



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Harold A. Stevens papers

1907-1990 [bulk 1936-1990]

Sc MG 605

Processed by Paula Williams.

Summary

Creator: Stevens, Harold A., 1907-1990

Title: Harold A. Stevens papers

Date: 1907-1990 [bulk 1936-1990]

Source: Gift of: Ella M. Stevens SCM 97-2

Abstract: The collection documents Stevens' advancement to the highest court in New York State and his contributions to the legal profession particularly his role as a founder of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). Stevens' accomplishments are reflected in letters from his contemporaries, colleagues, and dignitaries. Approximately one third of the collection, ten archival boxes, from 1951 to 1969, consists of judicial journals or volumes containing descriptive notes and transcripts from court cases ranging from litigation between companies and personal lawsuits to grand larceny, robbery, separations and divorces, custody proceedings and murder trials over which Stevens presided. There is also one notebook entitled, "Torts, Abstracts, and Five Point Method Notes." The collection also contains some letters, legal documents from a few court cases, and two folders of International Commission of Jurists Conference papers. _.

Preferred citation: Harold A. Stevens papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Paula Williams; Machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

Separated Materials:

The following items were removed from:

Name of Collection/Papers Harold Arnoldus Stevens

Accession Number SCM 97-2

Donor: Mrs. Ella M. Stevens

Date received:1/14/97

Date transferred:1/21/97

The item(s) listed below have been sent to the division indicated, either to be retained or disposed of there. Any items that should receive special disposition are clearly marked.

span class="emph">Schomburg Library:/span>

BLACK FACES IN HIGH PLACES: Negroes in Government; The New York

Red Book; picture story of DARCEE.

span class="emph">Schomburg Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division:/span>

Two videotapes: Stevens Portrait Ceremony, Boston College Law School 3/26/90 and The oral recollection of Black South Carolinians, The Honorable Harold A. Stevens.

span class="emph">Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:/span>

11 albums; 55 photographs.

span class="emph">Other:/span>

SIBL - FAIR SPEECH: GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE IN THE COURTS.

Creator History

The late Justice Harold Stevens achieved several historic milestones throughout his career; the most significant being the fact that he was the first Roman Catholic African American to hold several judicial positions in successively higher courts in New York State. Initially appointed to the New York State Supreme Court (1957), eleven years later (1968), he was appointed to the NYS Appellate Division, then to the NYS Court of Appeals, (1974) and lastly, Stevens was appointed to the Appellate Division, First Department from which he retired in 1977.

Stevens' accomplishments began in 1936 when he became the first Roman Catholic African-American graduate of Boston College Law School, where he was an honor student and vice-president of his class. In a 1958 interview, Stevens said he had decided to become a lawyer after a 1926 racial incident in which a black women and her two brothers, accused of killing a sheriff, were dragged from the county jail in Aiken, South Carolina, towed through town behind a car, shot, and mutilated.

Harold A. Stevens was born in October 1907 on a 1,000 acre farm owned by his father, William F. Stevens, on John's Island, South Carolina. His mother, Lilla L. (Johnson) was a public school teacher and his grandfather attended the University of South Carolina during the Reconstruction era. According to a *New York Times* article, his grandfather was expelled by segregationist Governor Wade Hampton, who stated that no colored person would graduate from college in his state.

As an undergraduate student, Stevens studied at Claflin College and graduated in 1930 from Benedict College, which later bestowed upon him his first honorary Doctor of Law degree. He passed the state

bar exam in South Carolina, Massachusetts, and New York. In 1938 Stevens married Ella C. Myers, a childhood friend, and they relocated to New York City. Shortly thereafter, in the late 1930s and early 1940s Stevens taught labor law at the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. In 1943 he enlisted in the United States Army. After World War II ended, he served as Special Counsel to President Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) and arranged for hearings on railroad issues regarding blacks. He also served on the provisional committee to organize black locomotive firemen.

For a time, Stevens clerked for Assemblyman William T. Andrews, until he became partner (1938-1942) of Andrews & Stevens. In 1946 Stevens ran for and was elected to the Assembly, becoming the first Roman Catholic African-American assemblyman to represent the predominantly white thirteenth Assembly District in Albany, New York. While an assemblyman, Stevens was also a partner in Dyett & Stevens (1942-1948) and Brandenburg & Stevens (1948-1950). He resigned as assemblyman in the early 1950's when he was elected to the New York State Court of General Sessions (1951); his first judicial position.

