Matt E. Mason Papers: Finding Aid

Finding aid prepared by Katie Richardson, October 6, 2009.
The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens
Manuscripts Department
1151 Oxford Road
San Marino, California 91108
Phone: (626) 405-2129
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URL: http://www.huntington.org
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Overview of the Collection
Title: Matt E. Mason Papers
Dates (inclusive): 1874-1919
Collection Number: mssMason papers
Creator: Mason, Matt E.
Extent: 78 items in 2 boxes plus one rolled item.
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Abstract: This collection contains the papers of Matt E. Mason (born 1849) chronicling his activity in manufacturing between 1874 and 1919 in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Includes diaries and account books kept between 1874-1882 with entries describing his day-to-day activities and include an account of his search for better employment opportunities, the type of weather conditions he encountered, shopping, news of friends, and his expenditures.
Language: English.
Access
Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item]. Matt E. Mason Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Provenance
Purchased from Michael Brown Rare Books, December 17, 2008.
Biographical Note
Matt E. Mason (born 1849) was the son of Norwegian immigrants, Edward and Catherine Mason who moved to the United States in 1849. According to U.S. census records, Matt was born in April of 1849 in Chicago, Illinois. He was the eldest of five children. He had three brothers and one sister: Oscar, Simon, Henry, and Mary. Soon after Matt’s birth, the family moved to Leroy, Wisconsin.
In 1874, Matt moved out of the family home in order to improve his job prospects and overcome some personal restlessness. He took a job as a blacksmith in Waupun, Fond Lac County, Wisconsin at the Fox Lake Manufacturing Company. Matt left the town in 1875 and traveled throughout Minnesota working along the way. He made his way back to Wisconsin where he got a job in Whitewater as a manufacturer of agricultural reapers at Gregory Esterly & Sons. Matt stayed in the area for three months until he ventured to Iowa. Matt remained in Iowa about two months working at Hail & Adams before heading back to Minnesota and then finally to the family home in Wisconsin. In his diaries Matt describes such things as the harsh weather conditions he faced while traveling, the Norwegian churches he visited in the various towns, socializing with other young men, and the working conditions he experienced in the various companies.
Matt remained in Whitewater, Wisconsin until 1877 when he received a letter informing him of employment as a carriage manufacturer in Rushford, Minnesota, a town with a high Norwegian immigrant population. Matt met and married Carrie, a Norwegian immigrant, in March of 1879. Shortly after their marriage the two set out for Valley City, Dakota Territory which they reached on March 25, 1879. The second day after the couple arrived, Matt bought a town lot with the help of his close friend and land agent B.W. Benson. Soon after, Matt built his store on the land.
By April 1, 1879, his brothers, Simon and Oscar, joined him in Valley City. The Masons and Bensons had formed a partnership and sold such goods as wagons, plows, harvesters, buggies, guns, ammunition, clothing, and assorted general goods until Matt was able to buy Benson out of his share and bring his brothers into the business. The store’s name was then changed to Mason Bros.
Mason and his wife had at least four children by 1900, three of which survived past infancy: Edwin, Clarence, and Milton. By 1910, the U.S. census lists Matt as being retired. He died sometime between 1920 and 1930.

Scope and Content
The papers in the collection chronicle Matt E. Mason's rise in the business world in the upper Midwest and span about forty years.
The Diaries series is arranged chronologically and consists of holographic account books and diaries kept by Mason between the years 1874-1882. The entries are written during Mason’s time in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota. The entries describe his day-to-day activities and include an account of his search for better employment opportunities, the type of weather conditions he encountered, shopping, news of friends, and his expenditures.
The Legal Documents series is arranged alphabetically and includes such items as financial records, checks written and received by Mason, indentures relating to the purchasing and selling of land, and receipts/agreements made by Mason and the Gregory, Jennison & Company.
The Photographs series (ca. 1900s) is arranged alphabetically and includes images of what appears to be the Mason Bros. store, both inside and outside, a picture of men working in a field presumably plowing for wheat, the Sumner & Morse Carriage factory, the Valley City Cornet Band, and two photographs of unidentified men.
The Oversize series contains one rolled item, the military commission issued to Edwin K. Mason (Matt’s son) for First Lieutenant of the North Dakota National Guard. The document is dated January 14, 1915 and is signed by North Dakota’s Governor, L.B. Hanna.

Arrangement
The papers are arranged in the following series: 1. Diaries (Box 1); 2. Legal Documents (Box 1); 3. Photographs (Box 2); 4. Oversize.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library’s Online Catalog.

Subjects
Mason, Matt E. -- Archives.
Agriculture -- Middle West -- History -- Sources.
Blacksmiths -- Middle West -- History -- Sources.
General stores -- Middle West -- History -- Sources.
Chicago (Ill.)
Iowa -- Description and travel.
Minnesota -- Description and travel.
Rushford (Minn.)
Waupun (Wis.)
Whitewater (Wis.)
Wisconsin -- Description and travel.
Valley City (N.D.)

Forms/Genres
Deeds -- Middle West.
Diaries -- Middle West.
Financial Records -- Middle West.
Indentures -- Middle West.
Personal Papers -- Middle West.
Photographs -- Middle West.

Additional Contributors
Fox Lake Manufacturing Company.
Gregory Esterly & Sons.
Gregory, Jennison & Company.
Mason Bros. Store.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1</th>
<th>Diaries and Legal Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Folder 1</td>
<td>Mason, Matt E. Diary (1874). 1 item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 2</td>
<td>Mason, Matt E. Diary (1875). 1 item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 3</td>
<td>Mason, Matt E. Diary (1876). 1 item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 4</td>
<td>Mason, Matt E. Diary (1877). 1 item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 5</td>
<td>Mason, Matt E. Diary (1879). 2 items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 6</td>
<td>Mason, Matt E. Diary (1881-1882). 1 item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 7</td>
<td>Legal Documents: Checks (bank checks) (1888-1902). 14 items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 10</td>
<td>Legal Documents: Indentures (1879-1920). 11 items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 2</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 1</td>
<td>Abbot, George L. (1911). 1 photo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 2</td>
<td>Agricultural work: three men with plow [undated]. 1 photo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 3</td>
<td>Exterior of the Mason Bros. store [undated]. 1 photo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 5</td>
<td>Sumner &amp; Morse Carriage Factory and employees [undated]. 1 photo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 6</td>
<td>Valley City Cornet Band [undated]. 1 photo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folder 7</td>
<td>Unidentified men [undated]. 2 photos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversize-Rolled Item</td>
<td>Mason, Edwin K. Military commission (1914). 1 item</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>