

G. A. Q. Miller papers

Ms. Coll. 998

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University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2014 October 21

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Miller, G.A.Q. (George A.Q.)
Title	G. A. Q. Miller papers
Call number	Ms. Coll. 998
Date [bulk]	1871-1892
Date [inclusive]	1841-1895
Extent	0.4 linear feet (1 box)
Language	English
Abstract	Captain George A. Q. Miller was a Civil War veteran and a special agent in the United States Post Office Department during the 1870s. This collection, consisting of correspondence, a photograph, and a scrapbook of clippings and notes documents Miller's life, his career in the postal service and as an early proponent of the Civil Service Commission, and his uncertain position within the post-Civil War federal government.

Cite as:

G. A. Q. Miller papers, 1841-1895 (bulk: 1871-1892), Ms. Coll. 998, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Captain George A. Q. Miller was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Related by marriage to Ulysses S. Grant, (his mother was cousin to Grant's wife,) he served under General McClellan during the American Civil War, participating in the Peninsular Campaign where he became very ill. After his recovery, he was appointed purchasing agent for the Mississippi River Squadron (also known as the Western Gunboat Flotilla or the Mississippi Flotilla).

Following the war, he became a postal service worker and was appointed, in 1868, by Grant as special agent of the Fifth division, Post Office Department, which was headquartered in Chicago and consisted of seven western states and the Indian territories. Newspaper clippings of the time state that he was "the originator of the covered mail wagon system," (p. 334), designed to reduce postal theft. He served as special agent from 1869 to 1873. In 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed Miller's home and his possessions. In 1872, Miller was accused of drunken and disorderly behavior and efforts were made to remove him from his position. In 1873, Senator John A. Logan and Charles B. Farwell, two politicians from Illinois, along with Postmaster General J. H. J. Creswell, "wanted [him] out," and Miller lost his position.

In 1877, he conducted the first-ever "civil service system" examination of applicants for a Postmastership in Victoria, Knox County, Illinois, with questions of his own writing (see folder 3), which resulted in P.A. Robinson being the first postmaster appointed under the rules. According to an interview with Miller (see folder 14), Rutherford B. Hayes "sent for [Miller] after he was inaugurated, and [Miller] went to Washington and stayed there five weeks with the promise of the first appointment in the bureau to be created" for the civil service, but such a position did not materialize. Letters to and from W.K. Rodgers, secretary to Hayes (located in folder 4), document this disappointing turn of events in 1878. Miller remained interested in the civil service examination and commission, collecting information and corresponding with influential citizens regarding the topic.

In 1881, Miller was a candidate for surveyor of the Port of Philadelphia and was serving as secretary of the National Mining Exchange. Prior to 1881, he was one of the five founders of the original Philadelphia Minding Exchange. During the 1880s and into the early 1890s, Miller focused his attentions on acquiring a pension from the government as a result of his illness contracted during his service in the Civil War. He also spent considerable time inquiring in regards to the existence of a patent for the covered mail wagons.

Scope and Contents

This collection documents G. A. Q. Miller's career in the postal service and as an early proponent of the Civil Service Commission. The collection is arranged in two series, I. Correspondence and photograph and II. Scrapbook (and loose items removed from volume). The correspondence is largely arranged in alphabetical order and includes letters regarding the postal service, letters of recommendation, information about the first civil service examination which was written and administered by Miller, and

an expected position with a to-be-created civil service department during the Hayes administration. Three groups of letters, as organized by Miller himself, were retained as units rather than being filed alphabetically by author of the letters. These letters address the existence of a patent for covered mail wagons, the acquisition of a pension for Miller which was necessary because of an illness contracted during his Civil War service that made work in the 1880s impossible, and the Post Office Department's effort to remove him from office in 1872. The letters in this series are often emotional and almost all contain notes in pencil by Miller which comment on the contents of the letters. There is also one cabinet card photograph of Miller in 1894.

The scrapbook which is titled by Miller as "original papers relative to civil service reform and papers and drafts of the original covered mail wagons used by the government of the United States, also original letters of two presidents and other prominent persons," contains mostly newspaper clippings and notes by Miller. The letters from presidents and other prominent persons were presumably removed when the volume was gifted to the University of Pennsylvania and can now be found in the first series. This is apparently the second of Miller's scrapbooks, the first of which was destroyed in the Chicago fire in 1871. As a result, this book largely documents Miller's life and career after that date. Researchers will find a number of clippings that document Miller's career and his interests in the postal service (particularly in relation to theft of mail, "fast mail service," dead letters, and box rents and drawers), gas and fuel burners, politics (particularly in relation to electoral votes), the Civil Service Commission, river and dam improvement, and to a very limited degree, the Civil War, Grant and Lee, and reconstruction. There are also a few miscellaneous clippings that do not seem to relate to Miller's more well-documented interests. Items that were loose in the scrapbook have been removed for preservation and placed in folders following the scrapbook. Of particular interest may be the clipping of the interview with Miller regarding Ulysses S. Grant and his administration as well as the unjust manner in which Miller believes himself to have been treated by the Grant and Hayes administrations (folder 14).

