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Guide to the

Smiley-Polk family documents

1839-1993

Sc MG 713

Processed by Janice Quinter, September 2002.

Summary

Creator: Polk Family

Title: Smiley-Polk family documents

Date: 1839-1993

Size: 0.01 linear feet (1 folder)

Source: Gift of the Polk Family, 2002.

Abstract: The ancestors of the Polk Family, Jim and Amey, their daughter, Judah, and her husband, Kit, along with their children, upon reaching the age of twenty-one), were emancipated in 1840. This occurred one and one-half years after the death of their master, plantation owner Thomas Smelly, in Isle of Wight County, Virginia. The newly-freed Smelly family left Virginia that same year, according to the law prohibiting freed slaves to remain in the state more than one year, and migrated to New Jersey. At some point the family changed their name from Smelly to Smiley. In New Jersey, the Smiley family met another freed family from Maryland, the Polks, and the two families intermarried. By 1993, Amey and Jim Smiley had over one hundred descendants. The Smiley-Polk family documents consist of nine holograph 19th-century documents relating to the emancipation of the ancestors of the Smiley-Polk family of New Jersey, and other items concerning the genealogy of this family.

Preferred citation: [Item], Smiley-Polk family documents, Sc MG 713, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

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Creator History

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Scope and Content Note

The Smiley-Polk family documents consist of nine holograph 19th-century documents relating to the emancipation of the ancestors of the Smiley-Polk family of New Jersey, and other items concerning the genealogy of this family.

Of interest are the freedom papers of Jim, Amey, and Judith Smellie (sic), later Smiley, attesting to their free emancipated status (1839) following the death of their master, Thomas Smelly, in Isle of Wight County, Virginia. There is one original copy and four court copies of Thomas Smelly's last will and testament stating that Smelly unconditionally emancipates Jim, Amey, and Judith, divides 100 dollars among them, and also grants freedom to their future issue (1839-1850). Another document, dated 1840, states that according to the laws of Virginia, any person who has been emancipated by his owner must leave the state within twelve months of the owner's death. It further attests to Amey's good character and recommends her to any community.

Additionally, there is an obituary written by Charles C. Smiley for Frances Ann White, a descendant of William and Frances Polk (1938). The printed material in the collection includes two addresses by Charles C. Smiley to the seventh and twenty-second family reunions held in New Jersey, 1921 and 1938, respectively, along with photocopies of two letters he wrote, 1934 and 1947. Photocopies of pertinent sections of a 1993 book *Historical Notes on Isle of Wight County*, as well as maps and a list of descendants of Jim Smiley, complete the collection.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American families
Free African Americans -- Virginia
Genealogy
Slavery -- United States
Slaves -- Emancipation -- Virginia

Names

Polk Family
Smiley Family (Organization)