

Information Sheet

R Whitledge, Thomas Benson, 1844-1917.
276 Papers, 1874-1916.
Twenty-two folders.

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These are letters to Thomas B. Whitledge, an attorney and politician in St. Marys, Ste. Genevieve County, Missouri. Correspondents include Edward A. Rozier, Benjamin B. Cahoon, and Richard C. Kerens. Subjects include levee districts, railroads, oil exploration, and the Republican Party. Topics in the latter category include patronage, religious toleration, and the Taft/Roosevelt split of 1912.

Thomas Benson Whitledge was born on 1 June 1844 in Pike County, Missouri. His father, for whom Whitledge was named, had died about three weeks previous, and Whitledge was raised by his widowed mother and elder brothers and sisters. As a young man he made an overland journey to California, but he returned to Missouri to become a steamboat clerk on the Mississippi River. On 26 January 1875 he married Sarah Fairchild Gilbert of Cairo, Illinois. They established residence in St. Marys, Ste. Genevieve County, Missouri, which had been founded by Sarah's father, Miles F. Gilbert. She died on 28 December 1905, and Whitledge never remarried. He died at Hot Springs, Arkansas, on 17 May 1917, and is buried beside his wife in St. Marys.

While working on the river Whitledge studied law, and was admitted to the Missouri Bar in 1880. He built a successful practice and became active in the Republican Party, running unsuccessfully for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1892. He was elected to the Missouri Senate in 1910 and was re-elected in 1914. A political conservative, he supported the renomination of William Howard Taft in 1912.

The Whitledge papers deal mostly with his legal and political careers. There is also some family correspondence, largely from his elder brother, Ralph J. Whitledge, a former river boat pilot and captain who was on the St. Louis, Missouri, Harbor and Wharf Commission and was a Supervisor for the U.S. Steam-Vessel Inspection Service, and his in-laws, the Gilberts of Cairo, Illinois.

The papers which deal with Whitledge's law practice are for the most part routine, although they do concern themselves with such topics as levee districts (particularly Perry County, Missouri, Levee District No. 1), railroads (especially the Saline Valley Railroad Company, the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway, and the Southern Missouri Railroad Company), and petroleum exploration in Ste. Genevieve County.

Whitledge's political papers will doubtless be of the most interest to researchers. They deal with Republican Party patronage, strategy, and ideology, particularly in the city of St. Louis, Ste. Genevieve County, and surrounding areas. Whitledge seemed to have considerable influence in party affairs, and was a voice for moderation, accommodation, and toleration. His correspondence from U.S. District Attorney Edward A. Rozier, B. B. Cahoon, and Richard C. Kerens is particularly instructive in this area.

Prominent correspondents, and other names mentioned in the Whitledge papers, include John L. Bogy, Samuel Bond, Benjamin Benson Cahoon, Archibald H. Cashion, Politte Elvins, Chauncy I. Filley, James D. Fox, Herbert S. Hadley, Henry Clay Horner, Louis Houck, Richard C. Kerens, Charles A. Killian, Joseph McCoy, Thomas K. Niedringhaus, John V. Noell, Joseph C. Pratt, John H. Reppy, Edward Amable Rozier, J. W. Scanlan, M. R. Smith, Ralph E. Sprigg, George Steel, and Moses Whybark.

The Whitledge papers consist almost entirely of letters addressed to Thomas B. Whitledge; copies of his outgoing correspondence are rare. The letters are filed in chronological order.

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