

A Guide to the Justice Roscoe Stephenson Papers, 1865; 1904-2011 (bulk 1981-2010)

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A Collection in the Supreme Court of Virginia Archives, Virginia State Law Library 00028356

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Descriptive Summary

Accession Number

000028356

Language

English

Creator

Stephenson, Roscoe Bolar, 1922-2011

Physical Characteristics

43.2 cu. ft. (96 boxes)

Repository

Supreme Court of Virginia Archives, Virginia State Law Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Access to confidential correspondence and judicial conference notes restricted until June 1, 2031.

Use Restrictions

Because the library is not open to the general public, researchers should contact the library to arrange access to the collection.

Acquisition Information

These papers were transferred to the Supreme Court of Virginia Archives from Justice Stephenson's chambers in Covington, Virginia, in April 2011.

Preferred Citation

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Adjunct Descriptive Data

Separated Material

Papers documenting Roscoe B. Stephenson Sr.'s work as a deacon and elder at the First Presbyterian Church (Covington, Va.), 1920-1935, circa, were transferred to the First Presbyterian Church in 2011.

Bibliography

George A. Revercomb, Jr., "In Memoriam, Roscoe B. Stephenson, 1884-1965," Virginia State Bar Association Reports, 1966 (v. LXXVII) (Richmond, Va.: Lewis Printing Company, Printers, 1967), 192-193.

Other Finding Aid

A box and folder list is available at the repository.

Biographical Information

Roscoe B. Stephenson, Jr., was appointed to the Supreme Court of Virginia in 1981 and reappointed in 1993. He retired in 1997 and served as senior justice until December 2010. Stephenson died on May 30, 2011, in Covington, Virginia.

Stephenson was born in Covington, Va., on February 22, 1922. He was awarded a B.A. degree from Washington and Lee University in 1943 and a J.D. from the Washington and Lee University School of Law in 1947. Stephenson then returned to Covington and practiced law there in partnership with his father, Roscoe B. Stephenson, Sr. From 1952 to 1964, he was Commonwealth's Attorney for Alleghany County. He returned to private practice in Covington in 1964 and continued until 1973, when he became circuit court judge for the 25th Judicial Circuit of Virginia, a position he held until he became a justice on the Supreme Court of Virginia in 1981.

As a Supreme Court of Virginia justice, Stephenson wrote decisions upholding the cap on awards on medical malpractice cases and affirming the use of DNA evidence in the case of Timothy W. Spencer in 1989. The Spencer case was the first case in which an individual was sentenced to death based largely on DNA evidence.

Roscoe B. Stehenson, Sr. (1884-1965) was born at Mountain View farm in Bath County (now Highland County). After earning a law degree from Washington & Lee University in 1909, he moved to Covington, in part because he had an uncle, George A. Revercomb, Sr., who had a law practice there, and began practicing law. Stephenson served as mayor of Covington and Alleghany county Commonwealth's Attorney. He was a Deacon and an Elder at First Presbyterian Church (Covington, Va.) He was an active member of the Virginia State Bar Association and his clients included civil and criminal cases.

Oscar Adam Stephenson (1845-1917) was born at Mountain View farm in Bath County (now Highland County). He served in McCausland's Brigade (Brigadier General John McCausland, Jr.) in the Civil War, and

was discharged from the Army of the Shenandoah in May 1865.

Scope and Content

The Stephenson papers are comprised mostly of Justice Stephenson's case files and opinions, correspondence, and other papers documenting his tenure as a justice on the Supreme Court of Virginia, 1981-2010. The papers also include correspondence and opinions, 1973-1978, documenting his work as a judge on the 25th judicial circuit in Alleghany County, as well as personal papers, 1954-2011, circa. The collection also contains personal and professional papers of Justice Stephenson's father, Roscoe Stephenson, Sr., 1904-1929; and the military discharge record of his grandfather, Oscar Adam Stephenson, 1865.

