

Archives and Special Collections, SUNY Fredonia
Special Collections
John S. Lambert Papers
Fredonia, NY

Collection Dates: 1899-1982

.42 linear feet
.45 cubic feet
(1 box, 2 reels of microfilm)

Author/Creator: John S. Lambert
Collection No: WNY MSS 17
Processed by: Processed by Kathryn S. Silliman, August 1994. Updated, 1 November 2006, by Richard Mikulski, Josie Lautenslaker, and Jeremy Linden.
Inclusive Dates: 1899-1982
Bulk Dates: 1899-1947

Abstract: John Samuel Lambert, distinguished jurist and justice of the Supreme Court of New York, was born at Johnsonville, New York, on February 4, 1851. In 1871 he moved to Mayville, county seat of Chautauqua County, to work on a farm with his brother. Shortly thereafter, he accepted a clerkship in the surrogate's office, the first step in what was to become an illustrious legal career. The young man continued his study of law in the Fredonia offices of Morris and Russell. Admitted to the bar in 1877, he entered into partnership with that Fredonia firm a year later.

In 1880 Lambert was elected Supervisor of the Town of Pomfret, NY. He left that office in 1882 after he was elected Chautauqua County judge. In 1889, after winning a hotly contested primary, he was elected to the Supreme Court bench. Here he served in the eighth judicial district in Rochester, New York, and in the appellate division in New York City until his retirement in 1921 at the age of 70.

Among the most publicized cases which Judge Lambert handled were the notorious Molineux murder case retrial and a review of the Hearst-McClellan mayoralty contest in New York City.

Following his retirement, Judge Lambert was called upon frequently to serve as official referee in Supreme Court matters. He died on July 16, 1936.

In 1891, Lambert married Winnifred Phillips of Cassadaga, New York. They had two daughters, Margaret Lambert (Fain) and Ruth Lambert (Miller). Shortly before his marriage the judge purchased Sunset Hill, the estate at 17 Central Avenue, Fredonia, which under his care became a local showplace. The property remained in the possession of the Lambert family until 1947.

Scope and Contents: The collection on deposit at Reed Library was placed there at various times during the 1970s by Ruth Lambert Miller (1898-1982), daughter of John S. Lambert. On January 1, 2005, the materials became an outright gift to State University of New York College at Fredonia (c.f. letter in donor file, September 25, 1979). The collection contains correspondence, 1899-1947, and subject files 1865-1982.

The correspondence, 1899-1947, is arranged chronologically by day, month and year. Except for the 1902 correspondence, which concerns the Molineux retrial, and a few other professional communications, most of the letters are addressed by Judge Lambert to his daughter, Ruth. He wrote to her frequently and at length when she was away at school and when he was in Rochester during court sessions. These letters contain much advice on how to approach life, on duty and happiness and on developing values, and offer the reader insights into the character of John Lambert.

The correspondence includes two autographs of Charles Evans Hughes and a letter of condolence written to Ruth Lambert Miller by Grace Richmond, a Fredonia author. Correspondents are indicated on the letters as follows:

JSL – John S. Lambert
RL – Ruth Lambert Miller (daughter)
ML – Margaret Lambert (daughter)
WL- Winnifred Lambert (wife)

The folders in these files are arranged alphabetically by subject. They include genealogy, newspaper clippings, photographs, a memoir of Judge Lambert, a published transcript of the Molineux retrial, and other memorabilia.

Of legal interest is a pamphlet entitled Judge Lambert's Rulings on the Marking of Ballots. In the hotly contested Hearst-McClellan mayoralty race in New York City in 1905, paper ballots were still in use. The judge was called upon to rule on the validity of ballot markings and the legality of certain variations.

In the subject files are a 1902 pamphlet entitled Dunkirk-Fredonia Central park, containing photographs of the streets, residences, and landscape of the area; Van Buren Life, a 1904 manuscript illustrated with drawings, a sensitive account by Anna Clift Smith of a winter spent alone at this isolated site. This manuscript has been reproduced by the Friends of Reed Library.

