James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Introduction

The papers of the James Birdseye McPherson Family (1849-1927) are a gift of Laura D. (Mrs. Orrie C.) Rinebolt of Toledo, Ohio, September 29, 1972.

All property rights to this collection belong to the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library. Literary rights have not been dedicated to the public.
James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Scope and Content

The James Birdseye McPherson Family Collection (1849-1927) contained in one document box consists of papers chronologically arranged within the following series: correspondence, 1849-1926; vouchers, 1860-1862; newspapers and clippings, 1862-1927; miscellanea and family memorabilia, 1850-1925; and photocopies of related material not in the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library Collection. The collection pertains mainly to James Birdseye McPherson (1828-1864), U. S. army officer and Civil War general, and the only Federal army commander to die in battle in that conflict. It was accumulated by Cynthia Russell McPherson, mother of General McPherson, and other family members and descendants, lastly, John Clinton Wilson (1893-1954), said to be a descendant of a sister of Cynthia Russell McPherson (but perhaps, instead or also, related to the General through his sister-in-law, Mattie Andrew McPherson.)

These papers reflect the career and character of General McPherson, his life in San Francisco (1858-61) while constructing the Alcatraz and bay area fortifications, Civil War experiences and campaigns, the wide publicity given his battlefield death, the McPherson Memorial monument and its dedication, post war reunions of the Army of the Tennessee, and affairs of the family following his death. Correspondence includes letters written by McPherson to family members from 1849 to 1864, a letter from General H. W. Halleck sending McPherson’s commission as Brigadier General and congratulations, and McPherson’s rough draft of his report to Brigadier General George W. Callum concerning the Union reconnaissance and attack and subsequent Confederate surrender of Fort Donelson.

Included are 35 U. S. Army vouchers for payrolls and supplies during the construction of fortifications at Alcatraz, and during the Civil War for military railroad construction.

Newspapers and clippings concern primarily Civil War news, McPherson’s death, the McPherson memorial monument, Army of the Tennessee, reunions, and obituaries of personal family interest.

Included in miscellanea and family memorabilia are memorial monument publicity brochures, a U. S. Military Academy Register, June 1850, giving names, class rank, demerits etc. of all four classes, visiting and mourning cards, William H. McPherson’s oath of allegiance to the constitution of the U. S. and the State of Ohio, his (WHMcP) certificate of a substitute for military duty, real estate accounts of the McPherson family (1872-1925), and personal family mementos. One item of particular interest is a hand drawn sketch (map) of the Marietta, Sandtown, Lost Mountain Roads area (Cobb County, Georgia) drawn probably in June 1864 just prior to the battle of Kennesaw Mountain.

As a calendar is included in this inventory other items of historical significance may be easily noted.

Much of the correspondence is personal in nature and of value only to a biographer. It is said that McPherson saved no letters while at West Point, but, that his mother saved all she received. After his death she gave many to friends as mementos. Nevertheless, 26 letters written by McPherson to family members remain in the collection.
James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Scope and Content

It is a small but significant collection of materials relating to McPherson's career as an army officer and events of the Civil War from his personal viewpoint. It merits the attention also of scholars in fields of San Francisco bay area history.
A genealogical chart prepared by the processor is also attached.
James Birdseye McPherson was born in Hamer’s Corners, now Clyde, Ohio, November 14, 1828. He was the eldest child of William and Cynthia Russell McPherson, natives of Hopewell, Ontario County, New York, who came to Ohio shortly after their marriage in 1824. (A genealogical chart of this family is included in this inventory.) William McPherson had first come to Ohio in 1823 with Lyman Babcock, Norton Russell, brother of Cynthia, and James Birdseye, all of New York State. It was for his friend James Birdseye that William McPherson named his firstborn son.

