Letter written by John Preston (1764–1827) to his brother-in-law James McDowell on July 21, 1799. (Smithfield Preston Foundation collection, Ms97-002, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, Virginia Tech.)
A Union Catalog
of Manuscript Collections
of the Preston Family
Laura Katz Smith

When John Preston arrived on American soil in 1738, he might have had a vague vision of the great impact he and his extensive family would play in shaping the history of Virginia and early America. Born around 1699 near Londonderry, Ireland, he and his wife Elizabeth Patton Preston (1700–76) left their homeland with her brother, James Patton, and their children, to settle on lands in the western part of the Virginia colony, in what is now Augusta and Botetourt counties.

After John Preston died in 1747, his son William moved the family farther down the Shenandoah Valley. William Preston (1729–83) in time established himself as a member of the Virginia militia and served as a commissioner of the peace and a surveyor of the newly-opened lands in the region. In 1759 William purchased land in Botetourt County and settled his family in the first of the revered family homes, Greenfield. In 1773 he purchased tracts of land in what is now Montgomery County, Virginia, and built Smithfield, named in honor of his wife, Susanna Smith Preston (1740–1823). Smithfield still stands today as a historical site maintained by the Montgomery County branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

With the family now firmly established in Virginia, they set about on a devoted mission to be fruitful and multiply. William and Susanna begat twelve children, eleven of whom grew to full adulthood and had a myriad of children of their own. William’s four sisters produced twenty-eight children, of whom twenty-four lived to marry and have children as well. Many descendants of this extended family played prominently in the early history of Virginia. James Patton Preston (1774–1843), John Buchanan Floyd (1806–63), and James McDowell (1795–1851) served as governors of Virginia. William Ballard Preston (1805–62) served in the Virginia legislature in the 1830s and 1840s, the United States Congress from 1846 to 1849, and as Secretary of the Navy from 1849 to 1850. Numerous descendants served as military officers or government
officials in the Civil War, on both the Confederate and the Union sides; among them were Robert Taylor Preston (1809–80) and William Preston Johnston (1831–99).

Members of the family also made their marks in South Carolina and Kentucky. William Campbell Preston (1794–1860) was a U.S. Senator from South Carolina from 1833 to 1842 and President of South Carolina College from 1846 to 1851. William Preston (1816–87) was a member of the United States Congress from Kentucky in the 1850s and a United States Minister to Spain from 1858 to 1860.

While the history of the family is certainly admirable, no less so is the dedication that the descendants placed on saving the extraordinary quantity of letters, land deeds, receipts, and documents generated by their venerated ancestors. Aware of the historical value of these treasures, the descendants, including Jane Preston Boulware Lamb and Preston Davie, gave these materials generously to various institutions in Virginia, Kentucky, and South Carolina, to preserve them for the historical record.

The Preston family has been studied and written about in several excellent genealogical publications, including *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia: Descendants of John and Elizabeth (Patton) Preston through Five Generations*, by John Frederick Dorman (The Filson Club, 1982), and *The Preston Genealogy* by William Bowker Preston (Salt Lake City, Utah; *The Deseret News*, 1900). These extensive genealogies, written from pride in the family and a fascination with Smithfield, must also be a result of the sheer availability of the documents. There is no doubt that many of the collections listed below were the basis for much of the research of these and other Preston genealogies.

This listing, or union catalog, describes collections of manuscript materials created by the Preston family, in order to provide researchers of the history of the family a guide to the collections and a lead to the institutions that hold the materials. For the sake of brevity I did not include descriptions of collections of genealogical materials, of which many exist, but focused almost exclusively on collections of original family materials, and of these only the collections that I deemed had true research value.

Each listing includes the institution's name, library's name, and location. I did not include such information as addresses, telephone or facsimile numbers, or contact persons, for fear that as soon as it was written and published the information would change. The name of the collection is that designated by the institution, to aid the researcher when contacting the institutions listed. Where possible, I listed the title of the collec-
tion, a description of the scope and content of the materials, the physical dimensions or number of items the collection encompasses, the identifying number designated by the institution, and any extraordinary characteristics of the collection.

I extend my thanks to the editors of the Smithfield Review, particularly Hugh Campbell and Charles Modlin, for their guidance in compiling this catalog, as well as the many archivists and Special Collections librarians who provided me with inventories and finding aids to aid me in the descriptions. A special thanks to Eileen Parris of the Virginia Historical Society for her extraordinary efforts on my behalf. My appreciation also goes to the Library Faculty Association of the University Libraries of Virginia Tech, who funded the research trips I took to investigate some of the collections at other institutions.

