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Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Levi P. Morton Papers
1818-1920
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**Thomas Lannon
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Summary

- Main entry:** Morton, Levi P. (Levi Parsons), 1824-1920
- Title:** Levi P. Morton papers, 1818-1920 (bulk 1878-1898)
- Size:** 9 linear feet (16 boxes, 22 volumes)
- Source:** Gift of his daughter Edith Livingston Morton Eustis. Additional gifts and purchases from Ashley T. Cole, Robert McElroy, Howard C. Robbins, and L. Biffin, 1929-1967.
- Abstract:** Levi Parsons Morton (1824-1920) was an American businessman, banker, diplomat, and statesman. He founded the banking firm of L.P. Morton & Co. in New York City. After an unsuccessful bid for Congress in 1876, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from New York in 1878. He was Minister to France from 1881 to 1885, was elected vice-president of the U.S. under Benjamin Harrison in 1888, and served as Governor of New York in 1895 and 1896.
- The collection consists of correspondence, family papers, speeches, biographical materials, political memorabilia, photographs, and scrapbooks. Correspondence, 1842-1920, relates to civil reform, Morton's political campaigns, his service as Minister to France, and his activities as businessman, banker, congressman, vice-president, and governor. Also, correspondence, 1871-1915, of his wives, Lucy K. Morton and Anna Livingston Morton; papers of the Morton, Parsons, Street, and Kearney families; memorabilia from Morton's political campaigns; and biographical sketches, speeches, photographs, and scrapbooks of clippings, 1859-1913.
- Access:** Advance notice required. Apply at: <<http://www.nypl.org/mssref>>
- Preferred citation:** Levi P. Morton Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
- Special formats** Artifacts, photographs, scrapbooks, sermons

Related materials note

Morton, Bliss & Co. Records. New-York Historical Society.

Biographical note

Levi Parsons Morton (1824-1920) was an American businessman, banker, diplomat, and statesman. A descendent of the Morton family that arrived at the English colonies on the ship Anne in 1623, Morton was born in Shoreham, Vermont, 1824 to the Congregational minister, Daniel O. Morton and his wife Lucretia Parsons. Levi was named after an uncle of his mother, Levi Parsons, an early missionary and possibly the first American to reach Jerusalem.

Early business experience in a dry goods outlet in Hanover, NH led to a position in the trading house of James M. Beebe & Co. of Boston, Massachusetts in 1849. As Beebe & Co. slowly dissolved, Morton used what he had learned to begin his own dry goods commission house. Morton & Grinnell was established in New York in 1854 by Morton and his partner, George Grinnell, a Massachusetts congressman. The two dealt in fabrics and assorted home manufactures produced by New England's mills. They stayed together until the outbreak of the Civil War which ended shipments of southern cotton to Boston's ports.

In 1861, Morton, in partnership with Walter H. Burns, H. C. Oakley, and Charles W. McCune, started the banking firm, L. P. Morton & Co. The Morton name would come to represent honesty and accountability important for gaining the trust of investors in an industry often lacking standards. L. P. Morton & Co. had offices at 35 Wall St., and maintained a thorough economic involvement with the booming American railway interests. Within a few years the firm established a branch in London led by Canadian politician, Sir John Rose.

In 1869, Morton and financier George Bliss formed Morton, Bliss & Co. which operated in London and New York. The London office of Morton, Rose, and Co. served as a separate entity with its own capital account and cooperated strategically with the American firm. Positioned in both England and America, Morton and his firms were able to participate in the swelling public interests on both sides of the Atlantic. The London branch acted as fiscal agent to the Alabama joint commission that sought compensation to the United States for damages inflicted by the Alabama and other British-built Confederate warships during the Civil War. With the help of John Rose, the houses of Morton, Bliss & Co. and James Cooke & Co. secured for the United States government a sum of \$15,500,000 as reparative settlement. The money directly funded American post-Civil War national debt at a lower rate of interest, negotiated through the sale of bonds in both America and England by Morton himself. Morton, Bliss & Co. served as fiscal agent to the United States government from 1873 until 1884. Morton's first wife, Lucy Kimball of Flatlands, L.I. died in 1871. A second marriage, to Anna Livingston Reade Street in 1873, further solidified Morton's status within New York's political scene.

