

Jesse W. Fell Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2009

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Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm76020362>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms009196>

Prepared by Thelma Queen
Revised by Harry G. Heiss

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Collection Summary

Title: Jesse W. Fell Papers

Span Dates: 1806-1965

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1830-1887)

ID No.: MSS20362

Creator: Fell, Jesse W., 1808-1887

Extent: 2,100 items

Extent: 8 containers

Extent: 3 linear feet

Extent: 8 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm76020362>

Summary: Editor, educator, and lawyer. Correspondence, speeches and writings, Fell's autobiography and other biographical material, genealogical material, land grants, ledger, clippings, scrapbooks, maps, lithographs, photographs, and other papers pertaining primarily to Fell's pursuits as a newspaper editor, educator, lawyer, and Quaker in Illinois, including also family correspondence pertaining to Abraham Lincoln's autobiography.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Blaine, James Gillespie, 1830-1893--Correspondence.

Brown family.

Davis, David, 1815-1886--Correspondence.

Douglas, Stephen A. (Stephen Arnold), 1813-1861--Correspondence.

Fell family--Correspondence.

Fell family.

Fell, Jesse W., 1808-1887.

Greeley, Horace, 1811-1872--Correspondence.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Correspondence.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865.

Lovejoy, Owen, 1811-1864--Correspondence.

Mann, Horace, 1796-1859--Correspondence.

Nicolay, John G. (John George), 1832-1901--Correspondence.

Stevenson, Adlai E. (Adlai Ewing), 1900-1965--Correspondence.

Trumbull, Lyman, 1813-1896--Correspondence.

Organizations

Illinois State Normal University.

Library of Congress.

University of Chicago.

Subjects

American newspapers--Illinois.

American periodicals--Illinois.

Land speculation--Illinois.

Libraries--Washington (D.C.)

Practice of law--Illinois.

Quakers--Illinois.

Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877)

Universities and colleges--Illinois.

Places

Bloomington (Ill.)--History.
Illinois--Politics and government.
Normal (Ill.)--History.
United States--History--1865-1898.

Titles

Collier's.

Occupations

Editors.
Educators.
Lawyers.

Provenance

The papers of Jesse W. Fell, editor, educator, and lawyer, were given to the Library of Congress by the estate of Robert D. Richardson between 1970 and 1972.

Processing History

The papers of Jesse W. Fell were arranged and described in 1976. The collection and finding aid were revised in 1998. The finding aid was revised again in 2009.

Transfers

Some engravings have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of the Jesse W. Fell Papers.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Jesse W. Fell is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Jesse W. Fell are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of these papers is available on eight reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Jesse W. Fell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1808, Nov. 10	Born, New Garden, Chester County, Pa.
1826-1828	Taught school in Pennsylvania
1828	Moved to Steubenville, Ohio
1828-1830	Studied in law office of Stokely & Marsh, Steubenville, Ohio
1832	Admitted to Ohio bar Moved to Bloomington, Ill. Admitted to Illinois bar
1833	Opened law practice, Bloomington, Ill.; first lawyer in McLean County, Ill.
1834	Appointed commissioner of schools, McLean County, Ill.
1834-1835	Befriended Abraham Lincoln while lobbying for McLean County in Illinois legislature
1835	Made an agent of State Bank of Illinois
1837	Bankrupted in financial crash Sold law practice to David Davis
1837-1839	Owner and publisher, <i>Bloomington Observer and McLean County Advocate</i> , Bloomington, Ill.
1838	Married Hester Vernon Brown (died June 1906)
1844	Moved to Fort Jesse, Adams County, Ill., and took up farming
1845-1851	Operated a farm and nursery business, "Fruit Hill," near Quincy, Adams County, Ill.
1850	Declined invitation to run as Whig candidate for state legislature
1851	Returned to Bloomington, Ill. Elected to Board of Trustees, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Ill.
1851-1852	Editor, <i>Western Whig</i> (later renamed <i>Bloomington Intelligencer</i>), Bloomington, Ill.
1852-1853	Partner, owner, <i>Bloomington Intelligencer</i> (later renamed <i>Pantagraph</i>), Bloomington, Ill.
1856	Supported Republican abolitionist Owen Lovejoy for Congress
1857	Helped found Illinois State Normal University, Normal, Ill. Built his residence, "Fell's Park," Normal, Ill.
1858	Suggested to Abraham Lincoln that he should run for president
1859	Elected secretary, Illinois Republican State Central Committee Secured autobiography of Abraham Lincoln and arranged its publication in eastern newspapers Organized Free Congregational Church, Bloomington, Ill., with brothers Kersey and Vickers Fell
1865	Spearheaded campaign to locate Illinois Soldiers' Orphans' Home in Bloomington, Ill.
1867	Successful in routing the Chicago & Mississippi Railroad (later Chicago & Alton Railroad) through Bloomington, Ill. Appointed to Board of Education, Illinois State Normal University, Normal, Ill.
1868	Purchased the Bloomington, Ill., <i>Pantagraph</i> , along with James P. Taylor and William Osborne Davis Declined public appeal to run for Congress
1879	Founded Larchwood Colony, Lyon County, Iowa
1887, Feb. 25	Died, Normal, Ill.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Jesse W. Fell (1808-1887) span the years 1806 to 1965 with the bulk of the material produced during the period 1830-1887. Fell's papers reflect his pursuits as a lawyer, land speculator, educator, newspaper editor, and political leader in Illinois and include biographical material, broadsides, calling cards, college catalogs, correspondence, genealogies, land grants, ledgers, lithographs, maps, miscellaneous notes, newspaper clippings, notebooks, obituaries, petitions, photographs, poems, printed matter, scrapbooks, speeches, stock certificates, wills, and writings. The papers have been arranged in three series: [Correspondence](#), [Speeches and Writings File](#), and [Subject File](#).