A blacksmith and farmer, William McPherson entered land in Greencreek Township, Sandusky County, Ohio. A thrifty man, of Scotch ancestry, and ambitious, he later purchased more land, all in the Clyde, Ohio, area, where James Birdseye McPherson grew to young manhood and which he considered his home until his death. Two more sons and a daughter were born to Cynthia and William McPherson, and they, with Lydia Norton (Russell Chase) Slocum, mother of Cynthia, who joined the McPhersons in Ohio after being widowed for a second time, made up the McPherson Ohio family.

The national financial panic of 1837 had its effect upon the family, who had prospered until that time, and William, overworked and worried fell into ill health, never to fully recover.

Finally, in 1841, it became necessary for the family to seek another source of income in addition to farming and the rentals of farmland. James B., the eldest, though only 12 ½ years old, was thereby apprenticed as a clerk to Robert Smith, a general storekeeper, farmer and mill owner, of Sterntown (now known as Green Springs), in the southwestern part of the township. Robert’s wife was Catherine, daughter of Jacob Stern, and the families soon made him as one of their own. Here James was exposed to books, and music, and was included in the education given by tutors to the Stern and Smith children. Here he also became acquainted with young Rutherford B. Hayes, who visited the Stern family frequently. By the time he was 18, James had become fascinated by adventures awaiting one in the new territory of Texas, annexed in 1845, and at war with Mexico by 1846. He yearned to go, but Robert Smith foresaw greater things for the bright studious lad of whom he had grown fond, and soon arranged and defrayed expenses for James, (now made fatherless by William McPherson’s death in 1847), to study at Norwalk Academy. Robert Smith further promised to arrange for James to secure an appointment to West Point, provided he could pass the entrance examination.

In May of 1849 James left Ohio to begin life as a cadet at the West Point Military Academy. He became one of 52 members of the class of 1853, among whom were Schofield, Bell, Sill, Tyler and others who gained distinction during the Civil War. John B. Hood, his antagonist at Atlanta, was his friend and for two years his roommate. He excelled, and was graduated July 1, 1853 with high honors, first in his class, made lieutenant of engineers, and appointed assistant instructor in practical engineering at West Point. In August 1954 he became assistant to Major Delafield at New York, and was chief engineer, constructing fortifications in New York and Boston Harbors and up the Hudson River. In December 1856 he was transferred to Fort Delaware, 45 miles

Local History & Genealogy Department
Toledo-Lucas County Public Library, Toledo, Ohio
below Philadelphia in the Delaware River, due to the sudden death of Major Dulton, and
was placed in charge of operations on completion of the fort.

Ordered to California in December 1857, McPherson traveled via Havana and
the Isthmus of Panama, and took charge of the construction of fortifications in San
Francisco Harbor. Alcatraz, alone, took almost a year and these fortifications are still
intact today. He was assigned for four years to this project which included Alcatraz,
Fort Point, Lime Point, Benicia (and Lovell’s Island). In December 1858 he was
appointed 1st Lieutenant. The following spring he met Emily Hoffman who had come
from Baltimore to California to visit her sister Sophie, wife of Louis McLane, prominent
members of San Francisco society. McPherson later became engaged to marry Emily,
it was only due to cancellation of his last 20 day furlough in March of 1864, because
of the planned spring drive against Atlanta, that they were not married. General
Sherman wrote a personal letter of apology for causing the wedding postponement to
Emily who by this time had returned to Baltimore. War came in April 1861, and in San
Francisco McPherson heard a young man named Thomas Payne give a stirring plea
against secession. He wrote to Washington offering his services for active duty. In July
he was made Captain in the Corps of Engineers and ordered East.

Arriving in New York, he received orders to go to Boston, take charge of the
Boston Harbor forts and recruit a regiment for the Engineering Dept. Preferring active
duty, he was assigned in November to the staff of General Halleck as aide-de-camp and
assistant chief engineer at St. Louis, Missouri, and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. In
January 1862 he was transferred to General Grant’s staff as chief engineer of the army,
was with Grant at Forts Henry and Donaldson, was brevetted Major of the Regular
Army. He was at Shiloh in April, and on the recommendation of Grant was made
Colonel in the Regular Army and in June 1862 Brigadier General of Volunteers, and
military superintendent of Railroads. After the capture of Corinth in May 1862 he was
with Grant at Iuka; and in October 1862 relieved Rosecrans by a brilliant movement
when the Confederates attempted the recapture of Corinth. For this he was made
Major General of the Volunteers.