**Preston collections, listed by state and thereunder by institution:**

**Kentucky**

**Filson Club Historical Society**
Louisville, Kentucky

PRESTON FAMILY PAPERS—DAVIE COLLECTION, 1658-1896. 2.0 cu. ft. Correspondence concerning family, business, political, military, and legal matters; land papers, that were in the papers of William Preston (1816-87) and his sister Susan Preston Christy Hepburn (1819-97), and other family members. Inventory available at repository. Mss./A/P937d.

PRESTON FAMILY PAPERS—GRAY COLLECTION, 1754-1899. .66 cu. ft. Collection includes correspondence and other papers relating to the business and legal matters of Francis Preston (1765-1835). Includes correspondence from his father William Preston (1729-83) about the American Revolution and the settlement of his estate, and information about the Prestons' salt business at “Salt Works” in Washington County, Virginia. Inventory available at repository. Mss./A/P937k.

PRESTON FAMILY PAPERS—JOYES COLLECTION. 2.0 cu. ft. Papers created by or written to William Preston (1816-87) of Louisville, Kentucky, and his wife and children. Papers include correspondence discussing personal, legal, land, business, social, and political matters, legal papers, military papers, and certificates and grants. Inventory available at repository. Mss./A/P937j.
Dear Sir,

Arrived here on the 11th of this month precisely 4
months ago. My Brother has not been well and I have been 4
times from which he has been long able to run by his own efforts
much exertion and great sedentary, but on the recovery
perhaps no one will live more rapidly than he long
done come my arrival. I think his Constitution is exceedingly
strong, but as he appears to be in good health and spirits, and
I am now in the country, I think best to return to London,
where I have not gone to employ the time during your
leaves here, and where we shall be able to decide more correctly
the future course. I was not able to meet you about the 16th
and it is a matter of great pleasure to me to learn
that the news my Brother sent you, he is now
much better, perhaps more strength in his body,
and is now accompanied by Dr. 

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WILLIAM PRESTON PAPERS, 1855–76. 7 items. Miscellaneous papers from Preston (1816–87) written mostly during the Civil War.

JOHNSTON FAMILY PAPERS, 1798-1943. 871 items. Correspondence of Albert Sidney Johnston (1803–62) and his son William Preston Johnston (1831–99), much of it concerning their military affairs during the Civil War, including administrative communications received by ASJ, letters received by WPJ as an aide-de-camp to Jefferson Davis, and his correspondence with his wife Rosa during his imprisonment at Fort Delaware and postwar exile in Canada. WPJ’s later correspondence relates to his career on the faculty at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, and as president of Louisiana State University. [AJ72].

University of Kentucky
Special Collections and Archives Service Center
Margaret I. King Library
Lexington, Kentucky

WICKLIFFE-PRESTON FAMILY PAPERS, 1753–1897. 158 boxes. Papers of William Preston (1816–87), a politician and soldier of Louisville, Kentucky. Also includes the papers of Robert Wickliffe (1775–1859), Preston’s father-in-law. Papers consists of letters and documents from noted Kentucky politicians, lawyers, and businessmen, indentures, and bills of sale. Preston’s papers include a diary in which he describes his tour of duty during the Mexican War; other papers include information about Preston’s career in Congress (1852–55), as an ambassador to Spain (1858–61), and as a major general in the Confederate army during the Civil War.

PRESTON-JOHNSTON PAPERS. 32,800 items. Collection consists of the papers of various members of the Kentucky Prestons, including William Preston (1816–87), Robert Wickliffe Preston (1850–1914), Sarah McDowell Preston and the McDowell family, Philip Preston Johnston (1840–1925) and Philip Preston Johnston II (1877–1937), and Margaret Preston Johnston (1885–1964).

Figure 1. Letter written April 27, 1814, by William Campbell Preston to James Monroe. (Mss1 P9267fFA2, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.)
Note from John Preston (1764–1827) to Nicholas Carper about giving James Breckinridge information about Preston's business affairs, June 15, 1789. (Preston Family collection, Ms62-006, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, Virginia Tech).

Louisiana

Tulane University
Manuscripts Department
Howard-Tilton Memorial Library
New Orleans, Louisiana

WILLIAM PRESTON JOHNSTON AND ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON PAPERS, 1700–1900. 11,147 items and 80 vols. Correspondence, diaries, business and legal papers, speeches, lectures, poetry, scrapbooks, ledgers, maps, photographs, and printed matter. WPJ's papers were created predominantly after 1860, with correspondence from Jefferson Davis, George Hancock, Sam Houston, and Robert E. Lee. ASJ's papers include his private and official correspondence and copies of Army orders.
North Carolina

**Duke University**
Special Collections Library
Durham, North Carolina

**JOHN WARFIELD JOHNSTON PAPERS, 1778–1890.** 416 items. Papers of a lawyer, judge and U.S. Senator of Abingdon, Virginia, and his wife, Nicketti Floyd Johnston, and her parents, John Floyd and Letitia Preston Floyd, Letitia's brother, Francis Smith Preston, and other members of the Preston family. Includes letters, fictional and political writings, and other papers, including references to the pioneers of southwestern Virginia and genealogical information.