In early 1952 the novice Justice Stevens became recognized for his court decorum and impartiality when he mediated a trial involving the actress, Tallulah Bankhead, who had accused her maid, Eveleen Ramsey Cronin, of stealing \$5,000 from her. The jury found Cronin guilty of grand larceny, but Stevens suspended her sentence. Three years later Governor Averell Harriman appointed him Justice of the State Supreme Court, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Justice Thomas J. Corcoran. In the fall of 1955, Stevens was elected a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court for a fourteen year term. Three years later, Governor Harriman named him an Associate Justice of the Appellate Division.

In 1963 Governor Nelson Rockefeller appointed Stevens a Justice of the Appellate Division, and reappointed him in 1968. From 1969 when Governor Rockefeller initially designated Stevens a justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, to 1973 Stevens had the distinction of being the highest ranked Roman Catholic African American in a state judicial system. Also during this period Stevens further distinguished himself by undertaking a number of projects, including a reorganization of the court system and a program to build new courthouses for which he was acknowledged as being the guiding force. In addition, he created, developed and implemented a plan to improve the administration of the local and state trial and appellate judicial system.

Stevens devised a procedure, according to one report, that once implemented streamlined malpractice cases by presenting them to a special panel of physicians, lawyers, and judges. The mediation process resulted in dispositions at the pretrial stage of litigation, with diminished expense in time, effort, and money to the parties and to the courts. Stevens was also instrumental in creating the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), a nonprofit organization established in 1971 to provide assistance and consultative services to improve state and local trial and appellate courts. He was a charter board member from 1971 to 1972 and a member of the Finance Committee from 1973 to 1974.

In 1973, Stevens was appointed, for an interim term, to the Court of Appeals by Governor Malcolm Wilson. In mid-1973, although the Democratic Party favorite among many voters, he was defeated in the primary election for a full fourteen year term to the Court of Appeals by Democrat Jacob Fuchsberg. Despite the defeat by Fuchsberg in the primary, Stevens campaigned and was endorsed by the Republican, Liberal, and Conservative parties in what became a controversial general election. He lost that election, but in late 1973, Governor Wilson appointed him an Associate Justice to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court for the First Judicial Department. The next year, Governor Hugh Carey designated Stevens a Presiding Justice of the First Department of the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court succeeding Justice Owen McGivern, who had resigned. Stevens retired from the judicial system in early 1977 and died of a heart attack in late 1990.

Early in his judicial career Stevens received a Papal award, the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice, from Pope Pius XII for his work with Catholic groups. He was a board member of several organizations including, the Catholic Interracial Council of New York; Citizens Planning Council; Catholic Club; Catholic Youth Organization; Grand Street Boys Association; and the Board of Governors of the Guild of Catholic Lawyers. He was President of the Catholic Interracial Council of New York; a committee member of the New York County Lawyers Association; a member of the Committee on Banks, Local Finance and Public Institutions; a Life Member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; and counsel to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Scope and Content Note

The Harold A. Stevens Papers, 1936 to 1990, consist of three series: *BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION*; *PROFESSIONAL CAREER*; and *SCRAPBOOKS* which document Stevens' advancement to the highest court in New York State and his contributions to the legal profession, particularly his role as a founder of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). Stevens' accomplishments are reflected in letters from his contemporaries, colleagues and dignitaries. Approximately one third of the collection consists of bound volumes of minutes and notes written by Stevens while he was a judge in the New York State Court system. Newspaper clippings and other memorabilia found in his scrapbooks, which comprise another third of the collection, document his career accomplishments in more detail than is available in his correspondence files.

Arrangement: I. Biographical Information, 1943-1996; II. Professional Career, 1950-1989; III. Scrapbooks, 1939-1985

Key Terms

Subjects

African American judges
Judgements -- New York State
Judges -- New York State
Trials -- New York State

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Scrapbooks

Names

Stevens, Harold A., 1907-1990

Container List

b. 1 f. 1 Biographical Information 1940-1991

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION, 1943-1996, n.d. (.05 lin. ft.), series contains campaign material, letters, addressed to Stevens and his wife Ella from colleagues and subordinates following his retirement from the New York State Court system, as well as his funeral announcement and his obituary from *The New York Times*.

b. 1 f. 2 Personal Correspondence 1990

Professional Career

PROFESSIONAL CAREER, 1936-1996 (6.0 linear ft.), series is comprised of correspondence from colleagues and dignitaries, and contain accolades Stevens received during his rise from assemblyman to his retirement from the New York State Court of Appeals. The files contain some telegrams, reports, programs, and citations. There are seven subseries in this series: *Elections and Appointments; Judicial Journals; General File; Independent Associations; Speeches and Writings; Accolades;* and *Printed Matter*. The *Elections and Appointments, 1950-1975 (.4 lin. ft.)*, files include correspondence regarding Stevens' career; both letters of congratulations and letters sympathizing with his loss of an election. Letters and certificates regarding his judicial appointments by New York State governors can be found here and also in his scrapbooks.

