



Guide to the Benjamin Hedrick Papers, 1848-1893

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Summary

Collection Title:

Benjamin Hedrick papers, 1848-1893

Creator:

Hedrick, Benjamin Sherwood, 1827-1886

Abstract:

Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick was a white professor of chemistry at the University of North Carolina, 1854-1856, and U.S. Patent Office official, 1861-1886. Collection consists chiefly of letters to Hedrick. The early correspondence is between Hedrick and Mary Ellen Thompson, his future wife. Other correspondence concerns life at the University of North Carolina, Hedrick's dismissal from the University in 1856 for his Republican and anti-slavery opinions, and his life in the North during the Civil War period. Many of the post-1861 papers relate to Hedrick's position as chemical examiner at the Patent Office. Other topics include Reconstruction, the economic plight of the South, and politics, including Hedrick's attempt to win political office in North Carolina (1868). Correspondents include Kemp P. Battle, Daniel R. Goodloe, Horace Greeley, Hinton Rowan Helper, David L. Swain, John Torrey, and Jonathan Worth.

Extent:

20 Linear Feet
6037 Items

Language:

Material in English

Collection ID:

RL.00524

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1mc92>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Benjamin Hedrick Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University

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Background

Scope and Content

This collection consists mostly of letters to Benjamin S. Hedrick, Professor of Chemistry at the University of North Carolina, 1854-1856, and Examiner in the Patent Office, Washington, D.C., from 1861 until his death in 1886. In 1856, expelled from the University for his opposition to slavery, he was driven from North Carolina. However, it is evident from his correspondence that he maintained an intense concern for the welfare of his native state and employed his influence in Washington for the benefit of the state during the Civil War and Reconstruction period.

The collection consists largely of correspondence between the Hedricks and their friends and colleagues. Early correspondence from 1848-1854 includes family news and affairs. Letters of courtship between Benjamin Hedrick and Mary Ellen Thompson, dated 1851-1852 (before their marriage), mainly detail personal news and opinions on new fashions and trends, such as bloomers, temperance, and women's rights. Political events are also mentioned, including the Railroad Jubilee of September 1851, as well as Hedrick's impressions of Harvard and details about his activities while travelling in the North.

Letters from 1854 discuss Hedrick's decision to accept the professorship position at the University of North Carolina and his subsequent plans for the program there. In 1856, Hedrick's article opposing slavery and endorsing John Fremont and the Republicans was published in the North Carolina Standard. The collection includes both clippings, minute excerpts, and correspondence about his subsequent expulsion from the University. Also included are details about the publicity and negative reactions to Hedrick's views; one letter from Mary Ellen Thompson Hedrick recounts UNC students burning Hedrick in effigy. Letters from the Hedricks' friends and supporters describe their own troubles in finding work as a result of backing Hedrick, and also include updates on the political climate throughout the country. Hedrick's grandfather, Benjamin Sherwood, was a regular correspondent from Marion County, Iowa, and provided regular news and opinions on the conditions of the Midwest. He opposed slavery, Democratic Party, and immigration from Catholic countries, and favors letting the Southern states secede. His letters also include family history along with updates from Marion county activities. Know Nothings, President Buchanan's cabinet, and Kansas violence are all discussed in letters from 1856-1857.

After Hedrick's expulsion and departure from North Carolina, incoming letters from friends and family offer news and updates on Chapel Hill residents, including University of North Carolina administrators and professors; schools; crops and prices; as well as family news, courtships, and events. Several letters

mention Hinton R. Helper's book, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*, which Benjamin Hedrick helped promote in 1858. At one point, Hedrick is warned against travelling in North Carolina until after the presidential election, for his own safety.

Following Lincoln's election in 1860, Benjamin Hedrick's letters describe the flood of Republicans moving to Washington, including his own relocation and pursuit of an appointment in the Patent Office. Included is a letter from March 1861 where he describes meeting President and Mrs. Lincoln. Meanwhile, letters to Hedrick from North Carolina mention secession fervor in Charleston, South Carolina, as well as preparations for arming white citizens against Black people. The North Carolina convention and its delegates are discussed, as are preparations for war in both the North and the South. Hedrick writes about the feelings in Washington, while his stepsister describes sewing uniforms for soldiers in New Bern, North Carolina.

