Donald R. Wright Papers: Finding Aid

Finding aid prepared by Nicholas S. Hall, July 1, 2009.
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Overview of the Collection

Title: Donald R. Wright Papers

Dates (inclusive): 1933-1977

Bulk dates: 1970-1977

Collection Number: mssHM 71551-71636


Extent: 87 items in 2 boxes

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Abstract: This collection contains the papers of lawyer and California State Supreme Court judge Donald R. Wright (1907-1985), chiefly consisting of correspondence, and some documents, dating from the 1970s. Most of the correspondence relates in some way to the California Supreme Court, including congratulations on Wright's appointment as Chief Justice in 1970, as well as a large group of telegrams and letters received in regards to the Court's decision to end capital punishment in California in 1972.

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]. Donald R. Wright Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance

Gift from Mrs. Donald R. Wright, 1988.

• Opinions/Justice Donald R. Wright, 1969-1977 [9 volumes] (Call number: 487426)
• Donald R. Wright scrapbooks covering his judicial career, 1953-1977 [2 volumes] (Call number: 492765)

Biographical Note

Born in Placentia, California, on February 7, 1907, Donald R. Wright (1907-1985) attended some of the nation’s top institutions of learning on his path to becoming a prominent California lawyer and judge. After graduating from Stanford University in 1929, Wright went on to study law at Harvard, where he graduated in 1932. He passed the California bar exam in June 1933 and immediately began work for Barrick, Pool, and Knox, a Pasadena law firm, with whom he worked for the next twenty years. Wright’s only respite from law came during the Second World War, while he served as an U.S. Army Air Force intelligence officer in Alaska. In 1953, California Governor Earl Warren appointed Wright to Pasadena district judge. In 1961, Los Angeles voters elected Wright to serve as a judge on the county’s Superior Court, a position which he served for seven years until 1968, when Governor Ronald Reagan appointed Wright to position of Associate Justice of the California Court of Appeal. Wright only served in this capacity for two years before Reagan appointed him Chief Justice of the California State Supreme Court. In this position, Wright took positions counter to the wishes of his political allies, most notably his opinion striking down the death penalty in 1972 and when voters reinstated it by initiative in 1976, striking it down again. Repulsed at his stance, Reagan openly lamented ever appointing Wright to the post. Other accomplishments of the Wright court included expanding the definitions of illegally obtained evidence for criminal cases, and the prevention of police from surreptitiously posing as students in college classes to root out supposedly dissident professors. Wright retired from the court in 1977 and died at his home in Pasadena on March 21, 1985.

Scope and Content

This collection contains the papers of lawyer and California State Supreme Court judge Donald R. Wright. The collection's highlights include several letters from American jurists of the highest order, as well as a large group of invective-laden
telegrams and letters Wright received in 1972 in regards to the California Supreme Court’s decision to end capital punishment in the state. Most of the correspondence relates in some way to the California Supreme Court, most commonly letters and telegrams of congratulation on his appointment to the post of Chief Justice in April 1970.

Notable participants include: Edmund G. Brown; Warren Burger; California Supreme Court; Alan Cranston; Los Angeles County Superior Court; Ronald Reagan; Joseph Wapner; Earl Warren. The collection also includes certificates, official appointments, meeting minutes, and speeches.

Subjects in the collections include: American Bar Association; Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka; California Bar Association; California Judicial Council; California Supreme Court; capital punishment; Conference of Circuit Chiefs; William O. Douglas; Elections in California; Al Gore; Harvard Law School; Hastings College of Law; judicial reform; Charles Manson; McGeorge School of Law; municipal courts in California; National Center for State Court; Richard Nixon; Pasadena Unified School District; Presidential inaugurations; press conferences; Ronald Reagan; Salvation Army; Twilight Club (Pasadena, Calif.); United Nations; United States Supreme Court; and Earl Warren.

**Arrangement**
Arranged alphabetically by author.

**Indexing: Added Entries**
Cranston, Alan MacGregor
Reagan, Ronald

**Indexing: Subjects**
Note: The California Supreme court is not subject indexed due to the large amount of relevant material.

American Bar Association

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

California Bar Association
- Subject in California. Supreme Court. Bar certification (1933, June 9). HM 71563.

