Finding Aid to the
Melvin A. Hildreth Papers

Hildreth, Melvin A., 1859-1944
Melvin A. Hildreth Papers, 1882-1944
8.8 linear ft.
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OVERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY

Melvin A. Hildreth was born in Watertown, New York on October 27, 1859, the son of Curtis L. and Sara Ann (Luther) Hildreth. Educated in the public schools and Whitestown Seminary, he was certified as a teacher. He studied law in the office of Mullen and Griffen at Watertown and was admitted to the bar in 1883. Mr. Hildreth moved to Fargo, North Dakota in 1888 and in 1889 was married to Luella Davis of Booneville, New York.

Melvin Hildreth served in the Spanish-American War in which he was judge advocate of the First Manila Command, Philippines. Active in the National Guard, he was appointed inspector general of the North
Dakota unit from 1905 to 1908. He was city attorney of Fargo from 1892 to 1894 and again 1902 to 1904, and from 1914 to 1923 was a U.S. District Attorney. Mr. Hildreth was president of the trustees of the State Hospital at Jamestown for six years. He maintained an active law office in Fargo until 1943. He died January 13, 1944 in Fargo and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Mrs. Hildreth died June 13, 1937.

Mr. and Mrs. Hildreth were the parents of two children, Mildred and Melvin D. Hildreth. Mr. Hildreth was one of the founders of the North Dakota Democratic Party in 1889, and twice ran for a congressional seat. He gave the seconding speech in 1908 for William Jennings Bryan at the Democratic National Convention. Mr. Hildreth was a member of the Episcopal Church, a Master Mason, National Rifle Association, state and national bars, and a life member of the Spanish-American War Veterans. Mr. Hildreth gained a reputation throughout the state for his courtroom presentations. One of his more well-known cases was the prosecution of Kate Richards O'Hare in a war-time espionage case.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Hildreth collection consists of correspondence, attorney dockets, case files, financial records, and various subject files.

The bulk of the Correspondence Series is the letterpress collection of outgoing correspondence from 1893 to 1909 which is quite complete. This collection fully documents Mr. Hildreth's career for this time period. Almost all is typed thus facilitating reading. Only two folders of incoming correspondence, 1894, 1896, and 1923, to 1926, have been preserved and are very scattered. The State Bar Association of North Dakota correspondence includes both incoming and outgoing letters from 1932 to 1935 and is very complete. It deals mainly with the membership problems of the American Bar Association in North Dakota including its delinquent members and the national headquarters. The remainder of the correspondence, which is very complete, consists of Mr. Hildreth's official correspondence while serving as president of the State Bar Association of North Dakota from 1935 -1936. The attorney docket ledgers basically cover most Mr. Hildreth's career from 1884 to 1943 although there is overlapping of years. Most of the volumes include an index to the cases with all actions taken listed for each case.

Another major series is the Court Case Papers Series. The major case papers include those of Katherine Rotenburg vs. Arthur Fisher, and Mr. and Mrs. Fisher (1926-1927) for which Mr. Hildreth represented the defendants; Myron R. Kent, whom he defended (1894), and the Movius Land and Loan Company, et. al. of Lidgerwood, North Dakota (1925-1927), whom he also defended. The papers of each case have been organized alphabetically by type of document and all are quite complete. Other cases include the transcripts for Henry von Bank (1918), Kate Richards O'Hare (1917), and A.D. Weeks, et. al. vs. Charles Hetland and City of Fargo (1924). The financial ledgers cover only the years 1891 to 1893 and 1904 to 1910. They are mainly business related although some do contain personal expenses.

The Subject Files Series, arranged alphabetically, cover many aspects of Mr. Hildreth's career. It includes pamphlets on the 1924 Davis-Bryan presidential campaign, prohibition and other miscellaneous topics including a copy of Townleyism Unmasked. There are six law notebooks of his son Melvin from
while attending Columbia University from 1914 to 1916. The scrapbooks, composed of newspaper clippings and some pamphlets, deal primarily with political topics mainly national, New York and the Democratic Party. Other topics include North Dakota, especially early statehood, women's suffrage, and death of former President Ulysses S. Grant, and legal articles. Several of the scrapbooks have indexes. The newspaper clippings, arranged by subject, are not very extensive. There are also several of Mr. Hildreth's speeches and various State Bar Association of North Dakota publications.