Morton rose to power within the Republican Party at a time when New York City was controlled by Democratic interests. His first attempt to gain elected office in 1876 failed. In 1878 he was appointed honorary commissioner to the Paris Exposition, and was nominated and successfully elected to Congress by the Republicans of New York's Eleventh District.

In 1880, Morton declined the vice-presidential position on the Republican ticket which would have put him and not Chester A. Arthur in the presidency after the assassination of James Garfield. Garfield offered Morton a choice of a cabinet appointment as Secretary to the Navy, or a diplomatic post as Minister to France. Morton chose Europe over Washington D.C. and succeeded General Noyes as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States of America in Paris where he would serve until 1885. Morton spent much his own money to convert a hotel into a spacious private residence with room for diplomatic concern and social gatherings. The legation occupied the western side of the Place de la Bitché, which was renamed Place des Etats Unis to reflect the new American presence in France. Morton was able issue a decree revoking the prohibition of the sale of American pork and removed restrictions on American corporations from collecting debt within the French Republic. Morton and his wife Anna Livingston turned the American legation into a popular center of society and culture in Paris. He accepted Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World on behalf of the United States, and was said to have driven the first rivet in the statue.

Morton returned from France to a Republican party increasingly controlled by Thomas Collier Platt. After unsuccessful bids for the Senate in 1885 and 1887, Morton was selected as Platt's choice for vice-president on the 1888 ticket with Benjamin Harrison. Harrison and Morton lost the popular vote, but won the race in the Electoral College. As vice-president, Morton presided over the Senate filled with men who had made millions off of railroads, mining, and gilded age excess. In 1892, political forces led to Morton being cut from the presidential ticket. Platt suggested Morton run for governor of New York, and Morton won the race by a large margin. As governor, from 1895 to 1897, Morton signed the bill that effectively consolidated greater New York. He left Albany firmly in the hands of the Republican Party where it would remain for the next 15 years. At the age of seventy-two Morton received a presidential nomination in the 1896 contest but was ultimately no match against those backing William McKinley.

Whereas American men of means had once retained control over the direction of their business with their own sense, the final stage of Morton's career began during transition of big business to the age of the financial strategist. In 1899, his seventy-fifth year, the Morton Trust Company was formed to continue the business of Morton, Bliss & Co. Within a year, the Morton Trust absorbed the State Trust Company with the approval of then governor, Theodore Roosevelt. The Morton Trust Company was itself absorbed into J. P. Morgan's Guaranty Trust Company, 1909.

Morton was a member of the Episcopal Church in New York, and in 1883 gave two buildings on Fourth Avenue for what would become the Grace Memorial House. In December of 1906, he anonymously donated \$600,000 for the creation of the choir of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. He maintained homes in New York City and Rhinecliff, New York and was survived by four daughters after his death in 1920.

Scope and content note

The Levi Parsons Morton papers document the political and professional career, personal life, and family background of the businessman and politician. The date span of the papers is 1818-1920, with the bulk of the materials dating from the period 1878-1898. The papers include personal and professional correspondence, political and legal memoranda, biographical sketches, scrapbooks, family and genealogical papers, clippings, photographs, ephemera, and artifacts. They form an important resource for the study of American political history, the rise of American Imperialism, the financial history of the United States government, diplomacy, New York history, and the culture of the Gilded Age.

Morton's correspondence includes incoming letters from businessmen and politicians who depended on Morton's interests for their political existence. The correspondence is concentrated around Morton's political victories; first to Congress in 1878, then vice-president in 1888, as governor of New York in 1895 and finally his unsuccessful bid for Republican presidential nominee in 1896. Morton's success in finance and trusted moral character was converted into political gain for the Republican party. His correspondents during the last two decades of the nineteenth century include James G. Blaine, George Boutwell, Roscoe Conkling, Hamilton Fish, Theodore Freylinghuysen, James A. Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, Theodore A. Havemeyer, Thomas Collier Platt, Sir John Rose, Benjamin H. Tracy, Frederick W. Wurster.

