Thomas William Sweeney Papers: Finding Aid

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Overview of the Collection
Title: Thomas William Sweeny Papers
Dates (inclusive): 1830-1944
Bulk dates: 1846-1892
Collection Number: mssSW 1-862
Creator: Sweeny, Thomas William, 1820-1892.
Extent: 1,464 pieces in 13 boxes, 2 envelopes, and 1 folder
Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Manuscripts Department
1151 Oxford Road
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Abstract: This collection contains the personal and professional papers of Irish-born American soldier Thomas William Sweeny (1820-1892), including his personal and official correspondence, military records accumulated during his service in the Mexican War, tours in California and Nebraska Territory, and the Civil War, and diaries. There is also correspondence of his son historian William Montgomery Sweeny (1871-1945). Subjects include: the Mexican War of 1845-1848; Fort Yuma; Sioux expedition, Nebraska Territory (Fort Pierre, S.D.); Civil War: Southwest Missouri, Georgia, battles of Shiloh and Corinth; and Sweeny family genealogy.
Language: English.
Access
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Preferred Citation
Provenance
Purchased from Mrs. William Montgomery Sweeny in 1956 and 1959.
Biographical Note
Irish-born American soldier and Fenian leader Thomas William Sweeny (1820-1892) was born in Cork County, Ireland, in 1820, son of William Sweeny and Honora (Sweeny) Sweeny, who emigrated with their family to the United States in 1832, settling in New York. During the Mexican War, Sweeny fought with the 1st New York volunteers, taking part in Winfield Scott's campaign, from the siege of Vera Cruz to the storming of Churubusco. He lost his right arm as the result of a wound received in the battle of Churubusco. From 1851 to 1853, he served at Fort Yuma, California, and then took part in the Sioux Expedition, 1855-1856, from Fort Pierre in Nebraska Territory (now South Dakota). At the beginning of the Civil War, Sweeny served under Nathaniel Lyon in Missouri. Following the surrender of the state forces at Camp Jackson, he was appointed brigadier-general of the three-months' Missouri volunteers and took part in Franz Sigel's expedition to Southwest Missouri. In August of 1861, he was put in command of the 52nd Regiment of Illinois Infantry which he led at Fort Donelson and Shiloh. Sweeny then commanded a brigade and a division in the Army of the Tennessee, taking part in the battles of Corinth, Kennesaw Mountain, and the Atlanta campaign. In August 1865, he was honorably discharged from volunteer service. In 1866 he took part in the failed Fenian invasion of Canada. He was reinstated in the Army in the fall of 1866. Sweeny retired from the army in 1870, with the rank of brigadier-general. After the retirement, he lived in Astoria, on New York's Long Island, until his death in 1892.
Sweeny was twice married. His first wife was Ellen Swain Clark whom he married in 1848. Widowed in 1860, he did not remarry until 1867. His second wife was Eugenia Octavia Reagan, who survived him. Three children were born to each marriage, four of whom survived their father, who died in 1892 in his home in Astoria, Long Island.
Sweeny's son, William Montgomery Sweeny (1871-1945), was a historian, editor, and genealogist, author of: A Biographical memoir of Thomas William Sweeny (New York, 1907) and Captain Thomas Cook (1752-1841), A Soldier of the Revolution.
Thomas William Sweeny Papers:

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mssSW 1-862

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(New York, 1909).

**Bibliography**


See also: Dictionary of American Biography.

**Related Materials**

This collection doesn't contain any materials dealing with the Fenian invasion. This period is covered in the [Thomas William Sweeny Papers](#) in The New York Public Library. (Rare Books & Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library)

**Scope and Content**

This collection contains the personal and professional papers of Thomas William Sweeny, including his personal and official correspondence, military records, and diaries, and the correspondence of William Montgomery Sweeny. Also included photographs, some pencil and ink drawings, and ephemera.

Personal correspondence of Thomas William Sweeny, chiefly his letters to the family and friends written from 1846 to 1892.

Military correspondence and documents - letters, orders, communications, reports, ordnance receipts, commissions, recruiting records, etc. -- accumulated by Sweeny during his service in the Mexican War, the tours in California and Nebraska Territory, and the Civil War, chiefly those received by him or his staff. There are some retained copies of outgoing communications and reports, including official reports on the battles of Shiloh and Corinth, and the march on the Holly Springs, some with by hand-drawn maps. Also included are the speech that Sweeny delivered on the first anniversary of the Battle of Shiloh, and his farewell address to the troops (July 1864).