**BOX AND FOLDER LIST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box/Folder</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>Biographical material and Inventory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Correspondence Series</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>Incoming, 1894, 1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>Letterpress, Feb. 20, 1893 - June 6, 1893 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>Letterpress, June 8, 1893 - Feb. 13, 1894 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, Feb. 13, 1894 - July 14, 1894 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, Dec. 11, 1894 - March 12, 1895 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Letterpress, Aug. 19, 1895 - Jan. 29, 1896 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>Letterpress, Jan. 30, 1896 - June 6, 1896 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, June 6, 1896-November 13, 1896 (No Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, Nov. 13-19, 1896, Jan 14-April 26, 1897 (No Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, April 27, 1897 Nov. 27, 1897 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, Nov. 24, 1897 Jan. 14, 1899 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, Jan. 14, 1899 July 31, 1901 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, Oct. 5, 1899 - Sept. 28, 1900 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, July 31, 1901 - May 29, 1902 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, May 29, 1902 - April 6, 1903 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, April 6, 1903 - April 29, 1904 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, April 29, 1904 - May 5, 1905 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, May 5, 1905 - March 5, 1906 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, March 6, 1906 - Sept. 26, 1906 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, Sept. 26, 1906 - May 24, 1907 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, May 25, 1907 - March 19, 1908 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, March 19, 1908 - Nov. 18, 1908 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>Letterpress, Nov. 18, 1908 - May 8, 1909 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2</td>
<td>Letterpress, May 8, 1909 - Nov. 27, 1909 (Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1</td>
<td>1923-1936</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State Bar Association of North Dakota Series

Correspondence—
11/2 1932
11/3 1933
11/4 1935, Jan. - June
11/5 1935, July - Sept.

Presidential Correspondence—
11/7 1936, January
11/8 1936, February
11/9 1936, March
11/10 1936, April
11/11 1936, May
11/12 1936, June
11/13 1936, July
11/14 1936, August - Sept.

Attorney's Dockets Series

12/1 Case action ledger, Jan. 1, 1884 - Aug. 7, 1888 (including legal fees)
12/2 Case action ledger, April 10, 1889 - June 1893 (with legal fees and index)
12/4 Attorney's docket, Jan. 16, 1903 - Jan. 2, 1943 (Index)
13/1 Attorney's docket, Jan. 4, 1897 - Feb. 4, 1908 (Index)
14/2 Attorney's docket, Dec. 22, 1906 - Feb. 14, 1929 (Index)

Court Cases Series


15/1 Affidavit for change of Judge
15/2 Affidavit of M.A. Hildreth
15/3 Bill of costs of defendants Arthur Fisher and Mrs. Arthur Fisher
15/4 Brief for defendant Waldo Fisher on motion for judgment or new trial
15/5 Correspondence, 1926-1927
15/6 List of jurors, statement of Violette O. Bannon
15/7 Memoranda for brief
15/8 Memoranda of evidence
15/9 Memorandum by Judge Buttz to grant new trial
15/10 Notes of Mr. Hildreth
15/11 Order for judgment
15/12 Order, Notice of trial, and Notice of retainer
15/13 Order to show cause
15/14 Requested instructions
Requests, 1-6
Summons, Complaint and Answer

Charles C. Francis et. al. vs. S.M. Francis, et. al., 1926-1930

State of North Dakota vs. Myron R. Kent, 1894
Appeal
Briefs
Briefs
Commutation appeal
Correspondence, F.C. Laird to Dr. C.P. Frank, 1894
Correspondence to Kent, 1894-1896
Court transcript
Jury selection
Jury selection
Miscellaneous
Murder indictment
Notes, Kent to Hildreth
Swedenski confession
Testimony of Margaret Bingingheimer
Testimony of J.C. Kent
Testimony of Kent (William W. Pancoat)
Testimony of Thomas Svendensky
Testimony of George Rasek
Supreme Court (North Dakota) action
Supreme Court (North Dakota) decision
Third Judicial District (Cass County Court)

