



DALLAS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Hatton Sumners papers, 2019.21

Finding aid

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Dallas Historical Society

Title: Hatton Sumners papers

Dates: 1883-1963

Bulk Dates: 1911-1963

Quantity: 2 boxes (.916 linear ft.), 1 flat box (12 inch width)

Abstract: The Hatton Sumners Papers are a supplemental collection to the larger collection of Sumners Papers housed by the Dallas Historical Society. This collection consists of correspondence and personal materials, including photographs.

Identification: 2019.21

Location: Found at the end of Hatton Sumners papers A.46.213

Language: The materials are in English.

Repository: Dallas Historical Society

Biographical Sketch or Administrative History

Hatton William Sumners, the second of three children of William A. and Anna Elizabeth (Walker) Sumners, was born in Lincoln County, Tennessee, on May 30, 1875. Sumners grew up on a farm in Boon's Hill, Lincoln County until 1894 when his family moved to Dallas County, Texas, and settled in Garland. Lacking money to pursue his education but desiring to study law, Sumners approached the Dallas city attorney, Alfred P. Wozencraft, for help. Sumners was hired by the McLaurin and Wozencraft firm and permitted to sleep in the law offices and study law on his own time. Sumners passed the Texas bar examination in 1897.

In 1912, Sumners, a Democrat, was elected to a new at-large seat in the United States House of Representatives and was the first of the 132 freshmen congressmen in the Sixty-third Congress to get a bill through the House. Sumners' bill made Dallas a port of entry for customs. In 1919 Sumners was appointed to the House Committee on the Judiciary, rose to the chairmanship in 1932, and served in this position until his retirement in 1946. In the years of his chairmanship, much of his attention was directed toward his career-long battle to limit the federal bureaucracy

and its effect on the people's responsibility for their government. Along with Sam Rayburn, Sumners was regarded as one of the most powerful men in Congress.

In 1924, Sumners became acquainted with Supreme Court Chief Justice William H. Taft, and their work on a bill amending the judicial code, popularly known as "the Judges Bill," resulted in its passage. Sumners appeared before the Supreme Court several times on behalf of the legislative branch including the Pocket Veto Case of 1928, the McCracken Contempt Case of 1934, and the Municipal Bankruptcy Act Case of 1936. Sumners served three times as manager of impeachment proceedings before the Senate in the cases of federal judges George W. English, Harold Louderback, and Halsted L. Ritter. In 1934, at the request of the resident commissioner of the Philippine Islands and the urging of President Franklin Roosevelt, Sumners drafted a constitution for the Philippine Islands. As a result of these and other activities, he developed a reputation as an authority on constitutional law.

Following his retirement from Congress, Sumners served as Director of Research in Law and Government of the Southwestern Legal Foundation and lived at the Lawyers' Inn on the campus of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. The Hatton W. Sumners Foundation, established in 1949, still awards loans, scholarships, and funding for worthy educational endeavors. Many organizations, including the YMCA, the Red Cross, and Munger Place Methodist Church, his local church, also benefited from his generosity. He was a member of numerous professional and civic organizations as well. He never married. Sumners received an honorary Doctor of Law from Southern Methodist University and the American Bar Association Gold Medal. He wrote *The Private Citizen and His Democracy* (1959). Sumners died on April 19, 1962, and after services in the Highland Park Methodist Church in Dallas was buried in the K. P. Cemetery in Garland.

Sources: Baylor University, Baylor Collections of Political Materials

Scope and Contents Note

The Hatton Sumners papers provide a supplement to the major collection of his papers housed at the Dallas Historical Society in the Hall of State in Fair Park. The papers have been divided into five series: I. Hatton Correspondence, II. Personal, III. Photos, IV. Kate Sumners' Correspondence (Mrs. Willis J. Davis), and V. Historical Items. While individually, the documents may seem insignificant, collectively, they provide insight into the private, family life of a public figure. Of special interest is the close relationship these letters show between Hatton, his sister Kate, and their mother.

