

# George Nicholas Sanders Family Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the  
Library of Congress

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Manuscript Division, Library of  
Congress

Washington, D.C.

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Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/mss.contact>

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## Collection Summary

Title: George Nicholas Sanders Family Papers

Span Dates: 1833-1973

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1833-1900)

ID No.: MSS60053

Creator: Sanders, George Nicholas, 1812-1873

Extent: 200 items; 2 containers; 1 linear foot; 1 microfilm reel

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Financier, lobbyist, and Confederate agent in Europe. Mainly journals of Anna J.

Sanders, wife of George Nicholas Sanders, and correspondence to and from George Nicholas Sanders and other members of the Sanders family relating to mid-nineteenth century politics, social life, and the Civil War. Subjects include the activities of George Nicholas Sanders and the wartime imprisonment and death of their son, Reid Sanders, as a Confederate soldier.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### People

Beauregard, G. T. (Gustave Toutant), 1818-1893.

Belmont, August, 1813-1890--Correspondence.

Benjamin, J. P. (Judah Philip), 1811-1884--Correspondence.

Breckinridge, Mary, 1826-1907--Correspondence.

Buchanan, James, 1791-1868.

Cass, Lewis, 1782-1866--Correspondence.

Clay, Henry, 1777-1852--Death and burial.

Davis, Jefferson, 1808-1889--Correspondence.

Douglas, Stephen A. (Stephen Arnold), 1813-1861--Correspondence.

Douglas, Stephen A. (Stephen Arnold), 1813-1861.

Floyd, John B. (John Buchanan), 1806-1863--Correspondence.

Floyd, John B. (John Buchanan), 1806-1863.

Forney, John W. (John Wien), 1817-1881--Correspondence.

Hunter, R. M. T. (Robert Mercer Taliaferro), 1809-1887--Correspondence.

Mallory, Stephen R. (Stephen Russell), 1813-1873--Correspondence.

Pierce, Benjamin, 1841-1853--Death and burial.

Sanders family.

Sanders, Anna Johnson Reid, circa 1815-1890. Anna Johnson Reid Sanders correspondence and journals.

Sanders, George N. (George Nicholas), 1848-1890. George N. Sanders journal.

Sanders, George Nicholas, 1812-1873.

Sanders, Reid, 1837-1864.

Sickles, Daniel Edgar, 1819-1914.

Webster, Daniel, 1782-1852--Death and burial.

### Organizations

Democratic National Convention (1852 : Baltimore, Md.)

Democratic Party (U.S.)

Virginia Military Institute.

### Subjects

American Confederate voluntary exiles--Canada.

Europeans--New York (State)--New York.  
Presidents--United States--Election--1852.

#### Places

Confederate States of America--History.  
New York (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.  
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Prisoners and prisons.  
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.  
United States--Politics and government--19th century.

#### Occupations

Confederate agents.  
Financiers.  
Lobbyists.

## Administrative Information

#### Provenance

The family papers of George Nicholas Sanders, financier, lobbyist, and Confederate agent in Europe, were purchased by the Library of Congress in 1914. An addition was deposited by the estate of Osborne C. Holland in 1981.

#### Processing History

The papers of the George Nicholas Sanders family were processed circa 1980. The finding aid was revised in 2012.

#### Related Material

Related collections in the Manuscript Division include two reels of microfilm from a private source containing selections of correspondence and newspaper clippings relating to George Nicholas Sanders from Record Group 109, Records of the Confederate States of America, in the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

#### Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of the George Nicholas Sanders family in these papers and in other collections in the custody of the Library of Congress is reserved. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division for further information.

#### Access and Restrictions

The papers of the George Nicholas Sanders family are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

#### Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on one reel. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

#### Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, George Nicholas Sanders Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1812, Feb.	Born, Lexington, Ky.
1836	Married Anna Johnson Reid (died 1890)
1843	Helped organize a meeting in Ghent, Ky., calling for annexation of Texas, and corresponded with 1844 presidential contenders on the issue
1848	In Paris, France, as agent of George Law, attempting to sell to European revolutionaries muskets discarded by the U. S. War Department
1850s	One of the leaders of the “Young America” movement
1851	Bought <i>U. S. Magazine and Democratic Review</i> (shortened to <i>Democratic Review</i> )
1853-1854	Appointed U.S. consul, London, England; confirmation was denied by the Senate and Sanders was recalled
1857-1860	Navy agent, New York, N.Y.
1861-1865	Confederate sympathizer and occasional agent on behalf of the Confederate government
1864	Member, Niagara peace conference
1872	Returned to the United States after several years in exile
1873, Aug. 13	Died, New York, N.Y.

## Scope and Content Note

The family papers of George Nicholas Sanders (1812-1873) span the years 1833-1973, with the bulk of the material dating from 1833-1900. The collection is comprised primarily of journals, correspondence, and assorted printed matter, and is organized by type of material.