Elections And Appointments

Congratulatory Letters

b. 1 f. 3 1950-1951

b. 1 f. 4-5 1955

b. 1 f. 6 Appointment To NYS Supreme Court 1957

b. 1 f. 7 >Appointment to Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division of NYS
Supreme Court 1968 - 1969

b. 1 f. 8 NYS Court Of Appeals Campaign 1973

b. 1 f. 9 NYS Court Of Appeals - Election Loss 1974

b. 1 f. 10-11 Appointment To The NYS Court Of Appeals - Congratulatory Letters 1973-
1974

b. 2 f. 1 Appointment To The NYS State Court Of Appeals Congratulatory Letters
1974

b. 2 f. 2 Presiding Justice Of The Appellate Division, First Department -
Reappointment 1975

Judicial Journals

Judicial Journals, 1932, 1951-1969 (4.4 lin. ft.), which retain Steven's titles, consist of the following categories: *Trial Calendars, Motions & Etc.; Court of General Sessions, Judges' Minutes; Journals* and *Appellate Division Opinions*. Stevens presided over a variety of cases ranging from litigation between companies and personal lawsuits to grand larceny, robbery, separations and divorces, custody proceedings, and murder trials. His notes, summaries, and opinions on cases during his career as a judge are found in this subseries. There are twenty-one journals, or volumes containing descriptive notes and transcripts from court cases over which Stevens presided. Half of the journals contain some handwritten notations, the other half are totally handwritten. One notebook entitled, *Torts, Abstracts, and Five Point Method Notes*, may have been written when he was in law school as an analytical tool and procedure to examine empirical data for legal cases that he may have referred to early in his career.

b. 2 Torts, Abstracts, And Five Point Method Notes 1932
v. 1

Professional Career (cont.)
Judicial Journals (cont.)

Trial Calendars

Five volumes of "Trial Calendars," dating from January 1951 to December 1954 contain clippings of printed case summaries pasted in the volumes accompanied by handwritten notes. The notes indicate the various stages of a case: whether the defendant was sentenced, pled guilty, went to trial, or if jury selection had been initiated. There are two volumes of "Motions & etc.," from January 1951 to December 1955. These volumes contain typed transcripts with the status of defendants' cases before trial. An alphabetical index by which the contents are arranged can be found throughout the Trial Calendars and Motions volumes. The volumes labeled "Court of General Sessions, Judges Minutes" consists of five volumes, arranged by the defendant's last name, containing information on the charge and the indictment, followed by the verdict and sentence. These are dated January 1951 to December 1954.

b. 2 1951
v. 2

b. 3 1952
v. 3

b. 3 1953
v. 4

b. 4 1954
v. 5

b. 4 1955
v. 6

Motions & Etc.

b. 5 1951 - 1955
v. 7

b. 5 1955 - 1957
v. 8

Court Of General Sessions, Judges Minutes

b. 6 Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1951
v. 9

b. 6 Dec. 1951 - May 1952
v. 10

b. 7 May 1952 - Mar. 1953
v. 11

b. 7 Mar. 1953 - Dec. 1953
v. 12

b. 8 Jan. 1954 - Dec. 1954
v. 13

Journals

There are nine journals of handwritten notes taken by Stevens, from January 1955 to December 1957. The plaintiffs' and defendants' names are provided at the beginning of each case, thereafter, however, Stevens used the _ symbol for defendants' names and the [UNK] symbol for plaintiffs' names. Journal entries include information on the following categories: date, appearances, findings, stipulations, testimony, cross examination, re-direct, question and answer, (diagnosis), sessions; time(s) the jury was sworn in, opening to the jury, recesses, summations, charges to the jury, jury retired, verdict, jury polled, and jury discharged.

