

Isaac McCoy Papers

MF 5540



Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

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Summary

Main Entry: Isaac McCoy Papers [microfilm]

Date Span: 1808 – 1874

Abstract: Microfilm contains correspondence and papers of Rev. Isaac McCoy – Baptist minister, Indian missionary, surveyor, and author.

Size: Thirteen microfilm reels

Collection #: MF 5540

Biographical Note

In 1810 McCoy was ordained a Baptist minister and seven years later was sent by the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions in America to the Miami Indians, who were living on the Wabash river, 16 miles above Terre Haute, Indiana. This was his first missionary experience but he was to spend the remainder of his life in this and related fields.

McCoy established Carey Mission among the Pottawatomies on the St. Joseph river near present Niles, Michigan in December, 1822. In 1826 he founded Thomas Mission among the Ottawas near present Grand Rapids.

His work with the Indians caused McCoy to sense the need of a permanent Indian country where tribes could be free from the "corrupting influences attending association with the frontier people of that early period." Consequently he was one of the first to suggest the removal of Eastern tribes to the unoccupied areas of the West. In June, 1824, he went to Washington to submit the proposal to the Board of Foreign Missions. The board was impressed with his ideas and suggested that he present them to the President. McCoy was unable to obtain an audience but did have conversations with John C. Calhoun, the secretary of war who was in charge of Indian affairs. Calhoun received McCoy's proposals with enthusiasm and became one of their strongest advocates.

Emigration of Eastern tribes to the territories west of the Mississippi had, by choice of the Indians themselves, begun many years before. Members of the Shawnee and Delaware tribes settled in Louisiana territory near Cape Girardeau as early as 1793. In 1809 a part of the Cherokee tribe located on the waters of the Arkansas and White rivers in Missouri territory while portions of the Choctaw and Creek tribes settled on the Arkansas and Red rivers. However, no official action had been taken by congress, prior to McCoy's proposal, to define a policy for removal of Eastern Indians to uninhabited lands in the West.

Anticipating the eventual passage of a removal bill, Calhoun arranged for the negotiation of treaties with various tribes in the Indian country which would allow the immigration of the Eastern tribes. It was to be several years, however, before such a bill was passed.

In November, 1827, McCoy again met with the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions and pressed the subject of Indian emigration. A memorial to congress was written and a pamphlet which had been prepared by McCoy supporting the removal proposal was ordered printed and widely circulated. Copies were presented to members of congress and to the heads of many governmental departments. McCoy himself was sent to Washington in December, 1827, and spent the next two months lobbying for a removal act.

In spite of the fact that a removal policy was favored by the President, now John Quincy Adams, and the secretary of war, James Barbour, as well as other influential persons, there was considerable opposition from groups which felt the Indians were being cheated of their ancestral homes and given instead an area considered by many to be nothing more than desert. The slavery question, too, was an important consideration, for Northerners felt that if the territory west of Missouri and north of the compromise line of 1820 were left open to white settlement the area would eventually become a free state and thus give the North an edge in the fight for power in congress. The question of suitability of the land for occupation was also raised. All these factors combined to defeat the 1828 attempt to pass a removal bill. An appropriation was made, however, to have the area explored, and later that year McCoy and George H. Kennedy of St. Louis were sent along with delegations of Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws, Pottawatomies, and Ottawas, to examine the country.

On August 21, 1828, McCoy, Kennerly, and the Pottawatomies and Ottawas left St. Louis for the Osage river. Following the Osage up to its headwaters, they crossed over to the Neosho which they followed out to its source. Moving up to the Kansas river they then returned along its south bank to the Missouri boundary, visiting some new settlements of Shawnees in what is now Johnson county, Kansas.

Years later McCoy wrote that the trip had allowed him to acquire an intimate knowledge of the country designed for the Indian settlements. He also noted that the country was "far better than I had expected." After an absence of seven weeks the delegation returned to St. Louis. A few days later McCoy, with Kennerly and a delegation of southern Indians, toured the area south of what is now Kansas as far as the Arkansas river near Fort Gibson in present Oklahoma. Here the Indians were left to visit kinsmen already settled along the river while McCoy and Kennerly returned to St. Louis.

The report McCoy wrote was submitted to the secretary of war in January 1829, and appended to the report of the committee on Indian affairs of the house of representatives. Though the committee favored the passage of an emigration bill, it was not until May 28, 1830, that such a measure was finally approved.

The Indian Removal act authorized the President "to cause so much of any territory belonging to the United States, west of the River Mississippi, not included in any State or organized Territory, and to which the Indian title had been extinguished, as he may judge

necessary, to be divided into a suitable number of districts, for the reception of such tribes or nations of Indians as may choose to exchange the lands where they now reside, and remove there; and to cause each of said districts to be so described by natural or artificial marks, as to be easily distinguished from every other."

In the meantime, in the fall of 1829 McCoy had made his third trip to the territory, visiting the Kansa nation and exploring the surrounding area. Once the bill was passed McCoy set about closing his missions in the East and transferring them to the new territory in preparation for the time when the Indians would move West. Some of the missionaries who came with McCoy were Jotham Meeker, Johnston Lykins, Robert Simerwell, and their wives.

For the next 10 years McCoy was almost constantly employed by the government in the Indian country, selecting and surveying locations for the immigrant Indians and establishing and maintaining missions and schools. In 1842 he moved to Louisville, Kentucky to direct the American Indian Mission Association, a society which he himself had organized. He continued in this work until his death at Louisville in 1846.