**WILLIAM AND JOHN PRESTON PAPERS, 1740–1960.** 349 items. Correspondence and other papers of the Prestons relating to surveying, old treaties with the Cherokees, the education of John Preston's children, legislation in the House of Delegates, property of the Preston family, and other matters.

**WILLIAM CAMPBELL PRESTON LETTERS, 1837–59.** 20 items. Personal, financial, and political correspondence of Preston.

South Carolina

**University of South Carolina**
South Caroliniana Library
Columbia, South Carolina


Virginia

**Clinch Valley College of the University of Virginia**
John Cook Wyllie Library
Wise, Virginia

**TRIGG-FLOYD PAPERS, 1830–1903.** Papers of Daniel Trigg (1843–1909), a lawyer and politician from Abingdon, Virginia, and John
Buchanan Floyd, son of John and Letitia Preston Floyd. The Floyd papers relate to Floyd's public service and include correspondence between the women of the Floyd and Johnston families. Floyd's wife was his cousin Sarah Buchanan Preston Floyd, daughter of Francis and Sarah Preston.

**College of William & Mary**  
Manuscripts Department  
Earl Gregg Swem Library  
Williamsburg, Virginia  

ROBERT PRESTON PAPERS, 1777–1864. 575 items. Papers of Robert Preston including letters from relatives in Ireland, documents, surveys, plats, and memorandum books. Mss39.1 P92.

PRESTON FAMILY PAPERS, 1755–1826. 90 items. Papers of three generations of the family reflecting their involvement in the administrative and political life of Virginia and the nation, as well as family concerns on the Virginia frontier. Itemized inventory available. Mss39.1 P91.


**Roanoke Valley Historical Society**  
Roanoke, Virginia  

PRESTON FAMILY COLLECTION, 1754–1828. 30 items. Family letters written between 1784 and 1828, which touch on a variety of political, social, and financial topics. The majority of the letters are written to John Preston, including letters from his second wife Eliza Ann [Carrington Mayo] Preston, and his daughter Elizabeth.

**University of Virginia**  
Alderman Library  
Special Collections Department  
Charlottesville, Virginia  

PRESTON-RADFORD FAMILY PAPERS, 1744–1895. Ca. 1300 items. Correspondence, receipts, surveys, indentures, wills, and other papers concerning farming and crops, land sales, legal affairs, mercantile purchases, and the hiring of slaves, of the Preston and Radford families of southwestern Virginia. Includes accounts (ca. 1755–62) relating
to the service of William Preston against the Indians on the Virginia frontier and estate papers of James Patton. Manuscript #6353.

JAMES BRECKINRIDGE PAPERS, 1783–1904. 456 items. Breckinridge (1763–1833) was a lawyer, army officer, and U.S. representative of Botetourt County, Virginia. Correspondence chiefly relating to Breckinridge’s legal career and his land speculation in western Virginia and Kentucky, legal papers, deeds, militia orders and returns, receipts, accounts, and other papers. Papers include correspondence from Francis Preston, John Preston, and William Preston. Itemized inventory available at the repository. Manuscript #10395.

Virginia Historical Society
Richmond, Virginia

PRESTON FAMILY PAPERS, 1727–1896. 3540 items. Correspondence, accounts, sheriff’s records, land records, estate materials, militia records of James Patton and William Preston. Also includes correspondence, accounts, land records, militia records, state treasurer’s records, and miscellany of John Preston (1764–1827) and Francis Preston, Thomas Lewis Preston, and James Patton Preston. Detailed index and inventory available at the repository. Mss1 P9267.


Virginia Military Institute
Preston Library
VMI Archives
Lexington, Virginia

JOHN T. L. PRESTON PAPERS. 7 items. Includes an historical sketch of VMI written for the Institute’s Semi-Centennial in 1889, Preston’s U.S. passport (1851), and a Franklin Society membership certificate (1856).

Also includes forty letters from John Thomas Lewis Preston to Francis H. Smith, located in the Institute’s official records.
PRESTON FAMILY (ALICE PRESTON MOORE COLLECTION). PAPERS, 1745–1882. 235 items. Papers include business transactions, land surveys, and general store accounts (1745–89) relating to William and Susannah Smith Preston; correspondence, business transactions, and notes on farm affairs (1782–1828) relating to their son, John Preston; correspondence and land surveys (1840–82) relating to John, William A., and Alfred G. Preston; correspondence (1848–61) relating to William Ballard Preston; and a day book (1789–1820) of the Prestons of Washington County. Ms62-004.

