

**The Filson Historical Society**

**Simrall Family  
Papers, 1812-1917**

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Size of Collection:  
0.33 Cubic Feet

Location Number:  
Mss./A/S613

## **Simrall Family Papers, 1812-1917**

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Simrall Family papers consist of letters written by Colonel James Simrall between 1812 and 1823 and letters received by Judge John Graham Simrall between 1882 and 1917. They are arranged in chronological order.

Colonel Simrall writes to his wife, Rebecca Graham Simrall, in Shelbyville, Ky., of his activities as Lt. Colonel and Colonel of Kentucky regiments during campaigns in the Northwest/Great Lakes Theater of the War of 1812. He was ordered to move against the Indians inhabiting lands in the Mississinewa River Valley of Indiana. The report (a photocopy of the original) he generated for Major Thomas Speed giving thorough details of various campaigns against the Indian tribes there and a careful survey of the territory, noting the terrain and distances, is included in this collection. Other letters document the movement of his and other officers' troops in Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Upper Canada, primarily during the 1813 Thames Campaign. His 1816 and 1817 letters note his participation in legislative activities and his procurement of a slave and goods in Frankfort, Ky.

Throughout 1823 Simrall writes his wife and sons a series of letters reporting on his journey on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to the Fever River region in Illinois. He is accompanied by his slave, "Bob," and is mining for lead with hired hands alongside Col. [James] Johnson and others. Also included is a summons from the Sheriff of Shelby County in 1823.

Letters to Judge John Simrall are written by John Hess Leathers, James K. Patterson, and Issa Desha Breckinridge offering congratulations, stating their legal interests, and requesting his endorsement of them. One letter is from his brother, Samuel B. Simrall, concerning his job and the sale of a horse and letters from his law partner, Temple Bodley, concern their law practice. There are two letters, from Thomas Speed and R. C. Ballard Thruston, discussing an "old" report [the 1812 Mississinewa Campaign] by Colonel Simrall during the War of 1812.

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### Biographical Note

James T. Simrall was born March 18, 1781, in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He moved from Culpeper County, Virginia, to Kentucky and is believed to have settled in Shelby County in 1792. Sources report that he married Rebecca Graham on December 30, 1804, in Frederick County, Virginia. In the War of 1812 Simrall was in active service by September 1812 under General William Henry Harrison, serving as a lieutenant colonel and colonel. He responded to a statewide recruiting campaign by recruiting several mounted companies in Kentucky. He was one of the leaders of the campaign on late 1812 against the Indians inhabiting the Mississinewa River Valley of Indiana. He also served as a leader in the campaign that culminated in the Battle of the Thames in October 1813. Following the War of 1812, his health was impaired by hard service and his estate was in a state of neglect. From 1814 to 1818 he represented Shelby County as a senator in the state legislature and was involved in early legislative efforts to finance the construction of a canal at the Falls of the Ohio. He traveled to the Fever River region of Illinois in 1823 where he was involved in lead mining operations. It was there that he died on September 9 of the same year. The Simrall children were sons John Graham, James, William, Joseph, Horatio, and daughter Cornelia.

John Graham Simrall, Jr., was born in Fayette County, Kentucky, on March 18, 1840, and is the grandson of Colonel James Simrall. His father, John Graham Simrall, was a noted Presbyterian divine. His mother was the daughter of Walter Bullock, a farmer of Fayette County. Simrall was a student at Centre College and graduated at age seventeen with second honors in his class of forty-seven members. Too young for law school, his father placed him under Judge George Robertson, of Lexington, for two years of courses in reading, history, and law. He then entered the senior class of the Louisville Law School and graduated with honors in 1861. Within six months, he was offered a partnership by Judge William S. Bodley of the Louisville bar, under the name of Bodley & Simrall, until Judge Bodley's death in 1878. Judge Simrall then took his late partner's son, Temple Bodley, into partnership with him under the name of Simrall & Bodley.

In 1882 Simrall was appointed vice chancellor of the Louisville chancery court by Governor Luke P. Blackburn. In 1884 he was elected, for a six year term, the first judge of the law and equity court. He served for three years and then resigned in order to resume the private practice of law with Bodley. He worked and became friends with Chief Justice John Taylor Coleridge of England during his visit to the United States in 1883. Judge Simrall was also one of the members of the first board of managers of the Agricultural & Mechanical School at Lexington and of the board of managers of the Colored Normal School in Frankfort. In 1895 he was a candidate for the court of appeals but was defeated. Simrall married his cousin, Cornelia Smith, with whom he had one child, Nellie. He died in 1905.

**Sources:** Young, Colonel Bennett H. *The Battle of the Thames: In Which Kentuckians Defeated the British, French, and Indians, October 5, 1813.* (John P. Morton and Company, 1903).

Battle, J.H., Perrin, W.H., and Kniffin, G.C. *Kentucky: A History of the State, 8<sup>th</sup> ed.* (F.A. Battey Publishing, 1885)

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Folder 2: Colonel James Simrall letters, January 1816-December 1817

Folder 3: Colonel James Simrall letters, April 1823

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Folder 5: Letters to Judge John Graham Simrall, October 1882-February 1917

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