

AC 99-004 INVENTORY

CONLEY, Benjamin, (1815-1886) Papers, 1839-1875, 1880, and n.d.
(bulk 1868-1875). 47 folders. 576 original loose papers
and printed items. 1.5 cu. ft. and 1 oversized folder.

Donor: Freddie J. Armstrong Goetz (Mrs. B.C.) Goodpasture.

These are the business, family, and political letters and accounts of Benjamin Conley from his family's earliest days in the South until his appointment as postmaster in Atlanta. The major parts of the collection are letters among the Georgia Republican Party members during Reconstruction and business of the Macon and Augusta Railroad from 1868-1869.

Correspondents include: Amos T. Akerman, James Atkins, John S. Bigby, Foster Blodgett, Jr., John E. Bryant, Rufus B. Bullock, John T. Burns, Robert T. Kent, John E. King, A.D. Rockafellow, and Thomas J. Speer. There are also single notes by Joseph E. Brown and Alexander Stephens.

Benjamin Conley was born in 1815 in Newark, NJ, and supposedly was clerking in an Augusta, GA, store by 1830. Among his papers are records of several other Conleys, including his brother, Morris J. Conley, an Alabama plantation owner who died during the Civil War. In 1842 he married Sarah (Sallie) H. Semmes and had three children, including John L. Conley, whose papers are also in this collection.

During his early years in the South, Conley was in business with different members of the Force family in Augusta, GA, Charleston, SC, and Alabama. A friend later wrote that Conley had the largest wholesale shoe business in the area. He was

popular enough to be elected mayor of Augusta from 1857-1859 although he was a Whig and later a Unionist.

During the Civil War Conley was cut off from his siblings in the North and withdrew to a Montgomery, AL, plantation to remain neutral. Immediately afterwards his services were greatly in demand, as president of the Macon and Augusta Railroad, delegate to the Georgia Constitutional Convention, and Georgia Senator in 1868.

By 1871, however, the Republican party was in shambles; Governor Bullock fled the state to avoid impeachment; and Conley, as president of the Senate, became governor at the end of October. Unable to prevent a new election (see Attorney General Amos T. Akerman's Dec. 2, 1871, letter in folder 25), Conley served only until James M. Smith's inauguration January 12, 1872.

In addition, Conley had lost much money and business through his association with the "Republican Ring" of Augusta and his support of the *Loyal Georgian* newspaper. For several years he attempted to obtain a federal post in Augusta as postmaster or Internal Revenue agent. Finally, in 1875 he was appointed postmaster in Atlanta where he lived until his death in 1886.

A devout Episcopalian, Conley was associated with St. John's Church in Montgomery, St. Paul's in Augusta, and St. Philip's in Atlanta.

Box Folder

- 1 01 Benjamin C. Conley Letters and Speeches, 1856(?) - 1875.
36 items.

Letters include: business, the Macon and Augusta Railroad presidency, a few items from Conley's term of governor, and applications for a U.S. government position. He took care of his Semmes in-laws' estates and also his brother's Montgomery plantation after the Civil War.

- 02 Letters to Reverend E.E. Ford, D.D., 1861, 1866, and 1867. 6 items.

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Conley's letters to Ford in January 1861 protested St. Paul's, his Anglican Augusta Church, dropping the Prayer for the President. Conley was appointed warden in 1866.

Box Folder

1 03 Notebook, ca. 1858-1859. 2 items.

Cash and memoranda for daily business. An 1859 receipt was removed to Wood Iron Works, folder 13. Also includes a request from J.R. Valleau(?) for a pass for him and his wife (1858?).

04 Cash Journal, 1872. 3 items.

05 Conley Family Records, 1839-1849. 14 items.

Includes records of John Conley, Morris J. Conley, and Benjamin Conley in Alabama and Augusta, GA. Includes City of Augusta depositions from citizens about a fire (1846). An oversized 1842-1843 account and an 1843 New Jersey indenture are filed in folder 47.

06 Conley Family Records, 1850-1859. 7 items.

Most are related to Augusta where Conley was in business with the Force family. See Conley's own correspondence for the 1850's. Includes Edgefield, SC, statement about a slave.