There is little material directly related to the Civil War, apparently due to interruption of mail service between North Carolina and Washington. The letters within the collection include mention of several battles, including Fort Sumter, Bull Run, Gettysburg, and Chickamauga. The homefront is also reported on, including North Carolina's conscription laws, the confiscation of Union-sympathizers' property, the arrival of refugees, and the condition of UNC's campus. Politics are another frequent topic, including the Copperheads.

One interesting component of the collection is a group of letters from John A. Hedrick, Benjamin Hedrick's brother and Internal Revenue Collector at Beaufort, N.C. John Hedrick's original letters are interfiled chronologically with the collection, and also exist in typewritten form, filed together at the end of letters from 1863. His reports from Beaufort mention the health and condition of the city; the arrival of refugees after the battle for Plymouth in April 1864; the spread of measles and smallpox; and his thoughts on the Massachusetts 55th Regiment, an African American regiment stationed in North Carolina. In February 1865, John Hedrick writes that the presence of African American Union troops keep Confederate troops away, since they do not like to fight Black soldiers. His correspondence also mentions the death of Lincoln and Johnston's surrender to General Sherman. Post-war letters discuss North Carolina politics, universal suffrage, and crop-sharing by former slaves. He denounces W. W. Holden, the North Carolina provisional governor, and encourages Benjamin Hedrick to run. Later letters describe the North Carolina Constitutional Convention and subsequent election of 1868, where both brothers ran for Congress (Benjamin for the 4th District, John for the 2nd District).

Another notable sub-group of letters about the Civil War come from prisoners of war at Point Lookout, Old Capital, Camp Elmire, Fort Delaware, and Johnsons' Island prisons. The prisoner letters exist only in typewritten form; no originals remain with the collection.

Following the surrender, correspondence transitions to discuss North Carolina's adjustment to Reconstruction. Benjamin Hedrick's visit to North Carolina results in a report to the Secretary of the Treasury that Carolina wants peace, and that hunger, crime, and speculation are serious problems for the population. Some letters to Hedrick complain about freedmen and their labor. Several correspondents discuss the poverty they face in the post-war period, both from their loss of property to the Confederacy and in their loss of slave labor following emancipation. Many write to Hedrick asking for seeds. One notable letter to Hedrick from February 2, 1866, comes from Milly Walker, formerly enslaved by D.L. Swain, who writes she is searching for her father and three children, who had been owned by Dr. Shoaf of Washington.

Another common topic in 1865 is Hedrick's efforts in establishing Internal Revenue districts throughout the state, resulting in much correspondence about the various posts and jobs that resulted.

The political letters of value are found mostly between 1865 and 1870. There is much discussion of the election and its various components, including candidates W.W. Holden and Jonathon Worth; secret political parties, including the Red Strings; the distrust towards the military government; and the issue of universal suffrage. The Test Oath is strongly criticized as impossible, and North Carolina statehood, disenfranchisement, and inclusion into the Union is a regular concern for correspondents, including Hedrick. Many letters denounce W.W. Holden as provisional governor, who is accused of electioneering among the state's freedmen. Hedrick is asked multiple times to promote Jonathon Worth among Northern newspapers. Hedrick's own political ambitions are regularly discouraged by his wife, who in 1867 also writes that he should not accept the presidency of UNC. Several letters in 1868 mention signs of the Ku Klux Klan. Others discuss national politics and the impeachment of President Johnson.

Letters from late 1868 and early 1869 detail the takeover of the University of North Carolina by Col. C.L. Harris and the subsequent appointment of Solomon Pool as president. With Holden as governor, Internal Revenue business in North Carolina becomes a regular topic of correspondence. In May 1869, Hedrick writes of his changing interest from politics to the growth of industry and the activities of the Patent Office. Later letters contain reports on North Carolina news and events, including the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, Governor Holden's impeachment, the Greensboro railroad, a report on the revitalization of UNC, and other political news.

Another significant part of the collection consists of patent papers from Hedrick's career in the Patent Office, including reports and other information on disputed patent cases.