California Judicial Council

Capital punishment
- Subject in Charles H. Carr, Jr. letter (1972, Mar. 14) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71567.
- Subject in Virginia Herring telegram (1972, Feb. 21) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71583.
- Subject in George D. Jagels letter (1972, Feb. 24) to Editor, Los Angeles Times. HM 71587.
- Subject in Robert Lochmiller telegram (1972, Feb. 19) to California. Supreme Court. HM 71598.
- Subject in Mr. and Mrs. R. I. Mitchell telegram (1972, Feb. 20) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71605.
- Subject in Sara Muir letter (1972, May 1) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71606.
- Subject in Charles H. Seel telegram (1972, Feb. 20) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71615.
- Subject in Ed Sullivan letter [undated] to California. Supreme Court. HM 71618.
- Subject in Mr. and Mrs. A. P. Walker telegram (1972, Feb. 19) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71620.
- Subject in Marlin L. B Young letter (1972, Feb. 22) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71636.

Conference of Circuit Chiefs

- Subject in Harry A. (Harry Andrew) Blackmun, 1908-1999 telegram (1971, Apr. 7) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71554.
Elections -- California

Elections -- California -- Los Angeles

Gore, Albert, 1948-

Harvard Law School
- Subject in “Dirty Gertie” telegram (1971, Apr. 7) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71570.
- Subject in George Kimball telegram (1970, Apr. 11) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71592.
- Subject in Ronald Reagan telegram (1971, Apr. 7) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71614.

Hastings College of Law

Justice, Administration of - United States

Manson, Charles, 1934-
- Subject in Charles H. Seel telegram (1972, Feb. 20) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71615.

McGeorge School of Law
- Subject in Harold M. Kambak letter (1975, Feb. 6) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71589.

Municipal courts -- California
- Subject in Benjamin S. Hite certificate of election (1958, June 30). HM 71584.

National Center for State Courts
- Subject in Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-, letter (1977, Sep. 9) to the Conference of Chief Justices. HM 71626.


Pasadena Unified School District
- Subject in Nobu. T. Kawai letter (1974, June 8) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71591.

Presidents - United States – Inauguration

Press conferences

Reagan, Ronald
- Subject in John Miner telegram (1970, Apr. 7) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71603.

Salvation Army
- Subject in Frank Lanterman telegram (1971, Apr. 19) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71594.

Superior Court (Los Angeles County, Calif.)

Twilight Club (Pasadena, Calif.)

United Nations
• Subject in Mary T. Hennessy letter (1970, July 17) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71582.
United States. Supreme Court
Warren, Earl, 1891-1974
• Subject in Richard Gleaves letter (1970, Oct. 28) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71577.

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

Subjects
Gore, Albert, 1948-.
Manson, Charles, 1934-.
Wright, Donald R. (Donald Richard), 1907-1985.
American Bar Association.
California Bar Association.
Conference of Circuit Chiefs.
Harvard Law School.
Hastings College of the Law.
McGeorge School of Law.
National Center for State Courts.
Pasadena Unified School District.
Salvation Army.
United Nations.
United States. Supreme Court.
Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka.
Capital punishment -- California -- History -- 20th century -- Sources.
Elections -- California.
Justice, Administration of -- United States.
Municipal courts -- California.
Presidents -- United States -- Inauguration.
California -- History -- 20th century -- Sources.
California -- Politics and government -- 20th century -- Sources.
Los Angeles (Calif.)

Forms/Genres
Certificates -- California -- 20th century.
Letters (correspondence) -- United States -- 20th century.
Speeches -- California -- 20th century.

Additional Contributors
Cranston, Alan, 1914-2000, recipient.
Reagan, Ronald.
Wapner, Joseph A.
California. Superior Court (Los Angeles County)
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“George.” Speech beginning “The way one looks at the age of a person....”
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Giannini, Peter E. 1 telegram (1970, Apr. 7) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907- HM 71576
Gleaves, Richard. 1 letter (1970, Oct. 28) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907-. HM 71577
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Harris, Susan Elizabeth. 1 presentation outline: document (1973, Nov. 2). HM 71580
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Lindroth, L.A., Mrs. 1 letter (1970, Sep. 26) to Donald R. (Donald Richard) Wright, 1907- and Margo Wright. HM 71597
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