PRESTON FAMILY (CHARLES PEALE DIDIER COLLECTION). PAPERS, 1747–1897. 282 items. Separate collection from the Preston family collection listed above. Papers include surveys, promissory notes, and land indentures (1747–70) relating to James Patton; list of quit rents in the Middle District of Augusta (1759–60); promissory notes and correspondence (1755–1806) relating to William Preston; and correspondence, surveys, and business papers (1780–1830) relating to John Preston. Ms85-020.

PRESTON, JOHN (1764–1827). PAPERS, 1806–20, 1844, n.d. 0.2 cu. ft. Papers consist of letters and promissory notes, and documents stating the transfer of lands, slaves, and property. Also includes a letter from J.B. McBride at the Union Theological Seminary, to William M. Radford of Botetourt County, Virginia. Ms94-034.

PRESTON, ROBERT TAYLOR (1809–80). PAPERS, 1829–71, n.d. 0.2 cu. ft. The collection consists of 218 letters, military orders, notes, certificates of military appointments, and other items, the majority collected or created by Preston during the period May 1861 through December 1862. Includes several military orders signed by such members of the Confederate Army as Jubal Early, John B. Floyd, and George E. Pickett, as well as orders written by Preston himself. Also includes a draft of a broadside written by Preston from Solitude on May 13, 1863, as a call to arms to the men of Roanoke and Montgomery County to repel the Union Army which was in the immediate vicinity. Inventory and selected transcripts available. Ms92-003.

PRESTON, WILLIAM (1729–83). LAND GRANT, 1773. 1 item. Land grant for 2075 acres in Botetourt County, Virginia (now the land
that is Smithfield), purchased by Preston, signed by British King George III and Virginia colonial Governor John Murray Dunmore. Ms94-027.

SMITHFIELD PRESTON FOUNDATION. PAPERS, 1784–1881. 0.4 cu. ft. Letters from several members of the Preston family, including John Preston, Eliza Preston Madison, James P. Preston, William C. Preston, Francis Preston, Eliza Preston Carrington, Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, and John Thomas Lewis Preston. Ms97-002.

Washington & Lee University
James Graham Leyburn Library
Special Collections
Lexington, Virginia
Scattered small collections, including letters from John Thomas Lewis Preston in the Baer family collection, notebooks of Margaret Junkin Preston, and William Preston’s 1758 commission as a major in the Virginia militia.

Washington, D.C

Library of Congress
Manuscripts Division
Washington, D.C.

JOHN THOMAS LEWIS PRESTON PAPERS. The collection consists of an 1861 diary kept by Preston while he served with the 9th Virginia Volunteers at Craney Island, Virginia, during the Civil War. Control number mm 77094284.

WILLIAM CAMPBELL PRESTON, FAMILY COLLECTION, 1779–1840. 17 items. Control number mm 79005677.

WADDY THOMPSON PAPERS, 1826–82. 89 items. Papers of a U.S. representative from South Carolina, lawyer, and diplomat. Includes correspondence from William Campbell Preston. Control number mm 79042853.

CAMPBELL-PRESTON-FLOYD FAMILY PAPERS, 1741–1925. 5000 items. Correspondence, account books, survey books, memoranda, bills, receipts, and other papers pertaining to members of the Campbell, Preston, and Floyd families of Southwestern Virginia. Control number 80014910.
Wisconsin

State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

DRAPER MANUSCRIPTS. Collection consists of materials gathered by Wisconsin archivist and historian Lyman Draper (1815–91) on his travels throughout the Allegheny mountains, the western Carolinas and Virginia, the upper Mississippi Valley, and the Ohio River Valley in the 1840s and 1850s. He collected papers and made copious notes that reflected the history of these areas from the 1740s to the early 1800s. The entire collection is composed of 500 volumes of records that are divided into fifty series, arranged by geographical area or the names of those Draper had targeted for biographies, including William Preston. The papers in series QQ (William Preston Papers, 6 volumes) specifically focus on William Preston and the men with whom he corresponded and did business. Topics include Indian affairs, provisions for military protection of the border areas, land surveys and grants in the Virginia frontiers, the preparation for and battle at Point Pleasant of Dunmore's expedition, Preston's negotiations with the Cherokee and Shawnee tribes, and Preston's public service and family interests. The papers in series ZZ (Virginia Manuscripts) include letters received by Draper from descendants of the western Virginia pioneers, and concern Draper's efforts to locate and obtain the papers of William Preston. Series QQ and ZZ are given an item-by-item description in The Preston and Virginia Papers of the Draper Collection of Manuscripts by Mabel Clare Weaks (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1915).