

ALFRED F. POTTS PAPERS, 1852-1916

Collection #
M 561

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Processed by
Charles Latham
15 November 1990

USER INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box

COLLECTION DATES: 1852-1916

PROVENANCE: Gift of Harry Huffman, Zionsville, IN, 28 June 1990

RESTRICTIONS: None

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the Indiana Historical Society.

ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

OTHER FINDING AIDS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 90.0385

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alfred Fremont Potts (1856-1927), lawyer, business and civic leader, was born in Richmond, Indiana, the son of Dr.

Alfred Potts and Mary Pope Potts. His father, a surgeon, died during the Civil War, and his education after grade school was largely self-administered.

Potts was admitted to the Marion County bar in 1876, and in the following year he formed a legal partnership with John L. Griffiths. This partnership, which lasted twenty-five years, made use of Griffiths' skill as an orator backed by Potts's ability to prepare cases; it achieved some notable successes in defending what had been considered hopeless criminal cases. It broke up when Griffiths became involved in politics, ending in a long tenure as consul-general in Great Britain, while Potts gave more time to civic and business matters.

Potts married May Barney of Indianapolis. They had two daughters: Deborah, who married Norman Cook, and Marjorie, who married first Walter Vonnegut and then humorist Don Marquis.

Along with Col. Eli Lilly and William Fortune, Potts was one of the chief founders of the Commercial Club, later the Chamber of Commerce. He was also involved in promoting construction of the Board of Trade Building (southeast corner of Ohio and Meridian Streets) and the Claypool Hotel. In 1908 he ran unsuccessfully for the State Senate. His major achievement, however, was in the gas industry. In 1887, at the beginning of the natural gas boom in central Indiana, Potts devised a plan for controlling the industry which called for a company with private capital, managed by a board of self-perpetuating trustees, and restricted to 8% annual earnings. This plan, instituted in Indianapolis, was meant to eliminate politics and stock manipulation and to provide gas to the public at a fair price. Potts was instrumental in setting up the same kind of organization for manufactured gas when natural gas ran out in the early 1900s. In 1916, at the request of Governor James P. Goodrich, he drafted a bill which would have applied the same principle to all utilities in the state, but the bill was sidetracked by other issues such as World War I, prohibition, and woman suffrage.

Potts also had a literary bent, and wrote a number of papers and toasts for organizations to which he belonged.

Sources: Materials in collection

Indiana Biographical Series, Vol. 2, pp. 245, 274

Dunn, Indiana and Indianans, Vol. 5, pp. 1918-1920

Who Was Who in America, Vol. 1

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection, filling one manuscript box, contains some biographical material, mainly clippings, 7 photographs of family members and a number of essays, stories, and toasts written by Alfred Potts. Most are undated, but those with dates run from 1903 to 1916. (There is a Xerox copy of an 1852 letter from Oliver P. Morton to "Mary" with a mention of the Potts family.) The papers are arranged alphabetically by title.

Some of the stories are humorous. Some have a moral; for example, two (Folders 20, 21) deal with rich men and their treatment of their ungrateful heirs. Some of the essays also are humorous (Folders 6, 22), some didactic (Folder 15), some sentimental (Folder 12). Folder 10 contains a rather lengthy Life of Sam Houston, Folder 18 an even longer Symposium on the [First World] War.

Taken as a whole, the papers show Potts as having a literary talent combining humor, thoughtfulness, and an interest in history and current affairs.

FOLDER LIST

Folder

1 Biographical

- 2 1852 letter, O. P. Morton to "Mary"
- 3 Areopagitica
- 4 Birthday toast to Potts 1903
- 5 Captain Bob's Woodlot
- 6 A cure for bachelors
- 7 Dealers in hope (astrologers, fortune-tellers)
- 8 The fall of Warsaw (poem)
- 9 How I re-won my wife
- 10 Life of Sam Houston
- 11 Our inheritance from chivalry
- 12 Our little girls
- 13 "Our state is rich..." (University Club 1905)
- 14 The revolt of the dishes
- 15 The scorcher
- 16 A sketch of two lovers
- 17 A study of the gentleman
- 18 A symposium on the war
- 19 The too serious (Indiana Underwriters 1904)
- 20 Was it madness?
- 21 The wills of the Ludlows
- 22 Woman and her clothes (Progressive Club 1916)
- 23 (VC) Photographs
 - 1) Alfred F. Potts for State Senator, n.d.)
 - 2) Alfred F. Potts, ca. 1905
 - 3) Alfred F. Potts, ca. 1912
 - 4) Dorothy Potts Cook, ca. 1912
 - 5) Alfred F. Potts, ca. 1916
 - 6) Probably Alfred F. Potts and wife ca. 1923
 - 7) Marjorie Potts Vonegut with daughter Ruth, performance on ocean liner, 1930.

CATALOGUING INFORMATION

MAIN ENTRY: Potts, Alfred F. (Alfred Fremont),1856-1927

SUBJECT ENTRIES: Houston, Sam, 1793-1863

Natural Gas--Indiana

Clubs

World War, 1914-1918--Public opinion

Astrology

Fortune-telling

Toasts

Indianapolis (Ind.)--Clubs

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