In addition to the patent papers, there is an extensive and varied collection of printed materials that is helpful in glimpsing the personal, professional,

and social life of a civil servant in post-Civil War Washington. Besides the usual accumulation of advertisements, calling cards, etc., there are numerous items on the Freemasons, the Cosmos Club of Washington, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Art, and the formative years of the American Chemical Society, among others. One group of items deals with the litigation of the bankrupt house of Jay Cooke and Co., in which Hedrick had holdings. Another series of items contains commenment announcements, etc., from the various schools and colleges with which the Hedrick family was associated (including Georgetown University, New York University, the United States Naval Academy, Cooper Union, Johns Hopkins, Rutgers Female Institute of New York City). Other items relate to political events of the mid-nineteenth century, such as a group of memorial exercises for Samuel F.B. Morse, James A. Garfield, and Charles Darwin, as well as an invitation to the services for the removal of James Monroe from New York to Richmond in 1858. There are also a number of printed pieces relating directly to the events of the Civil War and Reconstruction era, including broadsides, announcements, pamphlets, and clippings.

Bills and receipts cover four decades of business transactions, beginning with Hedrick's college days. Among the miscellaneous items are drafts of political speeches, newspaper articles (mostly ante-bellum), and an assortment of school papers and genealogical items. The bound volumes accompanying the collection are three memorandum books and one daybook.

Biographical/Historical

Chronology List

Date	Description
1827	Born, Davidson County, N.C.
1851	Graduated with highest honors, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
1851-1854	Clerk, Nautical Almanac, Cambridge, Mass.
1852	Married Mary Ellen Thompson
1854-1856	Professor of Chemistry Applied to Agriculture and the Arts,

Date	Description
	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
1856	Expelled from UNC for anti-slavery, pro-Republican views; left North Carolina
1856-1857	Travelled the U.S. Northern states, looking for work
1857	Chemist, New York
1858	Clerk, Mayor's office, New York City
1859	Teacher, Cooper Union
1861-1886	Examiner, Patent Office, Washington, D.C.
April 1865	Agent, American Union Commission; toured N.C. and examined schools
January-March 1868	Attended N.C. Constitutional Convention, Raleigh
1868	Candidate for Congress, N.C. 4th District (was defeated)
1886	Died, Washington, D.C.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The Benjamin Hedrick Papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library in 1959.

Processing Information

Processed by Rubenstein Library Staff, 1960s

Encoded by Meghan Lyon, January 2011

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Names and Subjects

- Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877) -- North Carolina
- Antislavery movements -- United States
- College teachers -- Political activity
- Governors -- North Carolina
- Southern States -- Economic conditions
- Unionists (United States Civil War) -- North Carolina
- North Carolina -- Politics and government -- 1865-1950
- Chemists -- United States
- Worth, Jonathan, 1802-1869
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill -- History
- Battle, Kemp P. (Kemp Plummer), 1831-1919

- Goodloe, Daniel R. (Daniel Reaves), 1814-1902
- Hedrick, Benjamin Sherwood, 1827-1886
- Hedrick, John
- Greeley, Horace, 1811-1872
- Holden, W.W. (William Woods), 1818-1892
- Ku Klux Klan (19th cent.)
- Hedrick, Mary Ellen Thompson
- Helper, Hinton Rowan, 1829-1909
- United States. Patent Office -- Officials and employees
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill -- Faculty
- Swain, David L. (David Lowry), 1801-1868
- Torrey, John, 1796-1873

Collection Inventory

Correspondence, 1848-1893 and undated

Physical Description: 15 boxes

Letters, 1848-1861	Box 1
Letters, 1861 May-1863 December	Box 2
Typescripts of letters from POWs, 1863-1864	Box 2
Letters from John A. Hedrick, 1862-1864	Box 2
Letters, 1864 (online item available)	Box 3
Digital Object: Letters, 1864	
Letters, 1865	Box 4
Letters, 1866	Box 5
Letters, 1867 January-August	Box 6
Letters, 1867 September-1868	Box 7
Letters, 1869	Box 8
Letters, 1870-1871 July	Box 9
Letters, 1871 August-1872	Box 10
Letters, 1873	Box 11

Letters, 1874	Box 12
Letters, 1875-1876	Box 13
Letters, 1877-1879 May	Box 14
1879 June-1893 and undated	Box 15

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Patent papers, miscellany, printed materials, and volumes, 1850s-1885 and undated

Physical Description: 5 boxes

Patent papers, 1862-1885	Box 16
Patent papers, miscellaneous dates	Box 17
Bills, receipts, etc., 1850s-1880s and undated	Box 18
Miscellany, undated	Box 18
Miscellany, undated	Box 19
Printed materials and clippings	Box 19
Printed materials	Box 20
Volumes (4)	Box 20

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