

A0003**Abert Family Letters, 1835-1846**

2 folders

Processed by Katy Smith, July 2001

REPOSITORY

Missouri Historical Society Archives

P.O. Box 11940

St. Louis, MO 63112-0040

314-746-4510

archives@mohistory.org

DONOR INFORMATION

Letters were purchased through the Bixby Book and Manuscript Fund from Walter A. Benjamin, New York, September 10, 1951.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John James Abert (1791-1863) was born in Maryland in 1791 and entered West Point on January 18, 1808. After graduating in 1811, he refused a commission, and instead practiced law. Abert served as a private during the War of 1812. In 1814, the army reappointed him as a major in the topographical engineers where he took command of a series of surveys along the Atlantic coast. Ten years later, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel, and in 1828 he was promoted to colonel and chief of the topographical engineers. Abert held this position until 1861, when he retired due to ill health. During the 1830s, Abert was also involved in the moving of the Native Americans to reservations under the Indian Removal Bill of 1830, and he acted as commissioner and agent to the Creek and Wyandotte Indians in 1833-1834. Abert died January 27, 1863, in Washington, D.C.

James William Abert (1820-1897), son of John James Abert, also served with the topographical engineers. Like his father, he attended West Point, and, after graduating in 1842, was assigned to the 5th United States Infantry. In 1843, he was transferred to the topographical engineers. James Abert sketched for Fremont on the first part of his 1845 expedition, and Fremont later gave command of the Canadian River mission to Lieutenants Abert and Peck. While on the mission, Abert kept written accounts, drew maps, and made sketches and watercolors of the Native Americans, Bent's Fort, and the native flora and fauna. In 1846, Abert and Peck surveyed New Mexico and again kept journals of the regional characteristics and peoples. Abert also taught drawing at West Point, was a business man in Cincinnati, served as examiner of patents in Washington, D.C., and was a professor of English literature at the University of Missouri. He died August 10, 1897, at his home in Newport, Kentucky.

George William Featherstonhaugh (1780-1866) was the first United States-appointed geologist. Born in London in 1780, he emigrated to America in 1807 and settled in Duanesburg, New York. He moved to Philadelphia in 1831, where he published the *Monthly American Journal of Geology and Natural History* and made surveys along the Atlantic coast. In 1834, he was appointed the official U.S. geologist, and was authorized to make a geological report of Missouri and Arkansas, and later other regions. In 1838, Great Britain commissioned him to survey and

define the boundary between Maine and Canada. In 1845, he was appointed consul for the British government at Le Havre, France, where he died in 1866.

Thomas Fitzpatrick (1799-1854), mountain man, trapper, fur trader, guide, and scout, acted as guide on the 1845 Fremont expedition, and accompanied Abert and Peck on the Canadian River mission. Known as “Broken Hand,” due to the loss of two fingers during a gun battle, Fitzpatrick was appointed an Indian agent in 1846 and was instrumental in a number of peace treaties.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of thirteen letters—eleven written by G.W. Featherstonhaugh to Colonel John J. Abert and two written by Thomas Fitzpatrick to Lieutenant James W. Abert.

The Featherstonhaugh letters were written from various locales including Detroit, Green Bay, Prairie du Chien, North Carolina, and Quebec. He related details about his explorations, including geological reports, descriptions of flora, fauna, and the people encountered, and difficulties with terrain and conditions.

The letters written by Fitzpatrick from St. Louis discuss his findings on Native American languages and political news and gossip.

The following abbreviations have been used in this inventory:

- AL Autograph Letter unsigned (an unsigned letter in the hand of the author)

- ALS Autograph Letter Signed (a letter entirely in the hand of and signed by the author)

- AN Autograph Note unsigned (an unsigned brief or informal letter or message, often fragmentary, in the hand of the author)

Folder 1

- 2 Aug 1835 ALS G.W. Featherstonhaugh, Detroit, to Col. Abert. Describes the start to Fort Gratiot on the way to Green Bay, the financing of the expedition (requesting funds to be sent to Prairie du Chien), and difficulties with his assistant, Mr. Mather. 7 pages
- 18 Aug 1835 AL [G.W. Featherstonhaugh], Green Bay, to Col. Abert. Describes the weather, the geography and geology of the area, fossils, and the purchase of a canoe and the hiring of voyagers to man it. 4 pages (incomplete)
- 1 Sept 1835 AL [G.W. Featherstonhaugh], Fort Crawford, Prairie du Chien, to Col. Abert. Discusses the weather, geography and geology of the area, and the relationship with Mather. 4 pages
- 13 Sept 1835 ALS G.W. Featherstonhaugh, Fort Snelling, to Col. Abert. Describes his preparations for the “most difficult part of my enterprise”—the visit to the Terre Bleu River and the Coteau de Prairie. 4 pages
- 5 Nov 1835 ALS G.W. Featherstonhaugh, steamboat on the Mississippi, to Col. Abert. Describes his hazardous prairie trip to Fort Armstrong, where he dined with Kearney. 4 pages

Folder 2

- 13 Nov 1836 AN [G.W. Featherstonhaugh] to Col. Abert giving future address and stating that the U.S. Mining Company had paid a second dividend. 1 page
- 19 May 1837 ALS G.W. Featherstonhaugh, Galena, to Col. Abert. Discusses a proposal of himself and Taylor to examine the territory of Wisconsin, his opinion on Nicollet and his writing of his travels, and land speculation along the Mississippi. 4 pages
- 19 July 1837 AL [G.W. Featherstonhaugh], Decatur, Alabama, to Col. Abert. Describes his travels and geological findings in the eastern and southern United States. 4 pages (incomplete)
- 24 Sept 1837 ALS G.W. Featherstonhaugh, mountains of Burke County, North Carolina, to Col. Abert. Describes the countryside and the people. 2 pages
- 16 Sept 1838 ALS G.W. Featherstonhaugh, Quebec, to Col. Abert. Discusses the changes in Quebec since he last visited thirty-one years previously and gossip, including libel against him. 3 pages
- 12 Dec 1838 ALS G.W. Featherstonhaugh, New York, to Col. Abert regarding current legal and political matters. 2 pages

- 5 Feb 1846 ALS Thomas Fitzpatrick, St. Louis, to Lieut. J.W. Abert [Abert], Washington, D.C. Discusses his opinions regarding the origins of the Indian languages and the custom of cannibalism. 3 pages
- 12 May 1846 ALS Thomas Fitzpatrick, St. Louis, to Lieut. J.W. Abert, Washington, D.C. Discusses his return from the Democratic convention to nominate the next district representative candidate, the increased immigration to Oregon and California, his reluctance to accept guide positions until the Congress makes a decision regarding Oregon, and other local politics. 3 pages