

**The New York Public Library  
Stephen A. Schwarzman Building  
New York Public Library Archives**

Guide to the

## **Tilden Trust records**

1878-1938

MssArc 4857

Compiled by Richard Hollinger, September 2002

### **Summary**

**Creator:** Tilden Trust

**Title:** Tilden Trust records, 1878-1938

**Size:** 1.36 linear feet (3 boxes)

**Source:** Tilden Trust

**Abstract:** NYPL Archives Record Group 3, Tilden Trust Records, consists of architectural drawings, correspondence, inventories, legal documents, memoranda, news clippings, notes, property maps, publications, and statistical tables that document the legal challenges to the will of Samuel J. Tilden and the disposition of his estate. There are also materials providing information on the activities of the Tilden Trust and the early history of the New York Public Library.

**Access:** Apply to Manuscripts and Archives Division for access at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>

**Preferred citation:** Tilden Trust records, New York Public Library Archives, The New York Public Library

### **Related collections**

Samuel J. Tilden papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Tilden Trust records, 1886-1930, bulk (1890-1915). Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

### **Creator history**

The Tilden Trust was founded, in accordance with provisions of the will of Samuel Jones Tilden (1814-1886), to "establish and maintain a free library in the City New York." It was incorporated by an act of the New York State Legislature on March 26, 1887.

The Act of Incorporation made the executors of Tilden's will, Andrew H. Green (1820-1903), George W. Smith (1836-1921) and John Bigelow (1817-1911), permanent members of the board of trustees of the Tilden Trust, and authorized them to appoint other trustees. On April 26, 1887 they appointed Alexander E. Orr (1831-1914) and Stephen Walker (d.1893). Lewis Cass Ledyard (1851-1932), the lawyer for the executors of the will, was appointed to the board on April 23, 1893 to fill a vacancy left by the death of Walker.

The officers of the board of trustees were: John Bigelow, president; Andrew H. Green, vice-president; George W. Smith, treasurer. L.V.F. Randolph, who was not a member of the board, was the secretary.

In 1887, relatives of Samuel J. Tilden initiated legal proceedings to challenge the 35th clause of his will, which directed that most of his estate be turned over to the Trust. The New York State Supreme Court upheld the validity of the will in a special session in 1889, but reversed the decision in a general session later that year. The Tilden Trust appealed this decision to the Court of Appeals. Before the court reached a decision, however, the Trust reached an out of court settlement with Laura Pelton Hazard, one of the litigants. She gave up her claim to half of the residuary portion of the Tilden Estate, which had been willed to the Tilden Trust, for a payment of \$975,000. On October 27, 1891, the Court of Appeals upheld the ruling that the 35th clause of the will was invalid, with the result that the other half of the residuary portion of the estate went to relatives of Samuel Tilden.

On March 30, 1892, the Tilden Trust reached an agreement with the heirs concerning the division of the remainder of the estate. The Trust received Tilden's books, manuscripts, statues, prints, engravings and pictures; and real estate and investments valued at approximately \$2,000,000. Between 1892 to 1895 the Trustees considered numerous proposals for the use of these assets. After considering various possibilities, they decided to merge the Tilden Trust with Astor and Lenox libraries to form the New York Public Library.

These three institutions were legally consolidated on May 23, 1895. In August of 1895 the books belonging to the Tilden Trust were transferred to the New York Public Library. The other assets of the Trust were legally transferred to the New York Public Library at this time, but remained under the control of the executors of Tilden's will until they were liquidated.

## **Scope and content note**

The records of the Tilden Trust mainly document the legal challenges to the will of Samuel J. Tilden from 1887 to 1892, and the disposition of the Tilden Estate in the 1890s. There are few records for the period after 1900. The papers include materials relating to the consolidation of the Tilden Trust and the Astor and Lenox libraries, and the early development of the New York Public Library. There are also a few items that document the political career of Samuel J. Tilden. The records consist of architectural drawings, correspondence, inventories, legal documents, memoranda, newsclippings, notes, property maps, publications, and statistical tables.

## **Arrangement**

The Tilden Trust records are organized into the following series:

- I. Correspondence, 1886-1938
- II. Papers Relating to the Incorporation and Development of the Tilden Trust, 1878-1894
- III. Papers Relating to the Formation and Early Development of The New York Public Library, 1894-1906
- IV. Legal Documents Concerning the Tilden Estate, 1886-1899

## **Key terms**

### **Subjects**

Libraries -- History -- 19th century  
Libraries -- New York (State) -- New York  
Probate law and practice

**Names**

New York Public Library

Tilden Trust

Tilden, Samuel J. (Samuel Jones), 1814-1886

**Special formats**

Architectural drawings

Lantern slides

Maps

## Container list

### **I. Correspondence, 1886-1938** (17 folders)

- b.1 f.1-11 1886-1898
- b.2 f.1 1899
- b.2 f.2 1900-1902
- b.2 f.3 1903-1905
- b.2 f.4 1906-1908
- b.2 f.5 1917
- b.2 f.6 1938

### **II. Papers Relating to the Incorporation and Development of the Tilden Trust, 1878-1894** (6 folders)

- b.2 f.7 Newsclippings Concerning Samuel J. Tilden, 1878-1880
- b.2 f.8 Last Will and Testament of Samuel Jones Tilden, 1884 (Printed copy of 1886)
- b.2 f.9 Memorials for Samuel J. Tilden, 1886
- b.2 f.10 Papers Concerning the Formation of the Tilden Trust, 1886-1893, n.d.
- b.2 f.11 Papers Relating to the Proposed Tilden Library, 1886-1894  
Architectural Plans for Tilden Library, 1886, 1892

### **III. Papers Relating to the Formation and Early Development of The New York Public Library, 1894-1906** (3 folders)

- b.2 f.12 Papers Relating to the Consolidation of the Astor and Lenox Libraries, and the Tilden Trust, 1894-1895
- b.2 f.13 Papers Relating to the Development of the New York Public Library, 1895-1906
- b.2 f.14 Statistics of New York City Libraries, 1897-1898, 1900

### **IV. Legal Documents Concerning the Tilden Estate, 1886-1899** (11 folders)

- b.2 f.15 Inventory of the Effects of Samuel J. Tilden at Graystone, 1886
- b.3 f.1 Shelf Inventory of the Tilden Library, 1887
- b.3 f.2 Inventories and Maps of Property Belonging to the Estates of Samuel J. Tilden, 1892, n.d.
- b.3 f.3 George Tilden vs. the Executors of the Tilden Estate, 1889
- b.3 f.4 Agreement between Laura P. Hazard and the Tilden Trust for the Partition of the Tilden Estate, 1891
- b.3 f.5 Papers Relating to the Partition of the Tilden Estate, 1893-1899
- b.3 f.6 Trustees of the Tilden Estate vs. George H. Tilden et. al., 1899
- b.3 f.7 Mortgage Contract between Edward Ackley and the Tilden Estate, 1894-1895
- b.3 f.8 Henrietta Blatchard vs. the N.Y.P.L. et. al., 1895
- b.3 f.9 The Hilton Bridge Construction Company vs. the Tilden Trust et al., 1897
- b.3 f.10 Edward Van Ordern vs. Executors of the S. Tilden will, 1899