Paul Martin estate, 1926

Merchants National Bank of Saint Paul vs. Movius Land and Loan Company, et. al., 1925-1927
Affidavit of W.S. Lauder, 1925
Affidavit of C.E. Movius, 1925
Affidavit of A. L. Parsons, 1925
Amended answer, and Amended answer by order of the Court
Answer to complaint, 1925
Articles of incorporation, 1923
Bill of particulars,* 1926
Brief of Ermine Kilby, and Memoranda for Brief
Complaint and amended complaint
Defendant answer and amended answer
Defendant’s trial brief - complaint, 1925
Demand for Bill of Particulars, 1925-1926
17/14 Demurrer, 1925-1926
17/15 Discharge certain Lis Pendens, 1926
17/16 Exhibits
17/17 Exhibits (explanation and copies)
17/18 Exhibits, 3-45 (incomplete) (copies)
17/19 Exhibits, 3, 11-13, 105, 131
17/20 Exhibits, A-C
17/21 Findings of fact, Conclusions of law, and Order for judgment, 1926
17/22 Inventory of Movius Land and Loan Co. by A. L. Parsons receiver, Lidgerwood, N. D.
17/23 List of creditors, bills receivable sold to First National Bank of Lidgerwood
17/24 Memorandum - Movius Land and Loan Company case
17/25 Miscellaneous documents
17/26 North Dakota Supreme Court opinion
17/27 North Dakota Supreme Court - Petition for re-hearing
17/28 Notes of Mr. Hildreth
17/29 Notice of entry of judgment and notice of retaxation of costs, 1926
17/30 Notice of retainer, 1925
17/31 Notice to produce books, documents, notes, accounts, etc. 1926
17/32 Notices of Lis Pendens, 1925, 1927
17/33 Plaintiff's brief
17/34 Stipulations, 1926
18/1 Subpoena, 1926
18/2 Summons and complaint, 1925
18/3 Supplemental brief for defendant Kilby
18/4 Transcript
18/5 Transcript of J. H. Movius and A. C. Parsons testimonies
18/6 Clara Henderson Roberts estate, 1935-1937
18/7 U. S. A. vs. Henry von Bank - Transcript of testimony, 1918
18/8 U. S. A. vs. Kate Richards O'Hare - Transcript of testimony, 1917
18/9 A. D. Weeks, et. al. vs. Charles Hetland and City of Fargo - transcript of the evidence and statement of Case, 1924

Financial Records Series

19/1 Accounts, 1890-1892
19/2 Account ledger, 1893
19/3 Expense accounts, 1904 - April 23, 1909
20/1 Cash book (income - expenses), May 1, 1905 - April 29, 1909
20/2 Day book (cash), 1907-1910
**Subject Files Series**

20/3  Abstract of land titles
20/4  American Bar Association - List of persons dropped for delinquent dues -
     North Dakota, 1928-1933
20/5  American Bar Association List, report, directory, 1932-1936
20/6  Army of the Philippines 1910 yearbook
20/7  Brief book and notes on law, 1888
20/8  J.W. Davis - Charles W. Bryan presidential Campaign, 1924 - Pamphlets
20/9  Eighteenth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution (Prohibition) - Pamphlets, 1926
20/10 *From Bernhardi to Hitler: The Origin of a Plan*, by Melvin D. Hildreth, 1940
     Melvin D. Hildreth - Columbia University law notes—
     20/11  Equity, 1914-1915
     21/1  Equity, 1914-1915
     21/2  Partnership, 1916
     21/3  Partnership, 1916
     21/4  Property 11, 1915
     21/5  Wills, 1916
     21/6  Lignite Coal - Pamphlets, 1915-1920
     21/7  Miscellaneous pamphlets, speeches, 1884-1936
     Newspaper clippings—
     21/8  American Bar Association Convention, 1935
     21/9  Crime
     21/10 Democratic National Party, 1920-1927
     21/11 Farming
     21/12 Juries
     21/13 National politics, 1916-1927
     21/14 North Dakota (Includes "Pageant of the Prairies," by Hildreth), 1917-1927
     21/15 North Dakota Non-partisan League, 1917-1922
     21/16 Women's Suffrage, 1915-1924
     22/1  Woodrow Wilson, 1912-1921
     Scrapbooks—
     22/2  "Common place book for notes on Law," 1880's
     22/3  National politics, New York, death of U.S. Grant, ca. 1884 (with index)
           p. 66-157
     22/4  National politics, New York, death of U.S. Grant, ca. 1884 (with index),
           p. 158-203
     22/5  Democratic Party, New York, North Dakota, and legal material, 1889-1890's
           (with index)
     22/6  Teaching, teacher examinations, poetry, 1882
     22/7  Women's suffrage and North Dakota Federation of Women’s Clubs,
           1915-1916
     22/8  Speeches
State Bar Association of North Dakota—

22/9  Fee schedule, 1924
22/10 List of members of various committees, 1933/34-1934/35
22/11 Programs, etc., 1932, 1935-1936
22/12 Report of Committee on Selection of Judges, 1936
22/13 *Townleyism Unmasked* - Pamphlet
22/14 "Unauthorized practice of the Law, bibliography," ca. 1933