The [Correspondence](#) series consists of three subgroups of [Family Correspondence](#), [General Correspondence](#), and [Published and Transcribed Correspondence](#). It was Fell who urged Abraham Lincoln to write his autobiography, and much of the correspondence in the [Family Correspondence](#), particularly that of Emmet L. Richardson, centers around the three-page autobiography and an accompanying letter. Lincoln sent the autobiography to Fell in December 1859, and Fell arranged for its publication in eastern newspapers prior to the 1860 election. Both items were ultimately acquired by the Library of Congress and are now among the papers of Abraham Lincoln and published in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. Second Supplement, 1848-1865*, Roy P. Basler and Christian O. Basler, editors (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, circa 1990). Members of the Fell and Brown families, including Fell's wife Hester Vernon Brown Fell, his father Jesse Fell, and his daughters Alice and Fannie Fell, are also represented in the Family Correspondence. Fell's Quaker heritage is reflected widely in these letters.

National and local figures of the time are represented in the [General Correspondence](#). Some of Fell's views on Reconstruction can be found in a letter to James Gillespie Blaine of March 1885. Most of the letters from national figures, such as David Davis, Stephen A. Douglas, Horace Greeley, Abraham Lincoln, Owen Lovejoy, Horace Mann, John G. Nicolay, and Lyman Trumbull, however, primarily concern local and state issues.

The [Published and Transcribed Correspondence](#) contains typed transcriptions of selected letters sent and received by Fell. The original letters are in the [Family Correspondence](#) and the [General Correspondence](#).

A brief autobiography written by Fell in 1886 is found in the [Speeches and Writings File](#), along with assorted speeches dated 1830-1833 and 1870. The file also includes a paper written in 1845 on the repudiation of Illinois state debt and handwritten notes on the founding of Normal, Illinois.

The [Subject File](#) contains material relating to the Lincoln autobiography, including letters to and from Fell descendant Adlai E. Stevenson (1900-1965), Collier's magazine, the Library of Congress, the University of Chicago, and Illinois State Normal University. Also in the Subject File are several biographical sketches of Fell, his admission papers to the Ohio bar, his certificate to practice law in Illinois, genealogies of the Fell and Brown families, an obituary of his mother-in-law, Hester Milner Gordon (1777-1871), and land grants awarded to Henry Flesher, Robert Miller, Joseph Gilleys, and James Ordway for their military service during the War of 1812. The Subject File also contains items reflecting the history of Fell's adopted town of Bloomington, Illinois, the adjoining town of Normal, and nearby Normal University (later renamed Illinois State Normal University), which Fell helped found.

Fell was an fervent arborist, and he was well known for the thousands of trees and shrubbery that he planted in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Iowa, and Illinois. The Subject File includes a pamphlet and a photocopy of a plat of Larchwood Colony in Lyons County, Iowa, a farming development where Fell planted over one hundred thousand trees and cuttings.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in three series:

- [Correspondence, 1806-1957](#)
- [Speeches and Writings File, 1830-1886](#)
- [Subject File, 1816-1965](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-3 REEL 1-3	<u>Correspondence, 1806-1957</u>
BOX 1-2 REEL 1-2	<u>Family Correspondence, 1806-1957</u> Letters exchanged between Fell family members. Arranged alphabetically by name of individual and chronologically therein.
BOX 2-3 REEL 2-3	<u>General Correspondence, 1833-1896</u> Letters sent and received. Arranged alphabetically by name of individual and chronologically therein.
BOX 3 REEL 3	<u>Published and Transcribed Correspondence, 1832-1911</u> Published and typed transcriptions of selected letters sent and received by Fell. Originals are in the Family Correspondence and General Correspondence. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.
BOX 3 REEL 3	<u>Speeches and Writings File, 1830-1886</u> Handwritten speeches and articles and Fell's unpublished autobiography. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 3-8 REEL 3-8	<u>Subject File, 1816-1965</u> Biographical material, broadsides, calling cards, certifications, circulars, college catalogs, genealogies, land grants, ledgers, lists, lithographs, maps, miscellaneous notes, newspaper clippings, notebooks, obituaries, petitions, photographs, plats, poems, scrapbooks, stock certificates, wills, and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by topic or type of material.

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 21,706

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Correspondence, 1806-1957

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