

George Dewey (1837-1917)
Family Papers, 1844-1901
MS 125

Introduction

This collection is comprised of letters, account books, and legal papers of George Dewey (1837-1917); his father, Julius Yemans Dewey (1801-1877); and his brother, Edward Dewey (1829-1900); from 1844 to 1901. The collection is stored in one flitop box and occupies .5 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Sketch

George Dewey was born in Montpelier, Vermont, on December 26, 1837. He was the youngest son of Julius Yemans Dewey (1801-1877) and Mary Perrin Dewey (1799-1843), who died when the boy was five years old. The family remained close despite their loss and George Dewey grew up to be, as his father described him, a “natural leader.”

George Dewey’s naval career began at Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont, when he was seventeen years old. He attended Norwich with the intent to prepare himself for the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, to which he transferred to in 1855. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1858, the fifth in his class. The following two years he experienced his first taste of naval life on the frigate *Wabash* in the Mediterranean. In 1861 he was commissioned lieutenant of the *Mississippi* which was one of the largest and heaviest armed ships in the Union Navy; a few months later he was made executive officer of the side-wheeler. Between 1868-1869 he was an instructor at the Naval Academy and in 1870 he was assigned to the steamer *Narragansett* for special service. He was eventually made commander of the *Narragansett* and was sent to survey the Pacific Coast for four years. In 1882 he was assigned to command the *Juanita* in the Asiatic squadron and two years later he was promoted to Captain and assigned to command the *Dolphin*. In 1889 he was Chief of the Bureau of Equipment and recruiting and earned the rank of Commodore in 1896. The next year he was sent to China in command of the Asiatic Squadron.

George Dewey is most famous for the May 1, 1898, defeat of the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay in the Philippine Islands. This victory made the United States one of the principal powers in the East, renewed confidence in the Navy, and made George Dewey admired by his country. Celebrations were held throughout the country. In Vermont, to honor it’s hometown hero, Dewey Day was held in Montpelier on October 12, 1899. All sorts of Dewey memorabilia were sold throughout the country, everything from fine china to soap. During Dewey’s lifetime he was one of the most famous men in America. On May 9, 1898, President William McKinley recommended Congress to appoint George Dewey to Acting Rear Admiral of the United States Navy for his patriotism and success at the Battle of Manila Bay.

George Dewey died on January 16, 1917, in Washington, D.C., and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Scope and Content

The George Dewey Family Papers are a collection of letters, legal papers, and account books of George, Julius, and Edward Dewey. The letters reveal the devout relationships the family continued to have even if there were periods of distance between them. The 23 letters from George Dewey to his father Julius are lengthy and detailed about George's first experiences in the Navy. There are ten letters from George to his brother Edward, including three from Manila and one concerning Edward's appointment of quatermaster for the Army. The collection also includes some account books of Julius' and one of Edward's, as well as some legal papers concerning the estates of Simeon, Julius, and Edward Dewey. The collection has a few miscellaneous items, such as Mary P. Dewey's commonplace book from 1894, a letter from Mary Greeley to her father Julius Dewey in 1863, letters of appointment concerning the estates of Simeon Dewey and Julius Dewey, and a premarital agreement between Julius Y. Dewey and his third wife Susan Elizabeth Griggs Lilley.

Organization

The collection is divided into four series: I. George Dewey correspondence, II. Edward Dewey papers, III. Julius Y. Dewey Papers, and IV. Miscellaneous, which includes letters and writings from Mary Dewey Greeley, daughter of Julius, and a letter from Simeon Dewey, father of Julius.

Related Collections

The holdings of the Vermont Historical Society related to George Dewey are extensive. Consult the main catalog under "Dewey, George" for items by him and under "Vermont--Biography--Dewey, George" for items about him. The heading "Vermont--Biography--Dewey, George--Songs & Music" lists the library's extensive collection of sheet music about Dewey. The library's Colonial Dames collection includes an authoritative and annotated genealogy on the Dewey family entitled *Life of George Dewey, Rear Admiral, U.S.N., and Dewey Family History*. Photos of Dewey and his house will be found in the picture files under "F-PO-Dewey;" photos of Dewey Day in Montpelier will be found under "F-TO-Montpelier-Dewey Day" and "F-TO-Montpelier-State House-Dewey Day." In addition, there is a drawer of Dewey material in the back of the library. Researchers should also use the manuscript catalogs to check for other materials by or about the Dewey family.

There are more letters between George Dewey and his brother Edward Dewey in MSS8-889375 and MSS8-889554. MSS8-889375 is a letter from George to Edward asking for money to send to Hope Goodwin. MSS8-889554 is a letter from George to Edward asking for \$300 for a saddle horse George wishes to buy. More information is available on Edward Dewey's service as quartermaster for the 8th Vermont Regiment in

1864 in MS 124 and MS 194. In addition to information concerning Edward's service during the Civil War, there are also letters between Edward and his father Julius during the Civil War in Misc. File 352, as well as, letters between Edward and his wife Susan Griggs Lilley in Misc. File 353, 354, and 355.

The Vermont Historical Society museum includes a large collection of Dewey and Dewey-related objects. Researchers should consult with the museum staff for information on these items.

Inventory

I. George Dewey Correspondence

- MS 125:1 Letters from George, to his father Julius
- 2 _____, _____, typed transcriptions
- 3 _____, to his brother Edward
- 4 Papers relating to George's schooling in Johnson, Vermont

II. Edward Dewey Papers

- 5 Account book, 8th Regiment
- 6 Correspondence from and to George concerning Edward's estate
- 7 Edward's estate papers

III. Julius Y. Dewey Papers

- 8 Account books
- 9 Family expenses and legal papers

IV. Miscellaneous

- 10 Family letters

Erin Tyburski
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