

**A0115****Thomas Hart Benton (1782-1858) Collection, 1790-1958**

2 boxes (1.0 linear foot)

Processed by Christopher Gordon, September 2003

**REPOSITORY**

Missouri Historical Society Archives

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**DONOR INFORMATION**

The collection consists of donations and purchases from various individuals.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Thomas Hart Benton was born March 14, 1782, near Hillsborough, North Carolina. He was the son of Colonel Jesse Benton and Ann Gooch Benton. The family moved to Tennessee after the death of Col. Benton and settled an area of wilderness twenty-five miles from Nashville. Thomas attended the University of North Carolina but did not complete his studies before the family moved westward. Later, Thomas studied law under St. George Tucker, joined the U.S. Army in 1810, and became closely associated with Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Andrew Jackson. He was admitted to the Tennessee Bar in 1811. Benton was elected to the Tennessee legislature, but when the War of 1812 was declared he was appointed aide-de-camp to General Andrew Jackson. A dispute between Jackson and Benton's brother Jesse and William Carroll eventually involved Thomas and the resulting disagreements resulted in several years of estrangement between Benton and Jackson.

In 1815, Benton moved to St. Louis and started the *Missouri Inquirer* but also continued to practice law. In large part because of his avid support of Missouri statehood, Benton was elected as one of the first two senators from Missouri in 1820 and served in that office for the next thirty years (1821-1851). Benton was a strong Democrat and staunch supporter of President Andrew Jackson. He chose to retire from the U.S. Senate in 1850, but was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1852. Benton ran for governor of Missouri in 1856, but was defeated in a three-way race. He retired from politics and dedicated the remainder of his life to writing about his career in politics. Benton died April 10, 1858, in Washington, D.C. He is buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis. Elizabeth McDowell Benton, whom Thomas married in 1821, died in 1854.

Jesse Benton was the second son of Colonel Jesse and Ann Gooch Benton. He was born in 1783 in North Carolina. Jesse married Mary Childress of Tennessee in 1808. He died in Tennessee in September 1843.

Samuel Benton, the third son of Colonel Jesse and Ann Gooch Benton, was born in 1785. He married Mary Hunter and resided in Nachitoches, Louisiana.

Jesse Benton Fremont was the daughter of Thomas Hart Benton and the wife of John C. Fremont. She was born May 31, 1824, at Cherry Grove, the Benton's estate in Rockbridge County, Virginia. Jesse married John C. Fremont in 1841. She died December 27, 1902, in Los Angeles, California.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The Thomas Hart Benton Collection consists of political correspondence, family letters, family papers, newspaper articles, circulars, photographs, and genealogy and research notes. The collection is arranged in chronological order and is indexed in the Archives Card Catalog. The collection contains original documents, typescripts, and photostats.

The material in Box 1 relates primarily to Benton's career in the newspaper business in St. Louis and the beginning of his political career. Among the items are letters relating to Benton's involvement in the Barton-Hempstead duel and Benton's duel with Charles Lucas, fought in St. Louis in 1817. Folder 2 contains articles from the *Missouri Intelligencer* and *Boonslick Advertiser* concerning Benton's politics, 1821-1828. Folder 3 contains Benton's letters to friends and family regarding his marriage to Elizabeth McDowell in 1821. Folder 4 contains an original copy of a counter petition circulated on Benton's behalf by citizens of Missouri in response to an earlier petition citing Benton's unworthiness to hold office. Folder 5 contains articles written by Benton regarding the annexation of Texas. Folder 7 contains a facsimile of the Expunging Resolution of 1837, Benton's successful attempt to remove the censure placed on Andrew Jackson by the U.S. Senate in 1834.

The collection contains letters from Benton to Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, General John Preston, Reverend Finis Ewing, Father De Smet, Missouri Governor David Dunklin and others regarding Missouri politics, Democratic politics, Jacksonian issues, the Bank of the United States, the salt tax, and John C. Fremont's expedition to the West. Box 2 contains a bound copy of the letter written by Benton declining a chance to run as vice-president under Martin Van Buren.

The collection contains numerous family letters written by Thomas, his brothers Jesse and Samuel, his mother Ann, and various nephews, as well as, Benton's daughter Jesse Ann Benton Fremont. The letters contain information about family slaves, the emigration of Samuel and his family to the Sabine River region of Texas, Jesse Benton, Jr.'s studies at Marion College, and other family business.

## INVENTORY

### **Box 1 (1790-1846)**

- folder 1 1790-1820
- folder 2 Articles taken from *Missouri Intelligencer & Boonslick Advertiser*, 1821-1828
- folder 3 1821-1825
- folder 4 1826-1828
- folder 5 Articles on the retrocession of Texas, 1829
- folder 6 1829-1834
- folder 7 1835-1838
- folder 8 1839-1846

### **Box 2 (1847-1942; 1958; no date)**

- folder 1 1847-1856
- folder 2 1857-1900
- folder 3 1902-1942; 1958
- folder 4 Wm. Chambers research notes, 1949-1950
- folder 5 no year; no date
- folder 6 Benton family genealogy