The political papers include a selection of documents relevant to Morton's political career. The biographical materials contain manuscript, printed and typed biographies of Morton, as well as personal reminiscences by Morton himself, his colleagues and daughter. The family and genealogical papers consist of printed family histories as well as original documents from the nineteenth century. There are photographs of Morton and his family and a collection of political memorabilia. The 1888 presidential campaign is well documented in buttons, ribbons, and programs of the inaugural celebration. Pamphlets are also included from ceremonies in both France and New York celebrating the gift and construction of Bartholdi's Statue of Liberal Enlightening the World. The scrapbooks include clippings from newspapers in New York and around the country which mention Morton's name, financial dealings or political decisions. They are a useful research tool for the period, covering such topics as finance, national politics and international affairs.

Arrangement note

The Levi Parsons Morton Papers are organized in the following series:

- Series I. Correspondence, 1842-1920
- Series II. Political papers, 1878-1897
- Series III. Biographical materials, 1892-1937
- Series IV. Family and genealogical papers, 1818-1915, n.d.
- Series V. Photographs, 1854-1896, n.d.
- Series VI. Memorabilia, 1884-1892
- Series VII. Scrapbooks, 1859-1913

Series descriptions and container list

Series I. Correspondence, 1842-1920

Morton's correspondence is arranged chronologically and consists chiefly of incoming letters. The earliest letters are from his parents, Daniel O. Morton and Lucretia (Parsons) Morton. However, the bulk of the correspondence dates from the years of Morton's political career. Politicians wrote confidentially to Morton, from the 1870s, as he began to play a larger role in New York City and national politics. Thus the correspondence provides context to the political decision making of the Republican party of New York at a time when it held a direct influence on national affairs. Letters include comments on speeches and hints at the motivation behind negotiations missing from the public record.

Beginning in 1876, there are notes relative to the announcement of Morton's run for the 11th Congressional District of New York City. Remarkable correspondence relates to Morton's diplomatic position in Paris, including a document of June 1883 featuring the signatures of American citizens in Paris. From 1888 are found letters to Morton from American political and social dignitaries congratulating him on the success of the 1888 presidential campaign. Beginning in June 1888, the series includes typed transcriptions, added to the collection by Prof. Robert McNutt McElroy, of letters by Morton to Benjamin Harrison held in the Harrison manuscripts collection at the Library of Congress. There are also many congratulatory letters received upon his election as governor of New York in 1894.

Of particular note are the letters addressed to Governor Morton concerning the consolidation of New York City. Letters were received from Brooklyn's mayor Frederick Wurster, from St. Clair McKelway, editor of the Brooklyn Eagle, and from Senator Luxow of the New York State legislature; from civic groups such as the Loyal League of Brooklyn and the City Club of New York, and various ranking Republican party members from the city and state including Republican party boss, Thomas C. Platt. The plan for consolidation had been advanced by Andrew H. Green in 1868 to combine the territories of Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island and was endorsed by New York Mayor Abram S. Hewitt in 1888. Republican politicians, in control of the state and city by 1896, saw consolidation as politically advantageous. Despite vetoes by the mayors of New York and Brooklyn, Morton signed consolidation in to effect, making New York the largest and most populous city in the United States.

The seven letter books contain Morton's outgoing correspondence from two periods in his career. The two letter books covering the years 1881 and 1884-1885 contain letters regarding confidential business matters exchanged with partner George Bliss. The remaining five letter books, 1895-1896, include official and confidential letters composed by Morton and his private secretary, Gen. Ashley W. Cole, while Governor of New York. Much of the communication is with city and state officials. Issues covered include the Brooklyn Charities Bill, the Raines Bill, the Albany Police Bill and the Greater New York Bill, as well as appointments to and administration of the Forestry Commission, Quarantine Commission, Bronx River Sewer and Highway Commission, the Prison Commission and offices of the coroner and state historian. There is also confidential correspondence addressed to Thomas C. Platt at his office at 49 Broadway, New York City.

Morton's social correspondence, filed separately at the end of the series, contains invitations to dinners and the opera which the Mortons received, as well as responses to invitations to parties held at the American legation in Paris. The correspondence, in French, is often addressed to Mrs. Anna Livingston Morton.

