

Collection #
M 0387

**RUSSELL B. (RUSSELL BENJAMIN) HARRISON
COLLECTION, 1880–1908 (BULK 1889–1893)**

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Processed by
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Updated 17 December 2004

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box, 2 photograph folders

COLLECTION DATES: 1880-1908

PROVENANCE: Beverly Hatfield, Indianapolis, IN, May 1975; Paul C. Richards Autographs, High Acres, Templeton, MA 01468, June 1979; Robert F. Batchelder, Ambler, PA, November 1982 and October 1984

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: M 0132, Benjamin Harrison Collection

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1975.0510; 1979.0611; 1982.1115; 1984.1020

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Russell B. Harrison, the son of Benjamin Harrison, 23rd President of the United States, and his first wife, Caroline Scott Harrison, was born in Oxford, Butler County Ohio, on 12 August 1854. He graduated from Pennsylvania Military Academy, Chester, PA, and in 1877 from Lafayette College, Easton, PA, where he specialized in mining and engineering. Russell Harrison's first public appearance was in 1878, when he represented his family in announcing to the press that the body of his grandfather, John Scott Harrison (son of President William Henry Harrison) had been stolen from its grave and had just been discovered hanging by the neck in a well at Ohio Medical College, ready for dissection.

Shortly after this, Harrison moved to Helena, Montana; where he ran the U.S. Assay Office from 1878 to 1885, and was credited with giving valuable assistance to Secretary of the Treasury John Sherman in resuming specie payments on greenbacks in 1879. At the same time, he engaged in "some ill-conceived ventures in cattle and mining enterprises" which "resulted in catastrophe" in 1886. A major scandal was averted by the intervention of his father, who found Russell's penchant for speculation a great source of worry and concern.

On 10 January 1884 he married Mary A. Saunders, daughter of Alvin Saunders, who had been Territorial Governor of Nebraska under President Lincoln and Senator from Nebraska (1877-1883). They had two children William Henry and Marthena.

By the mid 1880's Russell Harrison was spending part of his time in New York, partly for his business interests, partly to participate in the direction of Judge and of Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. In 1890 he acquired ownership of the Helena Daily Journal. In the same period he was involved in projects concerning the Austin and Northwestern Railway in Texas, the street railways in Richmond and Muncie, Indiana, and land in Montana. He was also secretary of the Montana Stock Growers Association, and participated in his father's presidential campaigns of 1888 and 1892.

During his father's presidency he made some memorable appearances in the press, the most notable being his arrest in a suit for libel brought by John Schuyler Crosby, former Territorial Governor of Montana, a month after his father's inauguration. In 1892 he made a remark concerning the mental condition of James G. Blaine, his father's Secretary of State and rival for the 1892 presidential nomination, which caused a furor.

During the mid-1890's he seems to have been involved in his Helena newspaper and in studying the law, eventually passing his bar examination, and was president of the Terre Haute Electric Railway Company, ca. 1894-1897.

When war broke out with Spain, he volunteered, was commissioned a major on the staff of Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, and eventually was made inspector general of Puerto Rico, with the rank of colonel.

After the Spanish-American War he practiced law in Indianapolis, with offices at various times in the Newton Claypool Building, the Bankers Trust Building, and at 39 East Ohio Street. He separated from his wife and lived at the Columbia Club and then the Denison Hotel. From 1908 to 1927 he served as consul for Mexico; from 1919 to 1927 as consul for Portugal.

Long a supporter of the Republican party, he personally entered politics in 1921, serving a term in the Indiana legislature and two terms in the State Senate. In both bodies he became chairman of the judiciary committee. During an investigation in 1927, he claimed that money to buy six gold medals for past commanders of the Indiana Department of Spanish-American War Veterans had been improperly assessed; he was cited for court-martial for malicious slander by the national body of the organization, but was exonerated.

He died in Indianapolis of heart trouble on 13 December 1936.

Sources: *A Biographical Directory of the Indiana General Assembly*, Vol. 2.
Obituary in *Indiana Biographical Series*, vol. 16, pp. 58-59.
Sievers, Harry J. *Benjamin Harrison* (Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1952-1968).
Dunn, Jacob Piatt, *Greater Indianapolis* (Chicago, Lewis Publishing Co., 1910)
Indianapolis city directories, 1900-1930

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection represents a grouping of several acquisitions of Russell B. Harrison papers. It spans the years 1880-1908, with the bulk of the papers covering the period 1889-1893. The papers and correspondence mainly concern Harrison's varied business dealings, his various brushes with the press, a few personal and family letters and photographs, and a copy of Benjamin Harrison's 1892 annual address to Congress.

The business correspondence is varied. There are some miscellaneous papers for the period 1881-1883, in Helena, Montana. Another group deals with projects in Helena in 1890: the purchase of the Helena Daily Journal, and dealings in land. Probably in connection with the latter is a small collection of letters from William Benner, former stenographer to Senator T.C. Power, offering to hand over to Harrison papers damaging to Power. Another group deals with 1890 plans to buy the Austin and North Western R.R., in cooperation with A.P. Wooldridge and F.H. Holloway. Finally, there is a small group of letters dealing with plans to buy the street railways in Richmond, IN (1890) and Muncie, IN (1893).

Another major body of correspondence deals with Harrison's troubles with the press. Some of these were minor, as when he was accused of misrepresentation in getting a free parasol from a store in New York, and when he claimed that some of his wife's jewelry had been stolen when their apartment at the White House was fumigated after their daughter's bout with scarlet fever. The largest body of papers deals with an 1889 suit for libel brought by former Territorial Governor John Schuyler Crosby of Montana. The suit was based on Harrison's re-printing in the Montana Stockmen's Journal of an article from a Buffalo paper implicating Crosby in a jewel theft at a society dinner. In the course of the suit, Harrison was arrested and briefly held in custody. He defended himself aggressively, finding ways to impugn the character both of Crosby and of his chief witness.

The collection also includes eleven telegrams, June-November 1898, to and from Russell B. Harrison, while on active duty at Headquarters, Seventh Army Corps, Jacksonville, Florida.

Correspondents in this collection include: D.S. Alexander, W.B. Allison, Finley Anderson, William Benner, Joseph Collett, Jno. Schuyler Crosby, C.M. Depew, W.S. Durbin, Marthena Harrison, May Harrison, William Henry Harrison [son], B.F. Hobart, Emma Jones, DeLancey Nicoll, Whitelaw Reid, William A. Sweetser, Marshall P. Wilder and A.P. Wooldridge.

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