Justice Stephenson's Supreme Court of Virginia case files, 1981-2010, are notes, research, opinions, and drafts of opinions he wrote while serving on the court. These papers also contain judicial correspondence, speeches, meeting and program materials, and mementos documenting his service on the court.

Justice Stephenson's personal papers, 1954-2011, contain personal correspondence, 1954-2011; letters pertaining to fundraising for Washington and Lee University, and records of his service to the Museum of Frontier American Culture and the John Marshall Foundation. The papers also include letters with extended family, letters about personal interests, such as golf and the 50th reunion of the Covington High School class of 1943. The papers include a few photographs, including a photograph of Roscoe Stephenson, Sr. speaking at the Catawba Sanatorium in 1917 and photographs of the Covington High School Class of 1943 fiftieth reunion.

The Roscoe B. Stephenson, Sr. papers, 1904-1929, are comprised mostly of letters documenting his law practice in Covington, Va., much of it involving the collection of debts from local businesses. The papers also contain letters pertaining to Stephenson's interest in state politics and his relationships with political figures in Virginia. They include letters to elected officials advocating for candidates, particularly the candidacy of his uncle, George A. Revercomb. A few letters contain comments on political issues, such as a letter to Delegate Hugh High about legislation White proposed to regulate pollution in the James river, 1914. Correspondents include John Garland Pollard, candidate for Attorney General and member of the Virginia Progressive Democratic League, 1913-1914; Delegate John W. Stephenson (Roscoe Stephenson Sr.'s uncle), 1914-1918, 1924; St. George Tucker, Lexington, 1914; Congressman H.D. Flood, 1916; Aubrey E. Strode, 1914; Justice Louis Spencer Epes, 1917-1918; Governor Westmoreland Davis, 1918; Senator W.A. Rinehart, and Abram P. Staples, 1924. Letters also document Stephenson's campaign for Alleghany County Commonwealth's Attorney, 1915 (including annotated Alleghany county voter lists, 1904, circa).

The Roscoe B. Stephenson, Sr. papers also contain correspondence with Stephenson family members in Bath and Highland counties and West Virginia; letters pertaining to investments in mining and timber operations; letters with Washington and Lee classmates and fraternity brothers; and letters pertaining to the time he spent in Catawba sanatorium in Roanoke County and his efforts to lobby for increased funding for tuberculosis patients. The papers also include a few items pertaining to Stephenson's work with the Alleghany County draft board during World War I and requests for pardons for convicted individuals when he was Alleghany County Commonwealth's Attorney.

Index Terms

Persons:

Stephenson, Oscar Adam, 1845-1917.

Stephenson, Roscoe Bolar, 1884-1965.

Stephenson, Roscoe Bolar, 1922-2011.

Corporate Names:

Alleghany County (Va.) Commonwealth's Attorney.

Catawba Sanatorium (Roanoke County, Va.)

Covington High School Alumni Association (Covington, Va.)

Museum of American Frontier Culture Foundation Board of Directors (Staunton, Va.)

Virginia 25th Judicial Circuit.

Virginia. Supreme Court.

Washington and Lee University Alumni Association (Lexington, Va.).

Subjects:

DNA fingerprinting -- Virginia.
Judges -- Virginia.
Judicial opinions -- Virginia.
Physicians' malpractice insurance -- Virginia -- Cost control.
Tuberculosis -- hospitals -- Virginia.
Virginia -- politics and government -- 20th century.

Geographic subjects:

Alleghany County (Va.) -- History -- World War, 1914-1918.

Form/Genre:

Audiocassettes -- Virginia -- Richmond.
Clippings (information artifacts) -- Virginia -- Richmond.
Personal correspondence -- Virginia.
Photographs -- Virginia.
Judicial records -- Virginia.
Lawyers -- Virginia -- Covington.
Legal correspondence -- Virginia.
Souvenirs -- Virginia.
Video recordings -- Virginia -- Lexington.
Voters' lists -- Virginia -- Alleghany County.