

Collection #
M 0114

DEWITT CLINTON GOODRICH AUTOBIOGRAPHY, 1905

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 1 half-size manuscript box

COLLECTION
DATES: 1905

PROVENANCE: Calvin Goodrich, Black Mountain, NC, 1948

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE
FORMATS: A 1990 transcription is available in the General Collection.

ACCESSION
NUMBER: 1948.0215

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

DeWitt Clinton Goodrich (1844-1920) was born in Peru, Indiana, the son of George Whitfield and Jane McPherson Goodrich. His grandmother had brought the family in 1831 to Indiana from Blacksburg, Montgomery County, Virginia.

A case of typhoid and widespread malaria in Indiana during the 1850s caused the family to move to Kansas just before the Civil War. But local disturbances, both "Bloody Kansas" and "Border Ruffians," forced them to move again, first to Missouri and then back to Peru. Goodrich relates his early encounters with enslaved people, Native Americans, and Mexican cattle drivers during these travels.

When sixteen, Goodrich enlisted in the Union army without his father's permission. After being sent home and finally obtaining that permission, he again enlisted, and served in the artillery for the remainder of the war. His unit served mainly in Tennessee and Mississippi.

After the war, Goodrich completed his education by spending one year at a Collegiate Institute in Battle Ground, Indiana. He enjoyed mathematics, and took up his father's profession as a surveyor. This led both to election as Miami county surveyor and to a summer surveying in Indian territory in Kansas. There, beside having some narrow escapes from the Indians, he learned to deplore the treatment of the Indians and the massacre of bison.

Back in Indiana and unemployed, Goodrich hesitantly began work as a traveling book seller, beginning with the popular *Kitto's History of the Bible*. He had less success selling a quickly produced book about the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. Goodrich eventually got into publishing himself. He contributed to and published an *Illustrated History of the State of Indiana* in 1875 and two years later a history of Pennsylvania. Goodrich details the costs associated with the book business such as printing, binding, illustrations, and finally, publishing. When his book stock, uninsured, was destroyed in a Philadelphia fire, he gave up publishing.

In 1878, Goodrich invented a simple door attachment that apparently greatly improved the safety of passenger elevators but was forced to sell the patent for a mere \$50.00. He then settled in Paola Kansas, and worked as a loan officer and city clerk. Finally, having been instrumental in getting a Soldiers' Home located in Leavenworth, Kansas, he became quartermaster of the Home. He later regretted the decision, though he stayed at the Home for twenty years. He died in West Lebanon, Warren County, Indiana.

Sources: Materials in the collection

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection, filling one half-size manuscript box, consists simply of the autobiography of DeWitt Clinton Goodrich, written in 1905 in the form of a 363-page letter to his son Calvin. Due to the detail and dates given, his recollections are presumably taken from diaries that he kept throughout his life. Apparently the son did not see the letter until forty years later.

Goodrich is a good storyteller, and the language he uses is often humorous. He has several real adventures: skirting Confederate troops on his way to Springfield, Mo., to get a letter from Col. Sigel exonerating his father; hearing a violin for the first time on a mission to sell two oxen for his father; helping a fugitive Union soldier hiding in the forest (all these as a boy of under sixteen); foraging for food as a soldier; and various business endeavors. He also inserts several interesting descriptions of processes now extinct, such as how to build a puncheon floor, as his family did on the Kansas frontier.

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