The 79 letters in the Hatton Correspondence series are largely handwritten and each of them directly concerns Hatton Sumners, either as writer or as recipient. While the earliest letter is dated 1898 from Hatton to his parents, the bulk of the letters are from 1911 to 1926, the year Mother Sumners died. The letters document the routine daily events of an upper class Southern household in correspondence with Sumners, a U.S. Congressman in Washington, D. C. This series is organized and distributed among four categories of recipients: General (acquaintances and friends, including William Howard Taft), Hatton & Parents, Hatton & Kate, and Other Family Correspondence (where the precise recipient is unclear).

The Personal series represents an assortment of items that Sumners saved. These have been organized into 12 folders which include biographical articles, speeches, Sumners' will, an itinerary and appointment book, bank statements, tax receipts, and a number of other items which, taken collectively, add personal pieces to the larger biographical story.

The Photos series has fifty photographs representing the Sumners family and significant events in Congressman Sumners' life. They include two early studio portraits taken before Sumners became a public figure, a couple of official congressional portraits, several special events photos, and numerous candid snapshots of relatives. There are also photographs present in the Oversize series.

The majority of items in the Kate Sumners series are letters between Kate and Willis written shortly after their marriage in 1917, while Willis was on the road, or while Kate was visiting her parents in Dallas between 1917 and 1919, as well as letters between Kate and her mother from 1914-1919. Following the death of Kate's father, her mother moved to Georgia to live with her. The next large segment of correspondence includes sympathy cards and letters written to Kate following the death of Willis in November, 1963. In addition to letters, these papers contain the condolence pages from Willis' funeral, a lock of brown hair tied with red ribbon, letters dealing with the Legg family genealogy, 1894-1932, and Kate's class notes for Logic in 1905.

Arrangement

The Hatton Sumners Papers are divided into six series including: Hatton Correspondence, Personal, Photos, Kate Sumners Correspondence (Mrs. Willis J. Davis), Historical Items, and Oversize. The correspondence has been organized by recipient primarily and by date secondarily.

Restrictions

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research use.

Publication Rights:

Permission to publish materials must be obtained from the staff of the Dallas Historical Society.

Copyright Statement:

It is the responsibility of the user to obtain copyright authorization.

Sensitive Material Statement:

Manuscript collections and archival records may contain materials with sensitive or confidential information that is protected under federal or state right to privacy laws and regulations. Researchers are advised that the disclosure of certain information pertaining to identifiable living individuals represented in this collection without the consent of those individuals may have legal ramifications for which the Dallas Historical Society assumes no responsibility.

Related Material

A.46.213, A.80.53, A.81.49

Index Terms

Subjects (Persons):

Sumners, Hatton W. (Hatton William), 1875-1962. [local]

Davis, Kate Sumners – Correspondence. [local]

Taft, William H. (William Howard), 1857-1930 – Correspondence. [local]

Subjects (Organizations): [610]

Legislators – United States. [local]

Subjects:

Lawyers – Texas – Dallas. [local]

Places:

Texas – Dallas. [local]

Document Types:

Photographs

Printed Materials

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Collections of the Dallas Historical Society, Hatton Sumners papers.

Acquisition Information:

Donation by Baylor University, Baylor Collections of Political Materials, July 2019.

Processing Information:

Collection processed by Malcolm Foley, Baylor University.

Description of Series

Series one: Sumners correspondence 1898-1962, undated

This series contains the correspondence dealing directly with Hatton Sumners. It contains letters between Hatton and his parents, sister Kate, and friends/acquaintances. Notably, within the General correspondence, there are two letters from William Howard Taft. The series is in average condition.