After the corps formation he assumed command of the 17th Army Corps of
Grant’s Army of the Tennessee, and played a vital part in the capture of Vicksburg.
Immediately after the surrender McPherson was made a Brigadier in the Regular Army
and Commander of the District of Vicksburg. With Sherman he drove the enemy from
Meridian, Mississippi into Alabama. Grant then took control of all the armies of the U. S.
and Sherman succeeded him in command of the Military District embracing the Armies
of the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee and Arkansas. McPherson, ordered to Huntsville,
Alabama, then joined Sherman at Chattanooga where he (McPherson) took command
of the Army of the Tennessee. Until his death at Atlanta, he helped to fight every battle
of importance in Georgia – Ringold, Dalton, Kennesaw Mountain, Resacz, Atlanta.
There he fell in battle July 22, 1864. Beloved by his fellow soldiers, as well as by
Sherman and Grant, he was awarded the Gold Medal of Honor. He was 35 years old at
the time of his death.
James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Biographical Notes

The only Federal army commander killed in battle during the war, his body was returned to Clyde under escort and buried with military honors in the cemetery which bears his name and was once a part of the old home farm. Close by sleep his father, mother, two brothers and sister. Ironically, his brother William died in 1871 from a kick by McPherson’s horse which had been sent north after the General’s death. William, a member of Co. G 50th Regiment Ohio, seems to have provided a satisfactory substitute for his military duty and remained at home to farm and care for his family, having married Mattie Andrew of Hartland, N. Y. in 1858. Russell, who retired as postmaster of Clyde in 1875 due to failing health, died in 1877, unmarried. He held a job in Cincinnati during at least part of the Civil War, employed by American Express, and at Jackson, Tennessee as general freight and ticket agent for the railroads, and at Memphis, also in government railroad service, and later in Indianapolis in charge of the Merchants Express Company. Emeline, the last surviving child, followed her mother, Cynthia, in death by 13 months, dying in April 1884. She had married Fred Vandercook of Fremont, Ohio, and raised 3 children. His beloved Emily never married and died in Baltimore in 1891, age 57.

In 1881 by subscription of the people of Clyde and Sandusky County and members of the Army of the Tennessee, a bronze and granite monument was erected over his grave. Other monuments and memorials to him include an equestrian statue at McPherson Square in Washington, D. C. and the naming of a Nebraska army post after him in 1866. Near Atlanta, an active army post now (1973) the home of the Third U. S. Army bears his name, and a barracks and guardhouse on Alcatraz serve as a memorial to the military engineer.
James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers

Biographical Notes

Bibliography

Cox, Jacob D. *Campaigns of the Civil War: Atlanta*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [1882].

*History of Sandusky County, Ohio, with Portraits and Biographies of Prominent Citizens and Pioneers*. Cleveland, Ohio: H. Z. Williams & Bro., 1882.


Guide to Related Materials

Missouri Historical Society – Civil War Papers; Major General Henry W. Halleck to Lieutenant Colonel J. B. McPherson, holograph letter, Dec. 30, 1861 (photocopy in this collection)


Hills, Alfred C. *McPherson, the Great Confederate Philosopher and Southern Blower*. New York: James Miller, 1864. (photocopy of title page and preface in this collection)

*Combination Atlas Map of Sandusky County, Ohio*. Everts, Stewart & Co., 1874. (photocopy of Green Creek Township, p. – in this collection)

*R F D News*  (Toledo-Lucas County Public Library, L. H. Dept., O.V.F. – Clyde)
James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Inventory