07 Conley Family Records, 1860-1867. 33 items.

Includes Civil War records such as impressment of Conley's slave Harry by the C.S.A.; taxing of crops in Alabama;

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certification of extra service by Private Lewis Conley, 7th GA Cav., in Augusta, 1864; and B. Conley's allegiance to the Union, 1865. Alabama drug bills and New Jersey doctor bills, 1865. Account with Robert, Moses, and Company whom Conley hired in 1866-1867 to manage the Montgomery plantation. Receipts for interest in *Loyal Georgian* bear revenue stamps.

Box Folder

1 08 Morris J. Conley Field Book, 1858-1865. 1 item.

Record kept by Conley's brother near Montgomery, AL. One-line entries give the day's weather. Longer records note plantation work, fields cultivated and fertilized, kitchen garden seeds sown, and fruit trees and vines planted.

09 Morris J. Conley Field Book Loose Papers, ca. 1861-1864 and n.d. 9 items.

News clippings and farm notes. "Pigs given to servants," 1864, with slave names. The undated list of slave names and work done (ca. 1861) was found separately; however, the names match the "pigs given" list, indicating that all papers are connected to the same group of people.

10 Conley Family Letters, 1855-1875. 13 items.

Most of these are letters from and to Benjamin Conley's sister, Mary E. Conley of Alabama and Newark, NJ, some concerning taxes. An 1855 letter is by brother Morris; and an 1863 letter is by Jane F. Conley, his sister or sister-in-law, about Morris's death in 1861. Letters to Benjamin Conley about his sister's taxes are filed with his general correspondence.

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- 11 Sarah H. (Sallie) Semmes (Mrs. Benjamin) Conley Papers,
1868-1882 and n.d. 10 items.

Includes letters to her husband (mixture of private and public affairs) when he was out of town, a letter from a friend, and an advertisement from Williamson and Wilson, dressmakers. Also two photographs thought to be Mrs. Conley.

Box Folder

- 1 12 John Lewis Conley Letters, 1866-1881. 14 items.

Benjamin's son, born about 1845, wrote his father from New Jersey in the 1860's and became a lawyer in Atlanta in the 1870's. He refused to support the organization of a black military organization in Augusta as he said such support would harm his own militia organizing.

- 13 Robert Wood Iron Works Records, 1850, 1854, 1859, and
n.d. 10 items.

Correspondence, reports, and advertisements for a Philadelphia business that specialized in railings and ornamental iron work, concerning shipment south for the Augusta City Hall and monument. An oversized price list is in folder 47.

- 14 James Caldwell and Randle Ramsey Letters, 1865-1867.
11 items.

Montgomery, AL, residents. Caldwell looked after some of Conley's interests by selling cotton and reporting on local events. Ramsey appears to be a tenant farmer, mending fences and

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growing crops for Conley. It was Caldwell's reports that led to Conley hiring Robert, Moses, and Company.

15 James M. Quimby Letters, 1865 and 1874. 2 items.

A Newark, NJ, carriage maker who may have employed John L. Conley in the 1860's. Mr. Quimby was a close personal friend of both Morris and Benjamin Conley.

16 Insurance Correspondence, 1866-1868. 7 items.

Box Folder

1 16 (cont.) William A. Jackson was a Newark, NJ, insurance agent. Folder includes Benjamin Conley letters also.

17 Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodge Records, 1844, 1866-1868, and 1874. 8 items.

Minutes, correspondence, lists, and forms.

18 Political Disabilities Letters, 1868. 24 items.

On February 11, Conley, as Commissioner of the 5th Congressional District, placed an advertisement in a newspaper offering to present the names of those needing to be relieved of political disabilities to "the Committee." These letters are the responses.

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- 19 Georgia Constitution Convention and State Relief
 Records, n.d. 12 items.

 Many of these are printed drafts made for the state
convention.

- 20 John E. King Letters, 1868-1869. 9 items.

 Mr. King wrote Conley from Augusta about the Macon and
Augusta Railroad and loans from New York. Other railway
correspondences is in Incoming Letters, folders 35 and 36.

- 21 John Emory Bryant (1836-1900) Letters, 1867-1868 and
 1871-1873. 8 items.

Box Folder

1 21 (cont.) A former teacher and Union soldier from Maine,
 Bryant came to Augusta to work for the Freed-
man's Bureau and remained to organize the Georgia Equal Rights
Association and publish the *Loyal Georgian*, a Republican news-
paper. He assisted in the formation of the Republican Party but
turned against Governor Bullock when the latter failed to work
for Bryant's goals. As related by Thomas J. Speer, Bryant,
"artless demagogue and reckless adventurer," was then appointed
to the Savannah Custom House. These letters concern money owed
among the principal Republican Publishing Company owners.
Several related receipts from C.H. Prince for the *Loyal Georgian*
are in Incoming Letters, 1866-1867 and 1868, folders 07 and 35.