This collection includes two reels of microfilm (one master copy and one use copy) containing three scrapbooks, including press clippings, cartoons and photographs. One scrapbook contains press clippings from Lambert's 1899 campaign for the Republican nomination for Supreme Court judge. The other two contain clippings regarding the Molineux retrial over which Judge Lambert presided in 1902.

Box Listing:

Box 1.

Inventory Folder

- Folder 1. Correspondence, 1899-1947 [12 Jan. 1899 – 31 Oct. 1902]
- Folder 2. Correspondence, 1899-1947 [1 Nov. 1902 – 5 Nov. 1908]
- Folder 3. Correspondence, 1899-1947 [14 July 1908 – 19 Oct. 1917]
- Folder 4. Correspondence, 1899-1947 [26 Oct. 1917 – 30 Nov. 1917]
- Folder 5. Correspondence, 1899-1947 [31 Nov. 1917 – 27 Feb. 1919]
- Folder 6. Correspondence, 1899-1947 [14 Sept. 1920 – 23 Jan. 1947, and undated]
- Folder 7. Autograph of John S. Lambert
- Folder 8. Certificates (5): Appointment and reappointment to Supreme Court of New York 1906, 1912, 1918
- Folder 9. Dunkirk-Fredonia Central Park, pamphlet, 1902
- Folder 10. Ephemera, tickets
- Folder 11. Exhibits at State University College at Fredonia
- Folder 12. Genealogy and family history, Winnifred Phillips Lambert, including Smith, Phillips, and Hatch families.
- Folder 13. Honors and awards
- Folder 14. Interview, Ruth Lambert Miller, Barker Library Collection (Photocopy)
- Folder 15. Legal papers
- Folder 16. Lincoln assassination, New York Herald, April 15, 1865
- Folder 17. Lindbergh kidnapping material
- Folder 18. Marking of Ballots, Judge Lambert's rulings, pamphlet, 1909
- Folder 19. Memoir of John S. Lambert by Ruth Clow
- Folder 20. Memorial exercises for Judge Lambert at Appellate Division of Supreme Court, September 29, 1936
- Folder 21. Miller, Ruth Lambert 1898-1982
- Folder 22. Molineux Case
- Folder 23. New-York Weekly Tribune, 21 Aug. 1852, Vol. XI, No. 571
- Folder 24. New-York Weekly Tribune, 4 Sept. 1852, Vol. XII, No. 573
- Folder 25. New-York Weekly Tribune, 30 Oct. 1852, Vol. XII, No. 581
- Folder 26. Obituary, John S. Lambert
- Folder 27. Photograph, Old Courthouse, Mayville. 1 Photograph
- Folder 28. Photographs, Sunset Hill, Lambert home. 8 Photographs
- Folder 29. Photographs, Sunset Hill, Lambert home. 12 Photographs
- Folder 30. Press clippings, family (copies)
- Folder 31. Press clippings, People vs. McClellan, mayoralty race, New York City, 1908 (copies)
- Folder 32. Press clippings, Professional (copies)

- Folder 33. Programs
- Folder 34. "Ruth Cooper Ross----her Book", pamphlet 1937
- Folder 35. Salary of Judges, broadside, 1889
- Folder 36. Sunset Hill, Home of Lambert family
- Folder 37. Van Buren Life, unpublished manuscript with drawings, 1904-1905
- Folder 38. Van Buren Life, typescript and notes from publication project.

Additional Media

1. 2 reels of microfilm (1 master and 1 positive copy) containing the following:
 - a. Scrapbook, press clippings, 1889 campaign. Republican nomination for Supreme Court judge
 - b. Scrapbook, press clippings, Molineux trial, October 13, 1902-November 12, 1902
 - c. Scrapbook, press cartoons and photographs, Molineux trial, October 13, 1902-November 13, 1902