Other letters to Morton's first and second wives are filed in the family and genealogical papers.

General correspondence, 1842-1920

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	1842-1844
	2	1845-1846
	3	1848-1849
	4	1850-1859
	5	1867-1868
	6	1870-1871
	7	1872
	8	1873-1874
	9	1876-1877
	10	1878
	11	1879
	12	1880
	13-19	1881
	20-27	1882
2	1-10	1883
	11-16	1884
	17-20	1885
	21	1886
	22	1887
	23-36	1888
3	1-6	1889
	7-9	1890
	10	1891
	11-15	1892
	16	1893
	17-22	1894
	23-26	1895 Feb - May
4	1-6	1895 June - Dec.
	7-24	1896
5	1	1897
	2-3	1898
	4	1899
	5	1900-1904
	6	1905-1907
	7	1908
	8	1909-1915
	9	1920
	10	n.d.
	Letterbooks, 1881-1896	
<u>Box</u>	<u>Vol</u>	
5	1	No. 1, 1881 Mar. 19 - May 4 (Letter book)
	2	No. 2., 1884 Apr. 11 – 1885 Apr. 25 (Letter book)
<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
5	11	Letters removed from copy book, 1885 Apr 27- Jun 18, 1890 Feb 14-Apr 2
<u>Box</u>	<u>Vol</u>	
6	3	No. 3, 1895 Jan. 4 -1896 Jan. 16 (Governor's private letter book)
	4	No. 4, 1895 Jan. 9 - 1896 Jan. 5 (Governor's official letter book)
	5	No. 5, 1895 Jan. 24 - 1896 Aug. 4 (Confidential letter book)
	6	No. 6, 1896 Jan. 8 - Dec. 30 (Governor's official letter book)

	7	No. 7, 1896 Jan. 27-Dec. 30 (Governor's official letter book)
<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
7	1-10	Social correspondence, 1883-1889

Series II. Political papers, 1878-1897

A collection of somewhat random documents saved by Morton's family have been gathered here as "political papers." They are grouped into four sections corresponding to the offices held by Morton as Congressman, Minister to France, Vice-President, and Governor of New York. The documents include bills, programs, appointments, addresses, resolutions, protocols, and reports. Notable documents include the program of the International Congress of Electricity held in Paris in 1881, a manuscript copy of Morton's speech dedicating the buildings of the 1892 Chicago World Fair, a report of the Tenement House Committee inscribed by the chairman, Richard Watson Gilder, to Governor Morton, and documents comprising the governor's dossier for the bill consolidating Greater New York.

		Congressional, 1878-1880
8	1	Election to congress, 1878
	2	New York State Election of 1879
	3	Congressional Convention, 1880
	4	Relief ship Constellation, 1880, Mar.
		Minster to France, 1881-1885
	5	Speech of previous ministers, 1865, 1868, 1869, 1877
	6	Program of the International Congress of Electricity, 1881
	7	Protocols and personal instructions, 1878, 1881
	8	Official Appointments, 1881-1885
		Vice-President, 1890-1893
	9	Mr. Blaine to Sir Julian Pauncefote, 1890
	10	Address dedicating the buildings, Chicago World Fair, 1892
	11	Address at dinner of New England Society, 1892 Dec.
	12	Resolutions tendering thanks of the U.S. Senate to Morton, 1890-1893
		Governor, 1894-1897
	13	Report of the Tenement House Committee, 1894 (Signed by Richard Watson Gilder, Chairman.)
	14	Inaugural address, 1895, 1896
	15	Legislative and Legal documents, 1894-1896
	16	Statement on Reorganization of the Criminal Courts, 1896
	17	Greater New York Bill, 1896
	18	Farewell address, 1897 Jan 1.