Box 1
Folder 1  Correspondence
1. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, West Point, NY, June 26, 1849
2. JBM to Russell B. McPherson, West Point, NY, July 31, 1853
3. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, Schodac, Renselear Co., NY, Nov. 14, 1854
4. JBM to Emeline McPherson, NYC, Sept. 24, 1855
5. JBM to Emeline McPherson, NYC, Dec. 28, 1855
6. JBM to Russell B. McPherson, New York, Jan. 2, 1856
7. JBM to Emeline McPherson, NYC, [prior to Oct. 14, 1856]
8. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, Ft. Delaware, DE, Jan. 16, 1857
10. JBM to William H. McPherson, San Francisco, CA, Feb. 4, 1858
11. JBM to William H. McPherson, Alcatrace’s Island, San Francisco, CA, Mar. 18, 1858
12. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, San Francisco, CA, June 19, 1858
13. JBM to Russell B. McPherson, Alcatrace’s Island, San Francisco Bay, CA, Sept. 20, 1858
14. JBM to William H. McPherson, San Francisco, CA, Dec. 18, 1858
15. Josephine to JBM, San Francisco, CA, Aug. 21, 1859
16. Mr. & Mrs. Jolhemus to JBM, San Francisco, CA, Oct. 12, 1859
17. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, San Francisco, CA, Jan. 19, 1860
18. JBM to William H. McPherson, San Francisco, CA, July 16, 1860
19. JBM to Russell B. McPherson, San Francisco, CA, July 20, 1860
22. Russell B. McPherson to Cynthia R. McPherson, Cincinnati, OH, June 24, 1861
23. Russell B. McPherson to Cynthia R. McPherson, Cincinnati, OH, Aug. 2, 1861
24. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, St. Louis, MO, Dec. 8, 1861
James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Inventory

Box 1 (cont.)
Folder 1  Correspondence (cont.)
25. JBM to Brig. Gen. G. W. Cullum, St. Louis, MO, Feb. 25, 1862
26. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, St. Louis, MO, Mar. 9, 1862
27. JBM to Brother [Russell], Pittsburgh (Shiloh), TN, Apr. 2, 1862
   (Letter missing October 2009 – DKC)
28. JBM to [Russell B.] McPherson, Camp near Corinth, MS, May 26, 1862
29. JBM to Brother [Russell], Corinth, MS, June 10, 1862
30. JBM to William H. McPherson, Corinth, MS, Aug. 15, 1862
31. Mr. & Mrs. Hiram Hutchinson, NYC, [Nov. 11, 1862]
32. Russell B. McPherson to Cynthia R. McPherson, Columbus [KY], Jan. 5, 1863
33. Mrs. Floyd Smith to JBM, NYC, [Oct. 7, 1863]
35. JBM to Cynthia R. McPherson, Huntsville, [AL], Apr. 4, 1864
38. (B L L ?) to Children, Hartland, July 19, 1874
39. Cora to Aunt Mattie A., Albion, NY, Sept. 28, [1883]
40. (Ellen) to W. Andrew, Hartland, NY, June 11, 1895
41. Ellen T. Aver to Sister & all, Estacato Plains, [NM], May 20, 1903
42. Leon Wilson to William B. McConnell of Fremont, OH, Toledo, OH, May 18, 1926

Folder 1A  Typed transcripts of original letters

Folder 1B  Carbons of typed transcripts

Folder 2  Vouchers, 1861-1862
3. Jan. 3, 1861 – Fort Alcatrace’s Island, San Francisco Bay, CA. Abstract of 4th quarter 1860 disbursements for payroll, supplies, etc. by 1st Lt. Jas. B. McPherson, $14,497.05 (portion including another signature torn off.)
Box 1 (cont.)
Folder 2  Vouchers, 1861-1862 (cont.)


James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers  
Inventory

Box 1 (cont.)  
Folder 2  
Vouchers, 1861-1862 (cont.)

R.R. billhead Dr. Special Roll. Receipt to Brig. Gen’l Jas. B.  
McPherson for payment of $524.85 wages to 13 train  
employees. Mo. of July 1862, signed Jas. B. McPherson, Brig.  
Gen’l & Supt.

