actions of the original processors are unknown. In 2003, the collection was re-described.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms:
  - Mining claims--Montana
  - Missouri compromise
  - Political parties--Montana
  - Real property--Montana
Slavery--United States
State rights--United States

Personal Names:
Benton, Thomas Hart, 1782-1858
Daly, Marcus, 1841-1900--Will
Maginnis, Martin, 1841-1919
Napton, William Barclay, 1808-1883--Diaries

Corporate Names:
Missouri. General Assembly
Democratic Party (Mo.)
Know Nothing Party (Mo.)
United States. Congress

Geographical Names:
Missouri--History--Civil War, 1861-1865
Missouri--Politics and government--19th century
Montana--Politics and government--20th century
Saline County (Mo.)
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865
United States--Politics and government--19th century

Form or Genre Terms:
Deeds
Diaries--Missouri--Saline County
Family papers--Montana
Legal documents--Montana

Occupations:
Judges--Montana

Other Creators:

Personal Names:
Napton, Thomas L., d. 1938
Napton, Welling, 1853-1938
Napton, William Barclay, 1808-1883
Stuart, Granville, 1834-1918

Finding aid prepared by Jack Rowan
2003

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