There are nine journals of handwritten notes taken by Stevens, from January 1955 to December 1957. The plaintiffs' and defendants' names are provided at the beginning of each case, thereafter, however, Stevens used the _ symbol for defendants' names and the [UNK] symbol for plaintiffs' names. Journal entries include information on the following categories: date, appearances, findings, stipulations, testimony, cross examination, re-direct, question and answer, (diagnosis), sessions; time(s) the jury was sworn in, opening to the jury, recesses, summations, charges to the jury, jury retired, verdict, jury polled, and jury discharged.

b. 8 Jan. 1955 - Apr. 1955
v. 14

b. 9 Apr. 1955 - Jun. 1955
v. 15

Professional Career (cont.)
Judicial Journals (cont.)
Journals (cont.)

- b. 9 Sep. 1955 - Jan. 1956
v. 16
- b. 9 Jan. 1956 - Apr. 1956
v. 17
- b. 9 Apr. 1956 - Sep. 1956
v. 18
- b. 10 Oct. 1956 - Jan. 1957
v. 19
- b. 10 Jan. 1957 - Apr. 1957
v. 20
- b. 10 Apr. 1957 - Oct. 1957
v. 21
- b. 10 Oct. 1957 - Dec. 1957
v. 22

Appellate Division Opinions

Four volumes of Appellate Division Opinions, two entitled, *Opinions of Mr. Justice Stevens* and two entitled, *Presiding Justice Stevens*, January 1958 to July 1972, complete this series. The front matter of these volumes contain four columns. The first column is an alphabetical list of plaintiffs' and defendants' last names, followed by initials that indicate if there was a memorandum (m), per curiam (pc), or opinion (op) given by Stevens, and finally the number of the volume and pages on which a case can be found. There are also several loose pages circa November 1972 to October 1973.

- b. 11 Jan. 1958 - Mar. 1962
v. 23
- b. 11 Apr. 1962 - May 1966
v. 24
- b. 12 Jun. 1966 - Jun. 1969
v. 25
- b. 12 Jul. 1969 - Jul. 1972
v. 26
- b. 12 Excerpts From Appellate Division 1972 - 1973
v. 27

General File

The *General Files, 1936-1996 (.4 lin. ft.)*, contain letters reflecting Stevens' humanitarianism, letters of recommendation for Stevens as well as by him for others, legal documents for a few court cases, and letters from colleagues, jurors, and dignitaries. There are also two folders primarily of conference papers that he acquired while attending the 1959 International Commission of Jurists convened in New Delhi, India.

- b. 13 f. 1 1936-1949
- b. 13 f. 2 1950-1955
- b. 13 f. 3 1956-1959
- b. 13 f. 4 1960-1969
- b. 13 f. 5 1970-1975
- b. 13 f. 6 1976
- b. 13 f. 7 (Retirement) 1977
- b. 13 f. 8 1978-1989
- b. 13 f. 9 Supreme Court Notes/Cases 1956
- b. 13 f. 10 International Commission Of Jurists, New Delhi, India, Conference Papers
Jan. 5-10, 1959 -
- b. 14 f. 1 Working Paper On The Rule Of Law

Professional Career (cont.)

Independent Associations

The *Independent Associations, 1976, n.d. (.4 lin. ft.)*, subseries is comprised of the Medical Malpractice Mediation files and a folder on the National Center for State Courts. The Medical Malpractice Mediation (formerly the Interprofessional Committee of Physicians and Lawyers or the Joint Interprofessional Committee of Doctors and Lawyers) files contain correspondence, news releases, newspaper clippings, and statistics that document Stevens' novel idea for streamlining backlogs of medical malpractice cases in New York State. The National Center for State Courts file includes an annual report, minutes, by-laws, constitution, and letters that reflect the origins of this nonprofit organization as envisioned by Stevens.

Medical Malpractice Mediation

- b. 14 f. 2 Interprofessional Committee of Physicians and Lawyers 1963-1964, n.d.
- Joint Interprofessional Committee Of Doctors And Lawyers
- b. 14 f. 3 Correspondence 1969-1971
- b. 14 f. 4 Correspondence, Reports 1971
- b. 14 f. 5 Minutes, Press Releases, Newspaper Clippings 1971-1973
- b. 14 f. 6 George M. Saypol - Correspondence, Statement 1972
- b. 14 f. 7 Correspondence, Panelists 1972-1974
- b. 14 f. 8 Correspondence, Statistical Report 1975
- b. 14 f. 9 Jacob D. Fuchsberg, Correspondence 1969-1972
- b. 14 f. 10 Requests For Information 1972-1973
- b. 14 f. 11 Medical Malpractice Mediation Panel Statistics 1975-1976
- b. 14 f. 12 National Center For State Courts 1971
- b. 14 f. 13 Correspondence, Report 1973-1974