Series III. Biographical materials, 1892-1937

The biographical materials include manuscript, printed and typed biographies of Morton, in addition to personal reminiscences by Morton, his colleagues, and his daughter, Edith Eustis. There are also letters addressed to Morton's daughter from individuals who wished to write biographies of the one time vice-president of the United States. Other materials include a cigarette package insert with a biographical sketch of Morton and a program from his memorial service.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
9	1	Biographical notes by Edmund C. Stedman, 1905
	2	Contemporary American Biography, 1892
	3	Correspondence regarding proposed biography, 1897-1927
	4	Editorial comment on the death of Levi P. Morton, 1920
	5	Levi P. Morton, History of Poor Boys Who Have Become Rich, Duke Cigarettes, n.d.
	6	Life and Public Service of Levi P. Morton by John D. St. Clair Hills, 1898
	7	Mayflower, a poem by Irwin Pounds McCurdy, n.d.
	8	Memorial service for Levi P. Morton, St. John the Divine, New York City, 1920
	9-10	Miscellaneous sketches, n.d.
	11	New England Magazine, 1898
	12	Personal memo by Levi P. Morton, n.d.
	13	Recollections of Levi P. Morton by his daughter Mrs. W. C. Eustis, 1937
	14	Reminiscences of Levi P. Morton by W. A. Street, 1920

Series IV. Family and genealogical papers, 1818-1915, n.d.

The family and genealogical papers include histories of the Morton, Parsons and other families researched and collected during his lifetime. The series includes information connecting Morton to his first American ancestor, George Morton, a character of import to the local history of colonial Massachusetts and its territories in Maine. Family history was of enough importance to Levi Parsons Morton to influence his purchase of a will signed by John Morton, May 1, 1713, in "Middleborough county of Plymouth in New England," and a summons to witnesses signed by John Morton, November, 8, 1766 as Sheriff of the County of Chester, Pennsylvania. Other original documents include his sermons, letters and notes created by members of the Morton and Parsons families, including his father, Daniel O. Morton, and Levi Parsons, the missionary and uncle of Morton's mother. Correspondence of Morton's wives, Lucy Kimball Morton and Anna Livingston Street Morton, is also present here.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
10	1	Dickinson family, 1896
	2	Kearny family, n.d
	3	Morton family, 1818-1852 Daniel O. Morton
	4	Religious Exercise of Miss Laura Chipman, 1818
	5	Character and Ministration of Angels, 1840
	6	Family prayer, 1829-1835
	7	Memorial sermons, 1852
	8	Daniel O. Morton Jr. obituary, 1865
	9-11	Morton family genealogy, n.d.
	12	Morton coat-of-arms, n.d.
	13	Parsons family
	14	Caleb Street and his descendants, n.d.
	15-22	Anna Livingston Street Morton, 1878-1915, n.d.
	23	Lucy (Kimball) Morton, 1871

Series V. Photographs, 1854-1896, n.d.

This series contains chiefly photographs of the Morton and his family taken during the 1880s while Morton was serving as foreign minister in Paris. There are also two daguerreotypes of Morton's parents.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
11	1	Campaign, 1888 (11 items)
	2	Ellerslie, Rhinecliff, NY, ca. 1890 (12 items) Ellerslie, the picturesque modern farm.
		<p>Ellerslie was the name of Morton's country home in the Hudson Valley north of New York City. It was purchased in 1877 from William Kelley, so that Morton might indulge to the utmost in his fondness for cattle and crops, meadows and waving corn, green, flowery slopes and shady woodlands. One report stated it surpassed all other estates along the Hudson line in point of desirable location, natural beauty and picturesque surroundings. It consisted of roughly 1,000 acres fronting the Hudson river, south of the old township of Rhinecliff. Morton raised award-winning Guernsey cows. The farm at Ellerslie was managed by H. M. Cottrell, a graduate of Kansas Agricultural College, additional men served to manage the dairy, crops, herds and poultry. Most livestock and crops were abandoned overtime, and in the 1880s Ellerslie progressed to become the greatest Guernsey cattle farm in the world. Cottrell oversaw the construction of the barn, which at the time was one of the most costly undertaken in the United States. It included over 150 stalls, three 500 ton silos, and a modern laboratory. Additionally, it included ventilation system that allowed for experiments with non-grazing cows. Morton's farm maintained 180 cows and bulls of a stock imported in 1887 from Island of Guernsey. As the model farm for the modern era, the Vice-President was able to represent himself as a farmer who personal investments helped lead to innovative techniques in dairy productions. One of these was the retention of milk giving cows in stalls night and day for months at a time. Cottrell and Morton's farm saw cows turned into artificial machines, fed with food and water and kept in a state of quiescence for the purpose of producing the highest yield of the richest milk. Five of Morton's Guernseys were shown at the Chicago's World's Fair as the stock of the future. Amongst the mechanical contrivances and analytical instruments, Cottrell invented new ways of to produce butter and cream. The poultry department sent to market 500 artificially incubated chickens each week. Ellerslie milk was famous in New York City, with a shipment arriving each day as late 1904. It was sent to both charitable hospitals and the finer hotels.</p>
	3	Daniel O. Morton and Lucretia Parsons, n.d. (2 cased daguerreotypes)
	4	Electa Morton Minot, n.d. (3 items)
	5-6	Levi Parsons Morton, 1854-1896 (14 items)
	7	Anna Livingston Morton, 1877-1890 (14 items)
	8	Morton daughters, ca. 1870-1890 (27 items)
	9	Morton house, Middleborough, MA, n.d.
12	1-8	Miscellaneous, n.d.

