



## University Libraries Special Collections & University Archives

### James W. Denver Papers

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#### Collection Summary

<b>Title:</b>	James W. Denver Letters
<b>Call Number:</b>	MS 2002-03
<b>Size:</b>	0.25 linear feet
<b>Acquisition:</b>	Purchased from M&S Rare Books Inc., June 2001
<b>Processed by:</b>	TJH, 12-18-2001; MN, 9-29-2011
<b>Restrictions:</b>	None
<b>Notes:</b>	None

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#### Content Note

This collection contains seven letters written to James W. Denver by various individuals from March 1858 to September 1858. Denver served as the Territorial Governor of Kansas from December 1857 to November 1858. The collection consists of correspondence written by Edward R. Smith, Judge Joseph J. Williams, George W. Clarke, and George A. Crawford. The letters involve concerns about land acquisition, appointments to territorial county seats, the location of those seats, and the antagonism between the free state and slave state factions of Kansas.

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#### Biography

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James W. Denver was born in Winchester, Virginia, in 1818. He received his education in Ohio and then moved with his parents to Missouri in 1841 to find employment. Denver went back to Ohio in 1842 where he studied law, and was admitted to the bar. He was appointed a captain in the army and served in the war with Mexico until its close, in July, 1848. He moved to California and was elected a state senator in 1852. Denver was then elected to Congress serving from 1855 to 1857. He was appointed, in 1857, by President James Buchanan to be the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The duties of his office took him to the Kansas Territory in December, 1857, where he was appointed Secretary of the Territory. Denver succeeded the acting governor Frederick P. Stanton on December

21, 1857.

The short tenure of Denver's administration concerns itself mostly with the problems of the Lecompton Constitution and the direct referendum that defeated it in January 1858.

The question at the time before the people of Kansas was the decision to adopt the Lecompton Constitution. The convention which framed the constitution had submitted it to the people in such a way that the only question they were called upon to decide was whether it should be adopted with or without slavery. The pro-slavery forces in Kansas, encouraged by Democratic administrations, determined to press for admission to the Union as a slave state. Decidedly a minority, they drew the lines of voting districts to offset the free-state majority, who then boycotted the election for convention delegates. The constitution, which was written at Lecompton, Kansas, protected slave property within the territory. In a series of tests of that document, it became clear, even to Denver, that free state supporters were in an overwhelming majority and that pro-slavery advocates were influencing the statehood process for their own purposes.

Nevertheless, President Buchanan persisted in support of the Lecompton Constitution and recommended that Kansas be admitted as a slave state. This was approved in the U.S. Senate but defeated in the House of Representatives. Meanwhile, the free state majority gained control of the territorial legislature. The Lecompton Constitution was defeated in a direct referendum held in January 1858. Denver spent most of his time trying to put off the pro-slavery attempts to rekindle the debate. He stepped in to mediate many of the local feuds that were going on at the time. Denver was unsure which side was manipulating the issue the most. He disliked the increasing violence of the situation and resigned his governorship on November 9, 1858.

In 1861, he entered the union army and was made a brigadier general. Denver served in the western states, a part of the time in Kansas, and resigned in March, 1863. Afterward he settled in Washington, D.C. to practice law. Denver ran a successful law business for the next 25 years. James W. Denver died in Washington D.C. on August 9, 1892. The Colorado state capital is named after him.

Denver's correspondence with four men comprises the collection. Short biographies of the letter writers follow.

Edward R. Smith was a Mound City businessman, who also invested in land development in southeast Kansas. He tacitly supported the original Lecompton constitution. Smith became a successful land speculator buying up parts of the Indian territories.

Judge Joseph J. Williams was a strong supporter of the Lecompton Constitution, Williams, who was born in Pennsylvania, had pro slavery sympathies. He consistently urged Governor Denver to take action against the free state supporters. Williams was assigned to the Third Judicial District of Kansas with his court located in Fort Scott. It was from there that he carried out several attempts to undermine the referendum that suspended the Lecompton constitution.

George W. Clarke was a Pottawatomie Indian agent who supported the Lecompton constitution. He was part of the Kansas militia before it was taken over by the free staters. After the referendum on the Lecompton Constitution in January 1858, he rode on the side of the pro slavery ruffians who terrorized the supporters of the Wyandotte Constitution.

George A. Crawford was the founder of Fort Scott, Kansas. He was a well-known editor and several times a gubernatorial candidate. In the spring of 1857, he came to Kansas and organized the Fort Scott Town Company, of which Crawford was made president. He was opposed to the agitation kept

up by the border factions but did not change his free state views. (For additional Crawford letters, see MS 75-07, George A. Crawford Papers, held by Special Collections and University Archives, Wichita State University Libraries.)

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## Series Listing

Series 1	Box 1	Correspondence. Seven letters written to James W. Denver from the period of March 1858 to September 1858.
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## Box and Folder Listing

### Series 1 -- Correspondence

Box 1	FF 1	Letter from Edward R. Smith dated March 28, 1858. Smith is asking Denver's advice on buying land. He talks of the political climate and what is the best land to acquire from the Indian Territory. He mentions the passing of the Lecompton Constitution and makes a reference to the free state supporters as freedom shirkers.
Box 1	FF 2	Correspondence from Judge J. J. Williams dated April 24, 1858. Judge Williams issues a warning about resistance to the general government. He wants Denver to come to Fort Scott area and see for himself the border trouble the area is having. Williams makes some disparaging remarks about the free staters and abolitionists. Williams assures Denver the problem with armed mobs will only get worse.
Box 1	FF 3	Correspondence from Judge J. J. Williams dated May 11, 1858. Williams is seeking legal help from Denver, who is a lawyer, about territorial law. Williams argues for suspension of county courts which are administered by allies of Jim Lane and James Montgomery, both avid free state supporters. Williams is frustrated with numerous territorial courts repeatedly moving to different locations to find cooperative coalitions.
Box 1	FF 4	Correspondence from Judge J. J. Williams dated May 12, 1858. Williams discusses an attack by J. Lane and J. Montgomery in Linn County. He urges Denver to summon the militia to help bring in Lane and Montgomery to question them about the attack. Montgomery is accused of killing a "pro slavery" man. Williams presents his evidence of this and pleads with Denver to act.
Box 1	FF 5	Correspondence from George W. Clarke dated May 12, 1858. Clarke writes to defend himself regarding a raid in Linn County. Clarke insists it was a response to Montgomery's action. There appears to have been a newspaper article detailing negative actions taken by Clarke. He is basically telling Denver his side of the story.

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| Box 1 | FF 6 | Correspondence from Judge J. J. Williams dated May 20, 1858. Williams discusses the state of economic trade within Linn County. He feels all the trouble is having a negative effect on the financial well being of the county. He speaks of Montgomery bandits and how the bandits are sympathizing with Jim Lane. He warns that Montgomery's men are apt to seek revenge for Clarke's raid at Fort Scott. Williams again urges for Denver to visit the area.                                      |
| Box 1 | FF 7 | Correspondence from George A. Crawford dated September 1, 1858. Crawford is asking about county seat locations and the officers who administer them. He requests Denver to explain how certain county seat locations are decided on. Crawford writes of an incident of how some Arkansas men are coming up to rescue one of their own held in a Paris, Kansas, jail. He warns Denver if this action takes place the conflict between the two factions of free state/pro-slavery will only escalate. |

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