

Joseph Wharton Family Papers, 1691-1955

(71 boxes)

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Abstract

Joseph Wharton (1826-1909) was a prominent Philadelphia Quaker merchant, industrialist, scientist, and philanthropist who was active in 19th century Delaware Valley manufacturing, business, and education development. The papers cover in depth his business activities as well as his career as Manager of Swarthmore College for over 35 years and as founder of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania.

The collection includes business correspondence, 1855-1908, of the Joseph Wharton Gap Establishment, the Lehigh Zinc Company, Bethlehem Iron company, the Hibernia Mine Railroad Company, as well as more than fifty articles prepared by Wharton dealing with the mineral ore industry including iron, zinc, and nickel, tariff questions, political issues on a national and regional level, and Wharton's special concerns in education. Joseph Wharton (1826-1909) was descended from two of the oldest families in Pennsylvania.

His father, William Wharton, was in the direct line of Thomas Wharton of Westmorland, England, who came to America in 1683. The first American ancestor of his mother, Deborah Fisher Wharton, was John Fisher, who emigrated from Lancastershire about the same time, and whose son, Thomas, settled in Sussex County, Delaware.

The collection contains legal and financial papers for the family from 1778 to 1909, plus memorabilia and reference materials maintained by the family throughout the entire period. Among the most significant family items are the original diary of Samuel Rowland Fisher, one of the exiles in Virginia. Also included are correspondence of the Wharton, Corbit, and Lovering families.

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL

Joseph Wharton (1826-1909) was descended from two of the oldest families in Pennsylvania. His father, William Wharton, was in the direct line of Thomas Wharton of Westmoreland, England, who came to America in 1683. The first American ancestor of his mother, Deborah Fisher Wharton, was John Fisher, who emigrated from Lancastershire about the same time, and whose son, Thomas, settled in Sussex County, Delaware.

Joseph was born in Philadelphia, educated in Friends' schools and in the private school of Frederick A. Eustis until the age of fifteen when he was sent to live for three years with the Joseph S. Walton family on their farm in Chester County in order to build up his health. While there he studied French and German on his own at night. At the age of nineteen he apprenticed himself to the dry goods firm of Waln and Leaming, working himself up to head bookkeeper by age 21. In 1847 he started to work with his brother, Rodman Wharton, and a man named Davis in their white lead business, where he stayed for three years. The following two years he spent taking care of his father's business affairs until joining

with Joseph B. Matlock in manufacturing bricks. After selling the brick business to Matlock, he was hired by Gilbert and Wetherill of South Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to manage their zinc mine and white paint business. The company failed in 1853, and Wharton leased its mines and worked them successfully for several years.

Soon after his marriage to Anna Corbit Lovering in 1854, Joseph Wharton began to experiment with the manufacture of metallic zinc, or spelter, importing workmen from Belgium and eventually establishing sixteen furnaces, the first successful spelter works in the nation. Next he bought a nickel mine in Lancaster County, Pa., and built a factory in Camden, New Jersey, where he made the first malleable nickel in the world. For a number of years he produced one-sixth of the entire world output. As his fortune grew, he began to invest in the Bethlehem Iron Works, eventually controlling the company.

In 1885, when the American Navy was being modernized from wooden to armorplated ships, Wharton bid successfully for the contract to manufacture the armor plates. The company name was changed to the Bethlehem Steel Company and became the largest manufacturer of armor plate in the world. In 1901 Mr. Wharton sold control of the company to a syndicate headed by Charles M. Schwaab, but even after he had disposed of his interests, he continued to be the largest operator of iron and steel in the country. He built large furnaces at Wharton, New Jersey, and worked 5,000 acres of ore land and 30,000 acres of coal lands in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Wharton was not only a financier, but also a scientist and philanthropist, and was probably the best metallurgist in the United States during his lifetime. He wrote extensively on metallurgy and economic matters, including protective tariffs. He was a member of the American Philosophical Society and frequently read papers on science before the Society. He and his wife, Deborah Wharton, were lifelong Hicksite Quakers, and both were founders of Swarthmore College. Joseph served on the Board of Managers of Swarthmore College from 1870 until his death in 1909, and was President of the Board from 1883 to 1907; Deborah served on the Board of Managers from 1862-1870. Joseph Wharton donated to the College the Swarthmore meeting house and Wharton Hall, a student dormitory, and endowed a Chair of History and Political Economy. In a period when business education consisted primarily of on-the-job training or apprenticeship, Joseph Wharton founded the Wharton School of Commerce and Finance at the University of Pennsylvania in 1881. He was also the President of the American Iron and Steel Association.

Besides iron mining and manufacturing, other interests include coal and coke mining, glass making, copper and gold mining, menhaden fisheries, cultivation of cranberries, railroads and banking, among others. He enjoyed writing poetry on any occasion and was very knowledgeable about precious gems. He acquired about 150 square miles of land in southern New Jersey, now known as the Wharton State Forest, in hopes of providing a pure water supply for Philadelphia.

Wharton was active almost to the end of his life and went to Germany to meet the Kaiser when he was 71. He traveled by canoe down the Colorado River to visit his silver mine in Nevada in 1905 when he was nearly 80. He died in Philadelphia, aged 82, in 1909, survived by his widow and three daughters, Joanna W. Lippincott, Mary L. Wharton and Anna W. Morris.

Scope and content

SCOPE AND CONTENT These papers appear to have been preserved and collected by succeeding generations of both the Wharton and Fisher families. The bulk of the collection is correspondence, but various other documents are included, such as deeds, business, financial, and legal papers, diaries and journals, business letterbooks and

ledgers, poems, printed articles, books, and pamphlets concerning Joseph Wharton and his business interests, speeches and lecture notes, clippings, various estate papers, memorabilia and reference material.

The collection contains legal and financial papers for the family from 1778 to 1909, plus memorabilia and reference materials maintained by the family throughout the entire period. Among the most significant family items are the original diary of Samuel Rowland Fisher in 1777 while one of the exiles in Virginia. Also included are correspondence of the Wharton, Corbit, and Lovering families.