The collection provides a fascinating (albeit one-sided) glimpse into a government worker in the late 1800s, who appears to have felt maligned on many occasions by his colleagues and superiors. Clearly Miller contributed to several important changes in the American federal system, in particular the postal service and the Civil Service Commission; however, it is also clear from the material and especially Miller's penciled notes that he did not feel appreciated for his efforts. Some of his letters and most of his notes are rather antagonistic and bitter, but it is important to note that Miller clearly felt pride in his accomplishments and felt strongly that he had, "through the grace of God been the instrument to do some good to my countrymen," (folder 2).

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2014 October 21

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

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Source of Acquisition

Gift of Captain G. A. Q. Miller

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- United States. Post Office Department.
- United States. President (1869-1877 : Grant).
- United States. President (1877-1881 : Hayes).
- United States. President (1881 : Garfield).

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Correspondence
- Notes
- Scrapbooks

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- United States--Politics and government--1865-1900

SUBJECT(S)

- Civil service--United States
- Postal service--United States

Collection Inventory

I. CORRESPONDENCE AND PHOTOGRAPH.

	Box	Folder
Bristow, Benjamin H., Treasury Department, letter to Miller regarding Miller's efforts on his behalf, but assuring him that he was not looking for advancement in the government, 1876 April 29.	1	1
Cochran, C. (Charles), Superintendent of Mail Depredations, letters to Miller regarding Post Office Department business, support for Miller at the time of efforts to remove him from the postal service in 1872, and letter of recommendation in 1879, 1872-1879.	1	1
Garfield, James A., Representative in the United States House of Representatives, letter to Miller thanking him, 1880 November 19.	1	2
Haigh, Joseph P., letter of recommendation for G. A. Q. Miller, 1873 September 23.	1	2
Hayes, Rutherford B., letter to Miller thanking him for suggestions, 1876 September 8.	1	2
Keen, Gregory B., librarian at the University of Pennsylvania, letter from Miller regarding his donation of papers, 1895 September 2.	1	2
Marr, James H., chief clerk in the first assistant postmaster-general's office, letter to Miller directing him to interview and recommend applicants for the post master at Victoria, Knox County, Illinois (includes list of questions "for use in the civil services examinations" compiled by Miller and responses of four applicants), 1872 January 9-24.	1	3

Marshall, J.W., assistant post-master general, letter to Miller regarding the Civil Service Commission, 1872 January 18.	1	4
McDonald, J. Sharp, letter of recommendation for Miller, 1873 September 7.	1	4
Rodgers, W.K., secretary to President Rutherford B. Hayes, letter to and from Miller regarding Miller's expectation for an appointment, 1878 January 31-February 2.	1	4
Schurz, Carl, letter to Miller regarding political nominations, 1876 May 19.	1	4
Smith, William Henry, general agent of the Western Associated Press, letter to Miller authorizing him to act as special agent of the Western Associated Press and to report news stories, 1871 May 2.	1	4
Sumner, A. W., assistant purchasing agent for Pennsylvania Railroad, letter to Miller regarding a pamphlet he wishes him to read, 1888 December 10.	1	4
Letters regarding the existence of a patent for covered mail wagons (correspondents include: Abbot-Downing Company; Schuyler Duryee, chief clerk of the patent office; and John Wanamaker, postmaster general), 1891 September.	1	5
Letters regarding and request by Miller for appointments and for a pension following his illness relating to his service to his country (correspondents include: O. (Octavius) L. Pruden, assistant secretary to President Chester A. Arthur; Frederick J. Phillips, secretary to President Chester A. Arthur; D. B. Harmony, acting secretary of the Navy; and John A. Swope, United States House of Representatives), 1881-1886.	1	6
Letters regarding the Post Office Department's suggestion to dismiss Miller from service, including letters describing the case against him, letters of support, and character references (correspondents include: M. Atkins, C. Cochran, George O. Fish, Abner Hard, John B. Hawley, J.W. Marshall, James S. Negley, M. Piggott, and illegible), 1872 January-July.	1	7
Photograph of G. A. Q. Miller, 1894.	1	8

II. SCRAPBOOK (AND LOOSE ITEMS REMOVED FROM VOLUME).

	Box	Folder		
Scrapbook with clippings and notes, 1871-1877.	1	9		
Baseball clipping, "The 'Unlucky' Eighth", 1877.	1	10		
Biographical and family clipping, undated.	1	11		
Civil Service Commission, clippings and pamphlets regarding, circa 1871-1883.	1	12		
Fuel and oil burner information, clipping and brochure, circa 1875.	1	13		
General Ulysses S. Grant and Civil War, clipping, "A Talk About Grant: What a Relative by Marriage Thinks of the Ex-President," interview with Miller, 1884.	1	14		
			Box	Fold
Map of Chicago following the fire that destroyed Miller's home (location of his home marked by him in pencil), undated.		50		
	Box	Folder		
National Mining Exchange, clippings, circa 1880-1881.	1	15		
Politicians and appointed positions, clippings, 1847, undated.	1	16		
Port of Philadelphia, clippings, 1880, undated.	1	17		
Postal service, clippings, monthly report, and receipt, 1841-1892, undated.	1	18		
Rivers, construction, dams, islands, etc., clipping and Senate bill 25, 1877.	1	19		
			Box	Fold
"Special Agents of the Post Office Department with their designations and the districts to which they are assigned," chart, with annotations by Miller, circa 1870s.		50		

	Box	Folder
Miscellaneous clippings, 1892, undated.	1	20