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Guide to the
Edwards Pierrepont papers
1839-1910
MssCol 19024

Compiled by Kit Messick, November 2012

Summary

Creator: Pierrepont, Edwards, 1817-1892

Title: Edwards Pierrepont papers, 1839-1910

Size: 1.68 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: Purchased from The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2012

Abstract: An American lawyer, jurist, and statesman, Edwards Pierrepont practiced law in Ohio and New York before being appointed United States Attorney General under Ulysses S. Grant. Pierrepont's papers include case files and related correspondence; professional correspondence with notable lawyers, jurists, and statesmen; and a small quantity of financial papers, real estate files, and printed matter.

Access: Advance notice required. Apply at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>.

Preferred citation: Edwards Pierrepont papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Related collections

Edwards Pierrepont papers.University of Iowa Special Collections

Edwards Pierrepont papers.Yale University Library

Creator history

Edwards Pierrepont (1817-1892) was an American lawyer, jurist, and statesman. Born Edwards Munson Pierpont in North Haven, Connecticut, Pierrepont later reverted to an earlier spelling of the family name. He studied at Yale College alongside Samuel J. Tilden, William Maxwell Evarts, and Benjamin Silliman, Jr., graduating in 1837. He studied law at the New Haven Law School and was admitted to the bar in 1840. He practiced law in Columbus, Ohio, before moving to New York and establishing his practice there in 1846. In 1857, Pierrepont was elected judge for the New York City Superior Court. He was a member of the New York State Constitutional Convention (1867-1868), and a member of the Committee of Seventy appointed by Governor Samuel J. Tilden to investigate and curtail Tweed Ring corruption. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln appointed him to a commission for cases involving state prisoners in the custody of military authorities. In return, Pierrepont helped organize the War Democrats in support of Lincoln's 1864 re-election. In 1868, however, Pierrepont aligned himself with Ulysses S. Grant, who later

appointed him to several offices, including United States Attorney General. In this capacity he was responsible for the prosecution of Lincoln assassination conspirator John H. Surratt. He also led the prosecution of the Whiskey Ring," a conspiracy by various politicians and government agents to divert tax revenues from whiskey, though as many of the perpetrators were Republican Party members and confederates of President Grant, Pierrepont's tenure as Attorney General lasted only one year. Afterward, he served as United States minister to Great Britain, then returned to private practice. Edwards Pierrepont died on March 6, 1892, in New York City.

Scope and content note

The Edwards Pierrepont papers constitute a sample of Pierrepont's work in New York and Ohio, both as a lawyer and as a judge, including case files and related correspondence. Also present is professional correspondence to and from notable lawyers, jurists, and statesmen; and a small quantity of financial papers relating mainly to his work, real estate files representing commercial and residential property owned by Pierrepont, and printed matter such as reprints of legal briefs and opinions.

Arrangement

The Edwards Pierrepont papers are organized into the following series:

Series I. Correspondence, 1839-1876, 1910
Series II. Case Files, 1834-1886
Series III. Financial Files, 1839-1900
Series IV. Real Estate Files, 1840-1875
Series V. Printed Material, 1864-1890

Key terms

Subjects

Judges -- New York (State) -- 19th century
Lawyers -- New York (State) -- New York
Lawyers -- Ohio -- 19th century
Political corruption -- New York (State) -- New York
Whiskey frauds

Names

Conkling, F. A. (Frederick Augustus), 1816-1891
O'Connor, Charles, 1804-1884
Patterson, J. F.
Pierrepont, Edwards, 1817-1892
Rawlins, John A. (John Aaron), 1831-1869
Rollins, E. A. (Edward Ashton), 1828-1885
Smith, E. Delafield (Edward Delafield), 1826-1878
Stanton, Edwin McMasters, 1814-1869
Stebbins, Henry G. (Henry George), 1811-1881
Surratt, John H. (John Harrison), 1844-1916 --
Trials, litigation, etc.
Swayne, Noah Haynes, 1804-1884

Wilcox, James A.
Wilcox, P. B. (Phineas Bacon), 1798-1863
Wood, Fernando, 1812-1881

Occupations

Judges
Lawyers

Places

New York (N.Y.) -- Politics and government
New York (State) - Politics and government --
19th century

Container list

Series I. Correspondence, 1839-1876, 1910 (6 folders)

The Correspondence series contains letters dating from 1839-1876, with a single letter from 1910. Correspondence is almost exclusively professional in nature, though a few letters refer to Pierrepont's financial affairs, including railroad investments and properties owned. Pierrepont's real estate holdings are more thoroughly documented in Series IV. Real Estate Files. Not all letters are to or from Pierrepont; many are to his colleagues, or to parties concerned with cases in which Pierrepont participated either as a lawyer or judge. Correspondence relevant to specific cases may also be found in Series II. Legal Files.

