

Collection #
SC 3310

**JAMES DILL AND FAMILY
LETTERS, 1822–1838**

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Reprocessed by

Matt S Holdzkorn
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	Forty-one letters in five manuscript folders
COLLECTION DATES:	1822–1838
PROVENANCE:	Heritage Photo Services (Indianapolis), 2001; Primary Sources-Uncharted Americana (Ann Arbor, Mich.), 2021
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	Catherine Lawrence Randolph Papers, SC1235; Varney-Porter Family Papers, M0639
ACCESSION NUMBER:	2001.0858; 2021.0021
NOTES:	

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

James Dill was born in Belfast, Ireland. Some sources give his birth year 1772, others 1779. He came to the American continent as a boy and eventually settled along the Ohio River. He was an early member of the bar in what became Dearborn County, Indiana.

In 1799, Dill became the second husband of the older Elizabeth [St. Clair] Lawrence. Through this marriage he also became the son-in-law of General Arthur St. Clair, at that time serving as the Governor of the Northwest Territory. For the balance of St. Clair's governorship, roughly 1800-1802, Dill served as his secretary. Dill and Lawrence had one child together, Alexander Hamilton Dill, born in 1800.

William Henry Harrison appointed Dill the first Recorder of Dearborn County in March of 1803, but Dill resigned a few months later. Dill served as a Lieutenant under Anthony Wayne, and as a General in the militia. He had the command of a small group of Indiana soldiers during the War of 1812, but they saw no action.

In 1813 Dill received the appointment he would keep for the rest of his life, Clerk of the Circuit Court in Dearborn County. He also represented the county at Indiana's 1816 Constitutional Convention. Later he would be unanimously elected as Secretary of the Indiana Senate (1817-19, and from 1822-23 to 1829-30).

Dill maintained his self-identity as a soldier for the rest of his life. He wore his hair in a soldier's queue and wore knee breeches and silver buckles long after they went out of fashion. A contemporary judge wrote of him, "Nothing could impair the hold which the gallant soldier and courtly and witty Irishman had on the friendship of the people of this county." He remained Clerk of the Circuit Court until his death in August of 1838.

Mary Skipwith Randolph Sheets was born to Thomas and Catherine [Lawrence] Randolph in 1811 in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Her father was first cousin to Edmund Randolph. Her mother was one of Elizabeth [St. Clair] Lawrence's children from her first marriage. After Mary's father died at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, James Dill, her step-grandfather, assumed responsibility for her. Her mother Catherine died in 1816.

Mary married William Sheets, a paper and stationery merchant, on 29 May 1833. At about that time they moved from Lawrenceburg to Indianapolis because Sheets had been elected Indiana's Secretary of State. Mary and William had several children together. William died in 1872, and Mary died in Philadelphia, PA on 6 Nov 1892. She is buried in Indianapolis.

Sources:

Archibald Shaw, ed., *History of Dearborn County Indiana*, (B.F. Bowen & Company : Indianapolis, 1915).

Chris McHenry, "Gen. James Dill was a character," *Dearborn County Register*, 28 Aug. 1997.

"Cousins of the President-Elect," *Indianapolis Journal*, 29 Nov. 1888.

“The Death of Mr. Sheets,” *Indianapolis News*, 5 Mar. 1872.

F.E. Weakley & Co., “Gen. James Dill,” *History of Dearborn and Ohio Counties, Indiana*, 1885.

“Funeral of Mrs. Sheets,” *Indianapolis Journal*, 11 Nov. 1892.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains forty-one handwritten letters, dating from 1822 to 1838. Most were written by James Dill while serving in the Indiana General Assembly at Corydon and then Indianapolis. Two were written by his wife, Elizabeth (“Eliza” in the letters), and two were written by their son Alexander Hamilton Dill. All but two are to Mary S. [Randolph] Sheets. Two letters from Dill are addressed to William Sheets. James Dill refers to himself as Mary’s father in the letters, and most use the salutation, “My Dearest Child”.

The letters discuss daily life, Dill's health, items sent between Dill and the Sheetses, and the birth of Mary's daughter, Elizabeth "Betty" Lawrence Sheets in 1836.

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James Dill to Mary S. Randolph, Dec. 1822-Feb. 1826

James Dill to Mary S. Randolph, Mar. 1826-Feb. 1833

Eliza Dill to Mary S. Randolph, Nov. 1823; n.d.

A.H. Dill to Mary S. Randolph, Oct. 1825; Jan. 1830

James Dill to William and Mary [Randolph] Sheets,
Aug. 1833-Feb. 1838

CONTAINER

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Folder 4

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