A large part of Sweeny's correspondence that he kept after his retirement from the army consists of letters from veterans and veteran organizations, including the associations of the veterans of the Mexican War, the 52nd Illinois Infantry, Army of the Tennessee, officers of the Irish Brigade, Associated Pioneers of the Territorial Days of California, Military Service Institution, the Grand Army of the Republic, Hibernian Benevolent Society, and others.

Also included is the diary that Thomas William Sweeny kept during his service at Fort Yuma in 1851-1853. Another diary, titled "Life in the American Desert" (1851, June-July) consists of clippings of the articles published in installments by the New York Atlas in 1856-1857, with author's annotations.

Correspondence and papers of William Montgomery Sweeny, chiefly letters addressed to him and related to his biographical and genealogical studies, including some genealogical data.

Note: This collection doesn't contain any materials dealing with the Fenian invasion.

Persons represented by 5 or more items consist of: Sarah A (Sweeney) Barnard (7 pieces); Emile H. Brie (7 pieces); Charles Brower (9 pieces); Francis D. Clark (10 pieces); James Edward Kelly (5 pieces); W. H. Lane (6 pieces); C. Osgood Morse (7 pieces); Samuel Vincent Niles (7 pieces); James Rowan O'Beirne (6 pieces); Grenville Mellen Dodge (5 pieces); Mary P. Kilby (7 pieces); Fitz John Porter (7 pieces); Charles Baxter Sweeny (15 pieces); Eugenia O. (Reagan) Sweeny (5 pieces); Frances Ellen Sweeny (11 pieces); Sarah Bernard Sweeney (5 pieces); Sarah Bernard Sweeney (5 pieces); and Thomas William Sweeny (335 (approx.) pieces)

Some notable items include:

- SW 181 Grant, Ulysses S. Letter to Gen. Thomas S. Jesup. 1847, Jan. 31
- SW 403 Scott, Winfield. Letter to David Conner: re. Taylor's victory over Santa Ana. 1847, Mar. 16
- SW 540 Sweeny, Thomas W. To C. Lovell: Report on Battle of Corinth (Miss.). 1862, Oct. 15
- SW 626 Sweeny, Thomas W. Official Report of the Battle of Shiloh. 1862
- SW 634 Sweeny, Thomas W. "The Siege and Occupation of Corinth" (of 1862). c. 1865
- SW 771 Account of battle of 52nd Ill. Reg. at Pittsburg Landing under command of Thomas William Sweeny, Feb. 1862
- SW 850(1-120) Sweeny, Thomas W. & others. Letterbook. Contains correspondence re Yuma military reservation on the Colorado River, and the Sioux expedition in Nebraska Territory.
- SW 862(1-195) Sweeny, Thomas W. & others. Letterbook. Contains correspondence during Civil War
The letterbook containing Civil War correspondence (SW 862) has been disbound for conservation purposes and the individual letters foldered sequentially in 4 boxes.

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

Subjects
Sweeny, Thomas William, 1820-1892 -- Archives.
Sweeny, William Montgomery, 1871-1945 -- Archives.
United States. Army. Illinois Infantry Regiment, 52nd (1861-1865)
United States. Army -- History -- Mexican War, 1846-1848 -- Sources.
United States. Army -- Officers -- Correspondence.
Atlanta Campaign, 1864 -- Sources.
Corinth, Battle of, Corinth, Miss., 1862.
Dakota Indians -- Wars.
Fort Donelson, Battle of, Tenn., 1862 -- Sources.
Indians of North America -- Arizona.
Indians of North America -- Government relations.
Indians of North America -- South Dakota.
Indians of North America -- Wars -- 1815-1875.
Irish Americans -- Archives.
Kennesaw Mountain, Battle of, Ga., 1864 -- Sources.
Mexican War, 1846-1848 -- Sources.
Mexican War, 1846-1848 -- Veterans -- Archives.
Shiloh, Battle of, Tenn., 1862 -- Sources.
Yuma Indians -- Wars.
Fort Pierre (S.D.)
Fort Yuma Reservation (Ariz. and Calif.) -- History -- Sources.
Georgia -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Sources.
Missouri -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Sources.
Tennessee -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Sources.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Sources.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Veterans -- Correspondence.
New York (N.Y.) -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
United States -- History, Military -- To 1900 -- Sources.

Forms/Genres
Diaries -- United States -- 19th century.
Genealogies -- United States -- 19th century.
Letters (correspondence) -- United States -- 19th century.
Military records -- United States -- 19th century.

Alternate Authors
Sweeny, William Montgomery, 1871-1945.

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