Finding Aid to the
J.B. (James Buel) Power Papers

Power, J. B. (James Buel), 1833-1912
J.B. (James Buel) Power Papers, 1872-1930
3.6 linear ft.
Collection number: Mss 309

OVERVIEW

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Citation: [Identification of item]. J.B. (James Buel) Power Papers, MS 309, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

James Buel Power was born August 20, 1833 at Stockport, New York, the son of William H. and Catharine A. (Buel) Power. The family shortly thereafter moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts where Mr. Power attended the local schools. In 1849 he began his railroad life as a ticket and freight clerk at Port Jervis, New York on the New York and Erie Railway. In 1851 Mr. Power accepted a position in the Civil Engineering Department of the St. Louis and Pacific Railroad as chairman of its preliminary survey. In 1852 he was transferred to its St. Louis and Iron Mountain road in Missouri. In 1856 he accepted a position as civil engineer in charge of work on the Susquehanna division of the New York and Erie Railway. On March 25,
1857 he married Helen Amelia Buckhout of Newburgh, New York. They had four children, George, Charles, J. A. “Allie”, and Clara. In 1857 they came to Waseco County, Minnesota where Mr. Power worked as an engineer and surveyor. In 1861 he was appointed Chief of the Land Office in the Auditor’s Office of Minnesota and in 1862 Mr. Power became Deputy State Treasurer. In 1867 he was appointed Chief Draftsman in the U.S. Surveyor’s Office in St. Paul. Mr. Power remained there until being appointed the first Land Commissioner of the Northern Pacific Railway in 1871 and in 1873 its General Agent for the Minnesota and Dakota division. In 1875 he became Land Commissioner for the Road. During this period Mr. Power helped promote the purchase of land for the bonanza farms in the Red River Valley because of the 1873 depression. In 1875 he himself bought 6,000 acres near Leonard, North Dakota calling it the Helendale Stock Farm. In 1881 he became the Land Commissioner of the St. Paul and Manitoba (Great Northern) which he resigned in 1885 to become Secretary/Treasurer of the South St. Paul Stockyards. But due to ill health he resigned this position shortly thereafter and moved to his farm in North Dakota to retire, living there permanently after 1890. Mr. Power was appointed director of the North Dakota Board of Agriculture in 1887, and in 1890 on the Board of Trustees of the newly established North Dakota Agricultural College, Fargo. Also in 1890 Mr. Power was appointed by the State Board of Public Lands as special agent to select lands inuring to the state by the Enabling Act. In 1893 he became Acting President of the North Dakota Agricultural College until 1895, and in 1897 he served in the North Dakota House of Representatives. Mr. Power continued to live on his farm until his death on December 16, 1912. He was buried at St. Paul, Minnesota.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The James B. Power papers are organized into three series: Correspondence, Financial and legal papers, and Subject files.

The Correspondence Series consists almost exclusively of Mr. Power’s letterpress books of out-going correspondence from 1873 to 1903. They are very complete and document his career fully during this period with the Northern Pacific and Great northern Railways, the North Dakota Agricultural College and his business and farming interests. All fourteen volumes are indexed, and quite legible with several having been transcribed including the 1878 and the 1890-1894 volumes. These correspondence volumes provide good insights into the early settlement and rise of bonanza farms in the Red River Valley. There is some incoming correspondence, but it is extremely scattered. The letters for 1953 to 1957 are from family members, related to the donation of the papers and reminiscences.

The Financial and Legal Records Series includes various loan agreements, property tax statements and miscellaneous receipts, mainly from 1872 to 1894. They are by no means complete but give an indication of the varied business activities and property holdings of Mr. Power. The legal material includes property deeds and land abstracts for his and other lands, and legal briefs form several court cases in North Dakota, related mainly to conflicts in property ownership. The miscellaneous legal documents include mortgage papers, power of attorney, foreclosure, affidavits of publication, and sheriff’s certificate of sale.

The Subject Files Series is not extensive but do contain various speeches of Mr. Power including: wheat, cattle, prohibition, business, and for commencements. Other items include pencil scale drawings of the
Helendale farm home and a few abstracts of Helendale Township, Richland County board minutes. The newspaper clippings include copies of obituaries of Mr. J.A. “Allie” Power, and articles written by James B. Power about him.

**SEPARATIONS RECORD**

The following non-manuscript items were removed from the James B. Power papers and have been sent to the section indicated.

**Maps** (Institute map collection)
- College Place addition to Casselton, Dakota.
- Power’s addition to Casselton

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