Series VI. Memorabilia, 1884-1892

The ephemera and artifacts include autographs, badges, political memorabilia, clippings, books, gifts, and artifacts from Morton's career in politics.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
13	1	Autograph album, c. 1880-1886
	2-12	Badges, 1892-1907, n.d. The small collection of badges includes commemorative medals from the 26th National G.A.R. Encampment, 1892 Sept., a Celebration for Robert Fulton at Jamestown, VA, 1907, the Republican national conventions in Chicago, 1888 and St. Louis 1896, and from Morton's New York gubernatorial campaign of 1895. Other badges attest to Morton's attendance of meetings of political associations such as the John J. O'Brien Association, Bryn Mawr Republican Club, Harlem Republican Club, Frelinghuysen Lancers Association, and the Republican Inauguration Club.
14	1	Clippings and printed ephemera, c. 1880-1900
	2	Columbian postage stamps, 1893 Contains stamps from denomination of one cent to five dollars. Bound in leather.
	3-10	Harrison & Morton Campaign of 1888 and Inauguration, 1889 Mar. 4
15	1	Historic Rhinebeck by Howard Morse, 1908 Inscribed to Mary Morton from her Father, July 1910
	2	Holy Bible, Oxford Facsimile Series 5A, 1895 Presentation copy from Bishop William Croswell Doane to Levi P. Morton. January 1, 1895. Bears the signature of Levi P. Morton from his inauguration as Governor of New York.
	3-9	Miscellaneous Invitations and commemorative materials collected by Morton.
16	1	Mayflower Compact, 1896 (Reprint by The Mail and Express Company.)
	2	Morton Memoranda by Josiah Granville Leach, 1894 Memoranda relating to the ancestry and family of Hon. Levi Parsons Morton.
	3	The Pilgrims, list of members and rules, 1910
	4-7	Statue of Liberty, 1884-1887
	8	U.S. Senate, Standing Rules of the United States Senate, Hon. Levi P. Morton, Vice President of the United States, 1888 Apr. 10
	9	U.S. Senate, Invitation to the Complimentary Dinner to Vice-President Levi P. Morton by United States Senators, 1893 Feb. 27 (Inscribed to Morton's children and grandchildren, 1912.) U.S. Senate, Testimonial of the United States Senators to Vice-President Morton, 1893 Feb 27
	10	Washington centenary, 1889 Morton's copy as a member of the General Committee.

Series VII. Scrapbooks, 1859-1913

Morton's scrapbooks include a near comprehensive collection of clippings concerning his professional and political career. The scrapbooks are arranged chronologically and include multiple newspapers clippings for every day that Morton's name appeared in the newspapers.

<u>Vol</u>	
1A	1859-1878
1B	1878-1880
2	1878-1879
3	1879-1881
4A	1881
4B	1881-1882
5	1881-1884
6	1884-1885
7	1885-1886
8A	1886
8B	1888
9	1888-1889
10	1889-1891
11	1891-1894
12	1894-1895
13	1895
14	1895-1896
15	1896-1897
16	1899-1907
17	1907-1913
18	1882
19	Humor of the Campaign, 1888