

Archives and Special Collections

Dickinson College

Carlisle, Pennsylvania

COLLECTION REGISTER

Name : **Johnson, Herman Merrills (1815-1868)** **MC 2000.9**

Materials: Scrapbook (c1860-c1890)

Volume: 0.25 linear feet (1 Document Box)

Donation: Gift of Dr. Theodore M. Johnson, 1928

Usage: These materials have been donated without restrictions on usage.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Herman Merrills Johnson was born on November 25, 1815 in Butternut Township in New York, near Albany. He attended Casenovia Seminary and then went on to Wesleyan University, where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and graduated with an A.B. degree in 1839. Following graduation, he became a professor of Ancient Languages at St. Charles College in Missouri until 1842. At that time he moved on to be a professor at Augusta College in Kentucky where he remained for only two years. In 1844, Johnson began teaching at Ohio Wesleyan University and would remain there until his coming to Dickinson in 1850. That year, he took up the post of professor of English Literature under the administration of Jesse Truesdell Peck and then under Charles Collins. In 1852, Professor Johnson was granted a D.D. degree from Ohio Wesleyan University.

During his ten years as a professor at Dickinson College, Johnson worked with three students to organize a group called "Eclectic Society of Dickinson College," which became active on May 12, 1852, as a chapter of Wesleyan University's Phi Nu Theta, a fraternity to which Johnson had belonged during his college days. This group marked the first fraternity group on Dickinson College campus, but would soon be followed by others such as Phi Kappa Sigma in 1854 and Sigma Chi in 1859.

Following Collins' resignation in 1860, Johnson was elected as the twelfth president of Dickinson College. Much of his presidential term was occupied with the effects on the College of the American Civil War. At the outbreak of war, students from both sides left the College, although in the case of the northerners, Johnson moved swiftly, with the aid of Governor Curtin, to persuade the younger enlistees to return. Classes continued for the most part, with some difficulty. In 1863, Lee's invasion of the North brought the town of Carlisle and Dickinson College under Confederate shellfire and brief occupation in the days immediately preceding the battle at Gettysburg. Following the battle, Federal authorities commandeered most College

buildings for use as hospitals housing the wounded of both sides. No students were present since graduation had been hastily moved up before the action took place.

Following the war, the student body had lost most of its usual influx from the southern states and was only three-fourths of its size in 1860 and Johnson continued to battle the deficits which had plagued his entire presidency. Johnson sought money constantly from the Methodist Conferences, and also sought to modernize the curriculum to make the College more attractive. With the help of the science faculty, including the young and influential Charles Francis Himes, areas of study such as chemistry, geology and metallurgy were incorporated into the program. Also, there was a brief flirtation with a joint venture for a business school, known as the Dickinson Commercial College, which quickly came to naught.

The centenary of the Methodist Church in 1866 finally offered some with relief since the occasion was marked with a significant endowment of new funds. The actual appearance of these funds for use came too late for Johnson. Exhausted by his years of effort and virtually penniless personally, he contracted a cold and died at his home in Carlisle in 1868. He had married Lucena Elizabeth Clark whom he had met in New York during their education. She survived him, as did six of their seven children, one of whom was the novelist Mary Dillon, author of *In Old Bellaire*.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The Herman Merrils Johnson Collection consists of a scrapbook believed to have been kept by the former college president throughout his lifetime and continued by his son Theodore. The collection is housed in one document box. Newspaper clippings from the *New York Sentinel*, *The Emancipator*, and Methodist periodicals constitute the bulk of the scrapbook. A number of poetic verses are also included, although none of the poems appear to have been authored by Johnson. Scrapbook materials that have become separated from the bound volume are stored in separate folders following the scrapbook. These loose materials have been sorted into three folders by subject: poetry, national and local articles, and international interests.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

BOX 01 - MC 2000.9

SCRAPBOOK

Folder 01)	Scrapbook
Folder 02)	Loose materials - Poetry
Folder 03)	Loose materials - National and Local Articles
Folder 04)	Loose materials - International Interests

This collection register was prepared by Eric N. Jester, October 2000.