Scope and Content

The papers of Isaac McCoy were presented to the Kansas State Historical Society on July 9, 1879, by John Calvin McCoy, a son who accompanied the missionary on his early explorations and assisted in the survey of the proposed Indian lands. The collection, numbering more than 2,500 items, was bound in 38 volumes shortly after it was deposited with the Society.

The papers are concerned almost entirely with Indian missions, Indian removal, and related matters. Missionary duties at the station on the Wabash, at Fort Wayne and the missions on the St. Joseph and Grand rivers are detailed. After McCoy established himself in Kansas the papers continue to illustrate the problems that early missions and missionaries were compelled to contend with. Lack of finances was a continual trial since there seemed to be an eternal difficulty in convincing the missionary board back East that certain commodities and facilities were necessary on the frontier. Internal problems such as a rapid changeover in personnel; nagging charges of mismanagement; controlling activities of teachers, students, etc.; and interdenominational bickerings plagued the efficient operation of the missions and schools.

Beginning in 1822 McCoy's devotion to Indian removal is illustrated in letters describing his early thoughts on the subject, his appearances before the Board of Foreign Missions, his lobbying in Washington, and his authorship of various tracts about emigration. With the passage of the 1828 bill authorizing exploration of possible removal areas his correspondence covers trips to the new country, his eventual establishment of missions and schools there and his services as surveyor locating areas for the various tribes moving in.

Early printing in Kansas, done by Jotham Meeker in an Indian orthography, is well described in letters to church leaders.

The main theme of the collection, of course, is the American Indian and McCoy's continual efforts to establish a better way of life for him in the West. Elementary and higher education; physical condition of the tribes; relationships with whites and the War Department; petty controversies with head men, mission personnel, and the Baptist board; and relations with the federal government particularly over appropriations of funds, form a major part of the collection.

In the 1840's McCoy's efforts to aid the Indian through the American Indian Mission Association are illustrated in letters to church leaders and agents of the association. Following McCoy's death in 1846 the papers are concerned mainly with the business activities of his children.

For microfilming, and for more satisfactory preservation, the bindings of the papers were cut and the adhesive strips to which the letters had been attached were soaked away. In most cases the strips were completely removed, but in a few instances a residue remained which causes slight loss of definition in the film copy.

Many of the McCoy papers show the ravages of water, fire, and insects. To preserve the integrity of the collection these damaged papers have been filmed even though in some cases legibility is almost entirely lost.

The arrangement of the correspondence is chronological. Undated and miscellaneous items, including McCoy's autobiography, accounts, lectures, poetry, hymns, survey notes, maps, and the manuscript of McCoy's book, *History of the Baptist Indian Missions*, follow the dated material. McCoy's journal, which covers the period 1814 to 1841, has not been filmed since much of it exists in letterpress publication.

Targets have been used sparingly and except for introductory notes no editorial material has been included. Short titles on small pieces of white paper introduce each new series and are easily noticed during rapid winding of the film. Researchers will notice occasional marks such as arabic numerals on certain of the letters. These are not a part of the original but were used as indexing aids by an early and untutored researcher. Insertions, which McCoy appended to his manuscripts, have been filmed following the page to which they belong. Dates supplied by the editors have been bracketed in the upper right hand portion of letters.

Included for the use of researchers, even though it contains some errors, is a rough draft of a calendar of the McCoy correspondence. This has been filmed at the beginning of roll one.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically

Provenance

Purchased microfilm from the Kansas State Historical Society, 1980.

Preferred Citation

Isaac McCoy Papers [microfilm]. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.
Nashville, Tennessee

Related Secondary Sources

Lyons, Emory J. "Isaac McCoy: His Plan of and Work for Indian Colonization," unpublished master's thesis, Fort Hays Kansas State College, 1937. (Copy in SBHLA)

Roustio, Edward. "A History of the Life of Isaac McCoy in Relationship to Early Indian Migrations and Missions as Revealed in His Unpublished Manuscripts," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Kansas, 1954. (Copy in SBHLA)

Yeager, Randolph O. "Indian Enterprises of Isaac McCoy, 1817-1846," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1955. (Copy in SBHLA)

Related Manuscript Collections

MF 5541 [Jotham Meeker Collection](#)

Access Restrictions

The Isaac McCoy papers are the property of the Kansas State Historical Society. Brief quotations are authorized without restriction but publication of any major portion of the material on this film must be approved in writing by an officer of the Society. Literary rights are not owned by the Society and therefore cannot be conveyed.

Subject Terms

McCoy, Isaac, 1784 – 1846 – Manuscripts
Indians of North America – Missions

Microfilm List**Reel 1**

Calendar of Correspondence

Correspondence, 1808-June 1821

Reel 2

Correspondence, July 1821-June 1823

Reel 3

Correspondence - July 1823-1824

Reel 4

Correspondence, 1825-June 1826

Reel 5

Correspondence, July 1826-August 1827

Reel 6

Correspondence, September 1827-1828

Reel 7

Correspondence, 1829-April 1832

Reel 8

Correspondence, May 1832-May 1836

Reel 9

Correspondence, June 1836-1838

Reel 10

Correspondence 1839-1842

Reel 11

Correspondence 1843-1874

Reel 12

Undated Correspondence

Fragments

Autobiography of Isaac McCoy

Miscellaneous undated accounts, receipts, and drafts

"Traditional History of the Origin of the Ottawa Indians"

Notes on Indian reform

Lectures on moral philosophy by Rice McCoy

Unidentified lists of names, primarily by states

Manuscript of hymn book

Poetry by Sara McCoy

Undated statements concerning a controversy over the Shawnee Baptist Mission

Undated survey notes

Maps

Miscellaneous items

Reel 13

Manuscript of Isaac McCoy's *History of Baptist Indian Missions*