Most letters to Pierrepont dating from the 1850s are from James and P. B. Wilcox, his Ohio law partners. Letters dating from the 1860s often relate to Pierrepont's work on President Lincoln's commission for cases involving state prisoners in the custody of military authorities during the Civil War. Notable are letters between Secretary of State William H. Seward and others discussing possible espionage perpetrated by Bank of the Republic president James T. Soutter, and two 1864 letters from Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to Major General Edward R. S. Canby regarding the conveyance of cotton grown "within the rebel lines" to the United States. The difficulties of Reconstruction are described in a partial telegram from Secretary of War John Aaron Rawlins (1869), and in a letter from Mississippi attorney George T. Swann (1875). The Rawlins telegram discusses the apprehension in New York City of John H. Pratt, a Major in the Confederate States Army charged with murder and treason ("the Stockade Case") in Jefferson, Texas. Swann's letter to Hon. J. P. Bradley states that "nothing short of an immediate display of a strong U. S. Military force, under a cool man ... can give us quiet, or any possibility of a free ballot in our fall election."

Pierrepont's efforts as Attorney General to thwart the Whiskey Ring in 1875 are not substantively represented here; however, there are several letters dating from 1868-1870 documenting an earlier whiskey fraud, wherein whiskey and tobacco were seized by the Internal Revenue Service from various New York distillers for tax delinquency. Additional material pertaining to these seizures can be found in Series II. Legal Files. Two letters from 1870 address a possible silk smuggling ring operated out of the New York Customs House by a member of the Guatemalan Consulate.

Notable correspondents present in this series include fellow lawyers, jurists, and statesmen such as Charles O'Connor, F. A. Conkling, Henry G. Stebbins, E. Delafield Smith, Noah Haynes Swayne, and others. One letter from 1910 is addressed to Pierrepont's granddaughter, Margaretta Beckwith. Correspondence is arranged chronologically.

b.1 f.1-6 1839-1876, 1910

Series II. Case Files, 1834-1886 (3 boxes)

The Case Files document some of Pierrepont's work as a lawyer and jurist in Ohio and New York, and as United States Attorney General. The files include correspondence, briefs, notes, depositions, summonses, warrants, and other legal instruments. Additional correspondence relating to Pierrepont's cases may also be present in Series I. This series should not be considered a comprehensive illustration of Pierrepont's career, as very little material-- and in some cases, no material-- is present to document his most significant trials. Files are arranged alphabetically by plaintiff.

Material documenting Pierrepont's Ohio practice is limited, but includes briefs, opinions, receipts, blank forms, and his law license. Some documents for properties in Ohio have also been included, though they mainly pertain to real estate transactions facilitated by Pierrepont in a legal capacity.

New York files reflect cases either tried or adjudicated by Pierrepont in Chancery Court, Common Pleas Court, and state Superior and Supreme Courts. Of particular note is the case of *Weylan vs. Wood*: Metropolitan Police patrolman Edward Weylen brought suit against New York City mayor Fernando Wood for injuries sustained when the Metropolitan Police attempted to arrest Wood and were assaulted by his unofficial Municipal Police—an event which sparked the 1857 New York City Police Riot.

The Whiskey Fraud file contains material relating to the 1866 seizure of "about 20,000 gallons" of spirits and tobacco from New York distillers by the Internal Revenue Service for tax delinquency, including letters from Commissioner of Internal Revenue E. A. Rollins. Rollins himself was later charged with malfeasance and revenue fraud stemming from these and other seizures, though he was later exonerated. Additional related correspondence can be found in Series I. This fraud is unrelated to the Whiskey Ring prosecuted by Pierrepont as U.S. Attorney General in 1875.