- 22 Foster Blodgett, Jr., (1826-1877) Letters, 1868 and
 1871-1874. 4 items.

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- 25 Amos Tappan Akerman (1821-1880) Letters, 1868, 1871,
 and 1875. 4 items.

 In April 1868 Akerman discussed ratification of the Georgia Constitution. A May 23 Elberton, GA, letter describes the 1868 election where Akerman had practiced law since 1855. A Republican elector, he was appointed U.S. Attorney General by President Grant in 1870 but was asked to resign only 11 days after writing Governor Conley that the U.S. government could not prevent an election for governor in January 1872. In an 1875 letter of recommendation, Akerman heartily endorsed Conley's "business capacity and political soundness."

- 26 Robert T. Kent Letter, 1871. 1 item.

 Kent, an African-American, Methodist-Episcopal Macon minister, wrote December 19 in support of Conley as governor, directing him to "be Ferme Standing and Acting in the Right."

- 27 Thomas J. Speer (1837-1872) Letters, 1871-1872. 6
 items.

Box Folder

2 27 (cont.) Speer was a Republican representative to the U.S. Congress from Georgia. Letters over a span of six months, during and after Conley's tenure as governor, give news of Georgia politics as seen from Washington, DC, and mention several of the figures represented in this collection: J.E. Bryant, John S. Bigby, and James Atkins. Speer died three months after the last letter in Barnesville, GA.

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- 28 John Taylor Burns (b. 1837) Letters, 1843 and 1871-1872. 5 items.

Burns, Georgia senator from the 42nd District, 1868-1871, was interested in buying Conley's Cherokee County lands. More information about him may be found in the Burns/Harris/Jones Family Papers, AC 83-017. Included is an 1843 registered Cherokee Co. land deed perhaps related.

- 29 Joseph Emerson Brown (1821-1894) Letter, 1872. 1 item.

Brown, former governor and president of the Western and Atlantic Railroad Company in 1872, wrote Conley a short note January 11, telling him that James M. Smith, Governor-elect, would call upon Conley in the Capitol at 4 p.m.

- 30 Caleb Tompkins Letters, 1872. 11 items.

Extensive correspondence from Tompkins and his niece Emily about a valuable box lost on the Western and Atlantic Railroad between Chattanooga and Cartersville in 1865.

- 31 John Summerfield Bigby (1832-1898) Letters, 1872 and 1874. 4 items.

Box Folder

2 31 (cont.) Bigby, U.S. Representative to Congress, was also Chair of the State Central Committee, Union Republican Party. From Newnan in 1874, he wrote a recommendation to the President of the U.S. for Conley's application for postmaster of Augusta.

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES
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37 Incoming Letters, 1870. 5 items.

Quarterly audit of the Western and Atlantic Railroad plus several letters on legal matters.

38 Incoming Letters, 1871, January-November. 29 items.

Many letters from Internal Revenue regarding Mary E. Conley's taxes. An August 8 Moses Brothers' letter reveals that Conley still owned the Montgomery plantation. Most of the letters are from November when Conley was acting governor. See folder 47 for oversized out-of-state proclamations.

39 Incoming Letters, 1871, December. 21 items.

Official correspondence to the governor from various factions of the Republican Party with additional requests from citizens.

40 Incoming Letters, 1872. 32 items.

Most of the letters are from early in the year during the General Assembly. As in the previous folder, a wide range of opinions is expressed from every part of Georgia, especially by Republicans. A Georgia Republican Campaign Club broadsheet is in folder 47.

3 41 Incoming Letters, 1873. 35 items.

Box Folder

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES
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Box Folder

- 47 Oversized Material, 1842-1872 and n.d. 8 items.
- 1842-1843 John Conley Account Page.
- 1843 Essex Co., NJ, deed from Benjamin Conley to
 Barrack T. Nichols.
- 1871 Thanksgiving Proclamation from governors of
 New Jersey and Pennsylvania.
- 1872 Georgia Republican Campaign Club broadsheet.
- n.d. Robert Wood's price list.
- n.d. Columbia and Augusta Railroad map.
- n.d. Handwritten form for listing Northern
 businessmen engaged in Georgia business.