15. July 1862 – Voucher No. 34, U.S. Mil. R.R.  
Special Roll for  
Soldiers. Record and receipt of payment by Jas. B. McPherson,  
Brig. Gen’l. & Supt. of $306.90. 8 soldiers. Signed by Jas. B.  
McPherson, Brig. Gen’l. & Supt.

Receipt  
Signed by L. C. Mitchell, Columbus, KY to (Steamer?) David  
Tatum, $1152.30. Signed Jas. B. McPherson, Brig. Gen’l. &  
Supt.

To A. A.  
Black (Dyer Station) $2.50. Signed Jas. B. McPherson, Brig.  
Gen’l. & Supt.

McPherson for payment of $53.00 to W. B. Ruffin for wood for  
Gen’l. & Supt.

19. July 25, 1862 – Voucher No. 71, To W. B. Sharp for foodstuffs  
Furnished for use of Memphis & Charleston R. R. (in repairs)  

20. July 1862 – Voucher No. 74, U. S. Mil. R.R. Jackson, TN,  
Mechanical Dept. Payroll $410.70, Mo. of July 1862, 10 payees  
and 1 payee scratched. Signed Jas. B. McPherson, Brig. Gen’l.  
& Supt.

$216.60  
Payroll, Mo. of July 1862, 6 payees (conductor & 5 brakemen)  

22. July 2, 1862 – Voucher No. 87, U. S. Mil. R.R. Date of  
purchase, June 20, $618.12 payment to William G. Campbell,  
Corinth, MS for lumber to rebuild bridges on the Memphis and  
Charleston R.R. between Corinth and Decatur & freight car  

23. August 1862 – Voucher No. 102, U.S. Mil. R.R. Record of  
payment Special Roll for Discharged employees. $435.30.  

James Conner for cordwood, $35.00. Signed Jas. B.  
McPherson, Brig. Gen’l. & Supt.
Box 1 (cont.)
Folder 2

Vouchers, 1861-1862 (cont.)


28. August 18, 1862 – Voucher No. 120, U.S. Mil. R.R., $5.00 to S. W. Miner, Agt., Jackson, TN for repairs of baggage room, trucks, etc. Signed Jas. B. McPherson, Brig. Gen’l & Supt.


Folder 3

Miscellanea and Family Memorabilia

James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Inventory

Box 1 (cont.)
Folder 3  Miscellaneous and Family Memorabilia (cont.)

2. June 1850 – *Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, New York.* 24 pp. James B. McPherson’s name in ink on cover. Lists members of all four classes by name, demerits, state of residence, date of admission, order of merit in respective studies; board of visitors; staff; courses; texts, etc.


4. (Dec. 1858) -- Envelope addressed R. B. McPherson (Russell B. McPherson 1832-1877) containing two visiting cards of:

   1) R. B. McPherson
   2) Mr. & Mrs. W. H. McPherson

   Miss M. A. Andrew (in lower left hand corner)


6. May 7, (1864) – Certificate (handwritten) stating that William McPherson of Co. G 50 Regt. Has furnished an acceptable substitute for 100 days military duty.

   Signed: M. J. Tichnor(?) Capt. Corn Co.
   Camp Crogan, Ohio

7. (ca. June 10, 1864) – Stationery imprinted “Headquarters, Department and Army of the Tennessee, _____ 1864. On reverse is hand drawn map of area of Marietta, Sandtown, and Lost Mountain Roads (Cobb County, GA)

   Names located on map are: Hardshell Church (Mount Olivet Church), S. Camp, Davis, W. Camp, B. Camp, Ship, Schoolhouse, Drake, Wm. Orr, Collins, D. Dickson, R. Bvnnett, Camps Mill kept by Rice, Williams. (1 photocopy included)

8. Mar. 11, 1865 – Church pledge on torn blue paper reading “we the subscribers agree to pay to the trustees of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of the town of Hartland or bearer the sums opposite our names for the purpose of purchasing and refitting a house to be used as a parsonage by the preacher in charge of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of the town of Hartland, Niagara Co., NY Hartland, NY Mar. 11, 1865.” (No names or amounts listed so probably a rough draft.)
9. April 5, 1872 – Certificate of teacher rank of 2nd grade from Jonas W. Brown, School Commissioner, 2nd District, Niagara Co., NY for Mrs. William McPherson (nee Mattie Andrew) – qualified to teach a common school for 1 year from date, April 5, 1872.

