

A Guide to the Executive letter books of Governor Philip W. McKinney, 1890-1893

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1890-1893

A Collection in the Library of Virginia 35358
Library of Virginia
2014
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History

Processed by: Craig Moore

Title Statement

A Guide to the Executive letter books of Governor Philip W. McKinney, 1890-1893

Subtitle:

Collection: 35358

Author: Claire Radcliffe

Publication Statement

Date: © 2014 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from created in EAD by Claire Radcliffe, 07 July 2014

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Accession Number

35358

Language

English

Creator

Virginia. Governor (1890-1894 : McKinney)

Extent

6 v. (3658 p.)

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

For preservation purposes, please use microfilm (Misc. reel 6194-6196)

Acquisition Information

Acquisition information unknown

Preferred Citation

Executive Letter books of Governor Philip W. McKinney, 1890-1893. Accession 35358, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Alternative Form Available

Also available on microfilm (Misc. reels 6194-6196)

Biographical Information

Phillip Watkins McKinney, son of Charles and Martha Guerrant McKinney, was born on March 17, 1832 at New Store in Buckingham County, Virginia. McKinney graduated Hampden-Sydney College in 1851 before studying law under Judge Brockenbrough at Washington College. Following his education, he opened a law practice in Buckingham County and, in 1854, married Anne Fleming Christian. The marriage produced one son, Robert Christian McKinney. McKinney officially entered politics in 1857 with his election to the House of Delegates where he served until resigning in 1861 to join the Army of Northern Virginia. A Captain in Company K of the 4th Cavalry, he was seriously wounded at the Battle of Brandy Station and left the military in 1864, briefly returning to the House of Delegates before opening a law firm in Farmville in 1865. Widowed in 1859, he re-married in 1884 to Anna Clay Lyle who gave birth to a daughter, Frankie Irving, in 1887.

McKinney's political career following his first term in the House of Delegates mixed achievement and failure. He served as the Commonwealth's Attorney for Prince Edward county briefly in the 1860's and 70's, and for longer terms in the 1880's. Unable to immediately repeat his earlier success, he failed to win election in several campaigns including a U.S. Congressional race in 1872, the House of Delegates in 1875, State Attorney General in 1881 and Governor in 1885 before successfully campaigning for the Governorship in 1889. Governor from 1890 to 1894, McKinney focused on improving the state's economy and strengthening the Virginia Democratic party. In 1891, he oversaw the passage of Olcott Settlement, a reorganization of the Government debt that provided the means for the State to extricate itself from a worsening financial situation. McKinney also addressed problems in the state fishing industry with passage of a bill to regulate the shellfish harvesting that included the creation of Shellfish Commission to regulate natural oyster beds. Although not acted on during his tenure, other ideas initiated under McKinney that would later help to strengthen the Democratic party included curbing the influence of lobbyists and railroads and enacting a state income tax. Retiring from active politics at the conclusion of his governorship, McKinney and his wife retired to Farmville where he died on March 1, 1899. He is buried at Farmville Cemetery.

Scope and Content

The executive letter books contain the outgoing correspondence of Governor Philip W. McKinney, including letters from private secretary Cazneau McLeod to McKinney while McKinney was away from Richmond during the summer months. The correspondence largely consists of typed carbon copies on onionskin paper, with occasional handwritten letters. An alphabetical index of correspondents (by first letter of surname) is located at the front of each volume, with page numbers. Much of the correspondence involves appointments to positions or requests for pardons.

Other topics include boundary disputes with Maryland and Tennessee, rewards for fugitives and the return of fugitives from other states, the state's psychiatric institutions, surveys and legislation on oysters, the installation of the Lee statue on Monument Avenue, hiring out of convicts for railroad work, various schools and institutions in the state, the division of federal funds for schools, the Lodge Force Bill of 1890, the Direct Tax Bill and the direct tax refund, the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893, preparations in case of a diphtheria epidemic, and the funeral train for the reburial of Confederate president Jefferson Davis. After the election of Grover Cleveland, McKinney wrote to the president many times with recommendations of Virginia Democrats for federal positions. He also inquired of different institutions on the potential dangers of electric lights and petroleum.

Notable correspondents include General Jubal Early; shipbuilder and industrialist William R. Trigg; Morton Marye; Martin McMahon; Colonel Thomas Whitehead; Redfield Proctor; former governor Fitzhugh Lee; Presidents Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison; U.S. Secretaries of War, State, and the Treasury; the superintendents of state schools and psychiatric institutions; the governors of Maryland, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Rhode Island regarding oyster legislation; and the governors of southern states on a regional immigration convention.

Index Terms

McKinney, Philip Watkins, 1832-1899
Proctor, Redfield, 1831-1908.
Early, Jubal Anderson, 1816-1894
Blaine, James Gillespie, 1830-1893
Marye, Morton.
Tyler, Lyon Gardiner, 1853-1935.
Lee, Fitzhugh, 1835-1905.
Virginia -- Boundaries -- Maryland.
Virginia -- Boundaries -- Tennessee.
Virginia -- Officials and employees -- 19th century.
Virginia -- Politics and government -- 19th century.
Monument Avenue (Richmond, Va.)

Corporate Names:

Virginia. Governor (1890-1894 : McKinney)
Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College.
Lee Memorial Association.
United States. President (1889-1893 : Harrison)
United States. President (1893-1897 : Cleveland)
Virginia Military Institute
Eastern State Hospital (Va.)
Western Lunatic Asylum (Va.)
Central Lunatic Asylum (va.)
College of William and Mary
Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union
Medical College of Virginia
Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute
University of Virginia
Maryland. State Fishery Force
Hollywood Cemetery (Richmond, Va.)
Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company
Virginia. State Board of Health
Randolph Macon Woman's College, Lynchburg, Va.
New York (State). Governor (1881-1891 : Hill).
Connecticut. Governor (1883-1893 : Bulkeley).
New Jersey. Governor (1890-1893 : Abbett)
North Carolina. Governor (1889-1891 : Fowle).
Rhode Island. Governor (1890-1891 : Davis).
Tennessee. Governor (1891-1893 : Buchanan).
Maryland. Governor (1888-1892 : Jackson).
West Virginia. Governor (1890-1893 : Fleming).
North Carolina. Governor (1891-1893 : Holt).
United States. Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862

Subjects:

World's Columbian Exposition (1893: Chicago, Ill.)
Convict labor -- Virginia -- 19th century.
Public Debt -- Virginia.
Diphtheria.
Oyster culture. -- Law and legislation -- United States.
Oyster surveys -- Chesapeake Bay (Md. and Va.)
Oystering Chesapeake Bay (Md. and Va.)

Genre and Form Terms:

State government records -- Virginia.

Letter books.

Letters (correspondence).

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into the following series:

- Series I. Executive letter books of Governor Philip W. McKinney, 1890-1894.

Arranged chronologically.

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