Box #	Folder #	Title/Description	Date
1	1	General,	Undated
	2	General,	1914-1925
	3	General,	1927-1932
	4	General,	1938-1962
	5	Hatton & Parents,	Undated
	6	Hatton & Parents,	1898-1911
	7	Hatton & Parents,	1915-1920
	8	Hatton & Parents,	1922-1925
	9	Hatton & Parents,	1926
	10	Hatton & Kate,	Undated

	11	Hatton & Kate,	April 1918- March 1925
	12	Hatton & Kate,	October- December, 1925
	13	Hatton & Kate,	1926
	14	Hatton & Kate,	1927
	15	Hatton & Kate,	1928-1932
	16	Hatton & Kate,	1948
	17	Other family correspondence,	1911

Series two: Personal 1883-1962, undated

This series contains the correspondence dealing directly with Hatton Sumners. It contains letters between Hatton and his parents, sister Kate, and friends/acquaintances. Notably, within the General correspondence, there are two letters from William Howard Taft. The series is in average condition.

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date
1	18	Congressional statements, accolades, and speeches,	1940-1962
	19	Biographical articles,	1924-1961
	20	Itinerary and appointment book,	1946, undated
	21	Will,	1905
	22	Southwestern Legal Foundation,	1951-1961
	23	Tax receipts,	1883-1928
	24	Checks to Sam Rayburn,	1914
	25	Loan note,	1906
	26	Life insurance policy,	1915
	27	Bank Statements,	1911-1914
	28	Warranty deed,	1903
	29	Personal member pass,	1944

Series three: Photos 1900-1961, undated

This series contains a number of photos kept by Sumners of himself, his mother, his sister, and other individuals. The series is in good condition.

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date
2	1	Babies,	Undated
	2	Sumners portraits,	1900-1961
	3	Sumners with others,	Undated
	4	Hatton Sumners presenting awards,	Undated
	5	Kate Sumners Wedding,	1917

	6	Kate Sumners,	1917
	7	Hatton Sumners' mother,	1917
	8	Davis-Sumners family,	Undated
	9	Portrait gifts to Hatton,	Undated
	10	Photo of woman,	Undated
	11	Home photographs,	Undated
	12	Ed Prather's reunion,	1951

Series four: Kate Sumners' correspondence (Mrs. Willis J. Davis) 1914-1963, undated

This series contains correspondence concerning Kate Sumners apart from her brother Hatton. The letters tend to be between Kate and her mother, her husband Willis, and other friends and acquaintances.

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date
2	13	Kate and mother,	May 1914
	14	Kate and mother,	January 1915
	15	Kate and mother,	February 1-10, 1915
	16	Kate and mother,	February 16-27, 1915
	17	Kate and mother,	March 1, 1915-February 28, 1919
	18	Kate and Willis,	November 11, 1917-May 17, 1919
	19	Kate and Willis,	May 19-26, 1919
	20	Kate and Willis,	May 29-June 7, 1919
	21	Kate and Willis,	August 22-25, 1919
	22	Kate and Willis,	August 26-29, 1919
Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date
3	1	Other,	Undated
	2	Other,	January 27, 1915-January 24, 1948
	3	Other,	October 26, 1948-March 22, 1950

	4	Other,	December 8, 1950-July 6, 1963
	5-6	Sympathy cards (Willis' death),	November 25-30, 1963; December 1-8, 1963

Series five: Historical items 1894-1963, undated

This series contains correspondence concerning Kate Sumners apart from her brother Hatton. The letters tend to be between Kate and her mother, her husband Willis, and other friends and acquaintances.

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date
3	7	Items from the funeral of Willis Davis	November 1963
	8	Program for Atlanta Civilian Club	November 19, 1948
	9	Cards and envelopes	Undated
	10	Short article by Kate	January 19, 1951
	11	Davis-Legg family genealogy	April 13, 1894-February 24, 1932
	12	Davis lock of hair	Undated
	13	Kate Sumner's logic notebook	1905

Series six: Oversized 1917-1963, undated

The oversized series contains 4 large portraits: one of Hatton, one of Kate on her wedding day, and two large family portraits. Portraits are in good condition.

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date
4	1	Hatton Sumners (portrait)	Undated
	2	Kate Sumners in wedding dress	1917
	3	Family photos	undated