United States files relate chiefly to cases tried in the United States District Court, including a table of income received and taxes owed presented in the case of *U.S. vs. Samuel J. Tilden*. Material relating to the Federal case against Lincoln assassination conspirator John H. Surratt is limited to a small quantity of correspondence and bills for services rendered.

Two folders contain unsorted legal material, including many documents in Pierrepont's often illegible hand.

- b.1 f.7 Ohio, 1834-1843
 - New York
- b.1 f.8 Burdell, Margaret vs. Burdell, John, 1846-1847
- b.1 f.9 Edward, Alfred H.P. vs. Edward, Mary E. et al, 1863
 - Pierrepont, as executor of the Edward estate, was also named in this suit.
- b.1 f.10 Ferris, Thomas J. vs. Henriques, David M., 1857
- b.2 f.1 Goodenough, Rollin A. vs. Rarey, John S., 1861-1863
- b.2 f.2 Henriques, Esther vs. Henriques, David M., 1860
- b.2 f.3 Lake, Joseph vs. Martin, Warrick, undated

Series II. Case Files, 1834-1886 (cont.)

New York (cont.)

- b.2 f.4 Lester, John H. vs. Spofford, 1886
 - b.2 f.5 Maddox, F. H. vs. Stanton, 1883
 - b.2 f.6 Matthews, Edward vs. Habby, John B., undated
 - b.2 f.7 McCullough, Charles H. vs. Colby, John S., 1859
 - b.2 f.8 Milbank, Isaac M. vs. Dennistoun, Alexander, 1851-1856
 - b.2 f.9 New York & Virginia Stock Bank vs. Gibson, Edmund T. H., 1856
 - b.2 f.10 New York Common Pleas Court--Miscellaneous , 1850-1852, undated
 - b.2 f.11 New York Court of Chancery--Miscellaneous, undated
 - b.2 f.12 New York State Superior Court--Miscellaneous, 1852-1874, undated
 - b.2 f.13 New York State Supreme Court--Miscellaneous, 1837-1880, undated
 - b.2 f.14 Rhineland, William C. vs. the Mayor of the City of New York, 1862
 - b.2 f.15 Roberts, Marshall O. vs. Opdyke, George, 1854-1864
 - b.3 f.1 Stewart et. al vs. Granniss, undated
 - b.3 f.2 Weylen, Edward vs. Wood, Fernando, 1857-1862
 - b.3 f.3 Tuppert, William W. and Wilcox, Edwin R. vs. Wade, Benjamin, 1856
 - b.3 f.4 Westcot, Joseph H. vs. Ellis, Robert E. and Thomas P., 1856-1857
 - b.3 f.5 Whiskey Fraud, 1866-1868
See also: Series I. Correspondence, 1866-1869
- United States
- b.3 f.6 U. S. District Court vs. Finlay, Norman M., 1868
 - b.3 f.7 U. S. District Court vs. Fullerton, William, 1870
 - b.3 f.8 U. S. District Court vs. Tilden, Samuel J., 1881 (Relating to income tax owed by Tilden)
 - b.3 f.9 United States vs. Surratt, John H., 1867
 - b.3 f.10-11 Unsorted, 1840s-1870s, undated

b.4 f.1-2 **Series III. Financial Files, 1839-1900** (2 folders)

Pierrepont's financial files consist of bills, receipts, canceled checks, promissory notes, accounts, and statements both to and from Pierrepont, relating to both personal and professional services. Many are bills to Pierrepont's clients for his services.

b.4 f.3 **Series IV. Real Estate Files, 1840-1875** (1 folder)

Real Estate Files contain leases, tenant's agreements, tax assessments, rent collection statements, and other material concerning commercial and residential properties owned by Pierrepont in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Also included are bills and receipts for work done and improvements made on these properties.

b.4 f.4 **Series V. Printed Material, 1864-1890** (1 folder)

The Printed Material series contains reprints of legal briefs and opinions, and includes material related to the landmark immigration case of Chy Lung vs. Freeman, in which Pierrepont defended a Chinese woman unlawfully detained at the port of San Francisco after being classified by immigration officials as “lewd and debauched.” Also available are reprints of Pierrepont's speeches; congressional bills; circular letters; and clippings documenting various legal cases and other subjects of interest.