Inspired by European revolutionaries of the 1840s, in the early 1850s Sanders was one of the leaders of the “Young America” movement, which, in historian Merle Curti’s words, “contended that a crusade for European republicanism would divert attention from sectional controversies, open European markets to American surplus, and fulfill the American mission of furthering the cause of democracy and freedom throughout the world.” [\[1\]](#) Having received a recess appointment as United States consul to London, England in 1853, Sanders established a residence in London that became a center of activity for exiled European revolutionaries such as Lajos Kossuth of Hungary, and Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) of Italy. Unfortunately for Sanders’s diplomatic career, he promised financial support which he could not actually secure for the revolutionaries. While his enthusiasm endeared him to the Europeans, many in Congress considered his actions ill-advised, and he returned to the United States after the Senate refused to confirm his appointment in 1854. However, his political and diplomatic activities put him in contact with many of the prominent Democratic politicians of the 1850s, although he disdained what he termed the “old fogey” wing of the Democratic Party.

Sanders is perhaps better known as a Confederate operative, although the details of some of his activities can be difficult to document. He did negotiate with the Confederate government for the construction in England of several vessels that could run the Union blockade, he was a member of the failed peace conference in Niagara, New York, attended in the summer of 1864 by Horace Greeley and John Hay, and later in 1864 was in Canada to represent the Confederate raiders of St. Albans, Vermont. Sanders initially was suspected of having been part of the conspiracy to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln, and a \$25,000 bounty was put on his head in May 1865. Although not charged in the conspiracy, Sanders went into exile for several years after the Civil War. Sanders's sons Reid and Lewis also undertook secret missions for the Confederacy, and Reid's imprisonment in 1863 by Union authorities at Fort Warren in Boston, Massachusetts, led to his death in 1864.

The papers are organized into two sections. The first section contains the journals of Sanders's wife, Anna J. Sanders. The journals are arranged chronologically. Anna Sanders's journals combine commentary on events of both national and personal importance, with family financial accounts and assorted notes. The journals for the 1850s are particularly rich in terms of historical content. Her 1850-1853 journal notes their frequent stays at the Astor House in New York, which put the family in a position to interact with the Kossuths and other Europeans in the city. In 1852, she made note of the participation of the Young America movement at the Democratic National Convention in Baltimore, the presidential election, the deaths of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, and in 1853 she mentioned conversations about the tragic train accident that killed President-elect Franklin Pierce's son. The 1855-1857 journal contains Anna Sanders's comments on political events of the day, as well as Democratic politicians familiar to her husband, such as Governor John B. Floyd of Virginia, Stephen A. Douglas, Daniel Edgar Sickles, and James Buchanan. In July 1856 she recorded that the "The Black Republicans are exhibiting the bad taste of bringing Mrs. Fremont forward in the canvas." The journal covering the period 1850-1853 also contains interfiled newspaper clippings and notes dating from 1861-1864.

Journals for the Civil War period note events of personal and historical interest, but some entries are written in a more hurried style than her earlier diaries, and occasionally contain transcriptions of letters written during the period. Anna Sanders alludes to a few of her husband's wartime activities, but is much more focused on her son Reid's imprisonment and death. The 1863-1865 journal was begun in 1863 by George N. Sanders (1848-1890), while a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute. It was then taken up by his mother, who wrote the majority of the journal entries.

The second section of the collection includes correspondence written to and from members of the Sanders family. Correspondents include many antebellum Democratic politicians and Confederate authorities, such as G. T. Beauregard, August Belmont (1813-1890), J. P. Benjamin, Lewis Cass, Jefferson Davis, Stephen A. Douglas, John B. Floyd, Henry S. Foote, J. W. Forney, R. M. T. Hunter, and Stephen R. Mallory.

Antebellum letters between family members primarily contain family news. Reflecting the fear of death for women in childbearing years, in 1839 Anna Sanders wrote her young son Reid a letter imparting her views on moral principles, literature, and education, in the event she died before being able to teach her son these values personally. Family letters written during the Civil War also document what the Sanders women experienced on the homefront, and to a lesser degree the activities George Sanders and his sons Reid and Lewis undertook on behalf of the Confederacy. The men's movements are not detailed in much depth, especially because many of their domestic and interational operations were covert. Postwar correspondence includes letters from Canada written by Southern refugees immediately after the war, including one in November 1865 from Mary Breckinridge who notes the pleasure of having a home after moving so frequently during the war.

Much of the correspondence to and from Reid Sanders has been organized separately, but some is interspersed within the general correspondence. General correspondence for 1866-1905 also

includes a few items dated in the early 1860s, as well as photocopies from 1905 and 1973 that contain genealogical information on the Sanders family.

[1] Merle E. Curti, "Sanders, George Nicholas," *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. XVII, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 334.

## Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is organized by type of material.

# Container List

Microfilm shelf no. 22,212

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1 not filmed	Journals of Anna J. Sanders
BOX 1	1837-1846
BOX 1	1850-1853
BOX 1	1855-1857
BOX 1	1863
BOX 1	1863-1865
BOX 1	1865-1867
BOX 2	General correspondence
REEL 1	
BOX 2	1833-1850
REEL 1	
BOX 2	1851-1860
REEL 1	
BOX 2	1861-1863
REEL 1	
BOX 2	1864-1865
REEL 1	
BOX 2	1866-1905, 1973
REEL 1	
BOX 2	Reid Sanders correspondence, 1861-1888
REEL 1	
BOX 2	Postal steamers correspondence, 1861-1863
REEL 1	
BOX 2 not filmed	Printed matter, 1854-1871, undated