Speeches And Writing

Speeches and Writings, 1940-1972, n.d. (.4 lin. ft.), contain Stevens' speeches, commencement addresses, articles and a few lectures given by him. One of his articles, *Violence of the Law*, which was published in the *New York State Journal of Medicine* in 1972, was well received and frequently requested. Requests of this reprint can be found in this subseries.

- b. 15 f. 1 1940-1949
- b. 15 f. 2 1950-1955
- b. 15 f. 3 1956-1959
- b. 15 f. 4 1960-1965
- b. 15 f. 5 1966-1969
- b. 15 f. 6 1970's
- b. 15 f. 7-8 n.d
- b. 15 f. 9 *Violence And The Law - Reprint And Requests For Article* 1972-1973

Accolades

Accolades, 1955-1996, (.1 lin. ft.). This subseries contains information regarding commencement exercises Stevens was invited to, particularly those where he was awarded an honorary degree, or was the commencement speaker. Correspondence regarding the unveiling of his portrait at Boston College and the unveiling of a portrait at the New York State Court of Appeals are also found here. Material from 1996 includes a newspaper clipping and a program from a dinner ceremony honoring Stevens given by fellow South Carolinians after his death.

- b. 16 f. 1 Benedict College Commencement 1955
- b. 16 f. 2 Villanova University Commencement 1957, 1962
- b. 16 f. 3 Morgan State University 1960
- b. 16 f. 4 University Of Notre Dame Commencement 1963

Professional Career (cont.)
Accolades (cont.)

- b. 16 f. 5 St. John's University Commencement 1965
- b. 16 f. 6 Yeshiva University Commencement 1969
- b. 16 f. 7 The Guild Of Catholic Lawyers, Nyc, - Honored Guest June 1969
- b. 16 f. 8 Portrait For The Court 1975
- b. 16 f. 9 Boston College - Unveiling Of Portrait 1990
- b. 16 f. 10 South Carolina Black Hall Of Fame Enshrinement Program/Reception June 1996

Printed Matter 1896-1996

The Printed Matter, 1896-1996, n.d. (.05 lin. ft.), files contain two pamphlets, *Pioneering African-Americans in the Courts and the Legal Community: Past and Present* and *Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, First Judicial Department* plus some oversized sheets that provide information on elected and appointed New York State and City officials.

- b. 16 f. 12 Biographies Of Elected And Appointed New York Officials n.d.

Scrapbooks 1939-1985

There are ten scrapbooks containing items that are illustrative of Stevens' career. In general, the majority of the materials are newspaper clippings, commencement programs, citations, and letters. The earliest scrapbooks, 1939 to 1952, include recital programs for Marian Anderson and Mildred Jenkins, and the ballot for Stevens when he ran for the Assembly in 1945. One scrapbook relates to the 1958 Manhattan College commencement exercise at which he was honored. Another scrapbook, dating from 1950 to 1964, includes newspaper clippings, programs, and a citation from Governor Nelson Rockefeller redesignating Stevens Associate Justice of the Appellate Division.

The scrapbooks for 1957 to 1980, consist of mementos from the International Congress of Jurists (convened in New Delhi, India in 1959), invitations (from Mayor and Mrs. John Lindsay, Governor and Mrs. Malcolm Wilson among others), several newspaper clippings about Benedict College (his alma mater), notices of his speaking engagements, and articles about some of his cases. One scrapbook contains newspaper clippings on the Medical Malpractice Mediation Program. Scrapbooks dated from 1963 to 1982, contain photographs, letters, programs, membership certificates from professional organizations, and two certificates from Governor Nelson Rockefeller (1967, 1969). The scrapbooks from 1973 to 1985 include invitations, campaign flyers, pamphlets, and newspaper clippings on the Democratic primary election between Jacob Fuchsberg and Stevens for Justice to the Court of Appeals in 1973.

- b. 17 1939 - 1952
- v. 1
- b. 18 1950 - 1964
- v. 2
- b. 19 1957 - 1980
- v. 3
- b. 20 1963 - 1982
- v. 4
- b. 21 1973 - 1985
- v. 5