10. June 26, 1874 – Handwritten note for $200 payable 3 months from date to M. A. McPherson or bearer, signed by B. A. Andrew. Dated Clyde, June 26, 1874.

11. April 187(6?) – Hand penciled copy of poem by William Arnold, April 187(6?) “In His Faded Coat of Blue.” 3 pp. Fourth page has addition of numbers and following words and/or names: Secle Rathbun; Miss M. A. Andrew; R. B. McPherson; Galveston, Texas; Frenomer (?)

12. (1882?) – Portrait 7” x 10” of Mrs. Cynthia McPherson (identical except for size to portrait in History of Sandusky County, Ohio, with Portraits and Biographies of Prominent Citizens and Pioneers. Cleveland: H. Z. Williams & Bro., 1882.


15. Aug. 4-5, 1887 – White ribbon, Society of the 72nd O.V.V.I. (Ohio Veterans Volunteer Infantry), 18th annual reunion. Clyde, Ohio, Aug. 4-5, 1887.


18. (n.d.) – White ribbon, Green Spring, Ohio. W.R.C.

James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Inventory

Box 1 (cont.)
Folder 3  Miscellanea and Family Memorabilia (cont.)
20. May 25, 1915 – 2 mint postcards, "I am a booster for the McPherson Memorial", Clyde, Ohio, May 25, 1915, announcing request by Ohio citizens to next Congress for appropriation for a memorial at McPherson's Clyde home in recognition of his services. Back: Typical postcard format. Front: Portrait J. B. McPherson, birth and death dates, and message requesting approval and support by N. B. Mason, Sec., Clyde, Ohio, of the Memorial Committees. 5 mint letter size envelopes and 1 mint legal size envelope of the McPherson Memorial Committee, Clyde.


22. May 18, 1926 – 6 pages account book listing property from 1872 to 1926 (acreage, taxes, etc.) belonging to J. R. McPherson, Martha McPherson, Mattie McPherson, Cynthia McPherson.

23. (n.d.) – 2 visiting cards, Mrs. William McPherson: 1 printed, 1 autograph.

24. (n.d.) – 4 handwritten pages, writer unknown, concerning the work of the missionary, Mrs. Harriet Newell(?), who with her husband and friends, Mr. And Mrs. Judson (Adoniram Judson, 1788-1850, American Baptist Missionary Society) went in Feb. 1812 to Buran Empire (Bihar Province, India).


Folder 4  Newspapers and Clippings, 1866-1927 (Photocopies)

Folder 5  Newspapers and Clippings, 1862-1866


James Birdseye McPherson Family Papers
Inventory

Box 1 (cont.)
Folder 6 Newspapers and Clippings, 1866-1869 (cont.)

Folder 7 Newspapers and Clippings, 1869-1927
Box 1 (cont.)
Folder 7 Newspapers and Clippings, 1869-1927 (cont.)
3. July 23, 1881, Saturday morning, The Cleveland Leader, Cleveland, Ohio, Vol. 34, No. 204, 12 pp. and duplicate pp. 1-2. P. 1,Cols. 3-7 and p. 2, cols. 1-2 concerns the unveiling of J. B. McPherson memorial monument at Clyde, O. Speeches, dignitaries, etc.
4. July 23, 1881, Saturday morning, The Cleveland Leader, Cleveland, Ohio, pp. 9, 10, 11, 12 only of a 12 p. edition. P. 10, cols. 1-6 concerning J. B. McPherson’s life, career, death, etc. upon the 17th anniversary.

Folder 8 Photocopies of related materials in other collections