

THE MERRILL-PALMER INSTITUTE:  
MERRILL AND PALMER FAMILIES  
COLLECTION

Papers, 1848-1926 (Predominantly,  
1848-1919)

43 linear feet

Accession Number 1066 L. C.  
Number MS

The papers of the Merrill and Palmer Families were placed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs as part of the papers of the Merrill-Palmer Institute in January of 1982 and were opened for research in June of 1986.

The Merrill-Palmer Families Collection consists of the papers of Thomas Witherell Palmer, Lizzie (Elizabeth) Merrill Palmer, and Charles Merrill, father of Lizzie. The Merrill-Palmer Institute was established by Lizzie Palmer in her will which bequeathed the bulk of her estate for this purpose.

Thomas Witherell Palmer was born in Detroit on January 25, 1830. Son of Thomas P. Palmer and Mary Ann Witherell Palmer, he became one of Michigan's most distinguished citizens. His father, originally from Connecticut, was a store owner, sawmill owner, and involved in mining in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Mary Palmer was the daughter of James Witherell, a Michigan Supreme Court Justice and Secretary of the Michigan Territory.

Thomas Palmer was educated in Detroit and at the University of Michigan. He settled in Appleton, Wisconsin in 1848. After his business was destroyed by fire in 1852, he returned to Detroit and became his father's business partner. In 1853, he associated with Charles Merrill, who owned vast lumbering enterprises throughout Michigan. He became a full partner in 1863. On October 16, 1855, he married Lizzie Merrill. They adopted two children, Harold and Lizzie.

In 1882, Thomas Palmer was elected a Michigan State Senator, and the following year, a United States Senator. During his political career, he was a popular debater and orator, a proponent of women's suffrage, government regulation of railroads, and restricted immigration. He was appointed Ambassador to Spain in 1889 and served for two years. In 1892 he accepted President Harrison's offer to be a commissioner for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He died on January 1, 1913.

Lizzie Pitts Merrill Palmer was born in 1837. Throughout her life she was highly active in family business affairs and in the Detroit community. During her long residence in Detroit, Lizzie Palmer, together with Thomas, was active in the Humane Society, was a founder of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and donated many gifts to the city of Detroit, including Palmer Park. She died on July 28, 1916. In her will, Lizzie left three million dollars for the establishment of the "Merrill-Palmer Motherhood and Home Training School."

The papers of the Merrill-Palmer Family Collection primarily reflect Thomas and Lizzie's involvement in the Michigan and Detroit business communities. The journals of Thomas Palmer and Charles Merrill reflect their personal activities in the mid-nineteenth century.

Important subjects covered in the collection are:

Family Properties  
Estate Transactions  
Merrill-Palmer School

Palmer Park  
Palmer-Whittier Land Company

Among the important correspondents are:

George Brady  
Harold Palmer  
Lizzie Merrill Palmer

Thomas Palmer Estate  
Thomas P. Whittier

An index to subjects and correspondents will be found on page 10.

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40 manuscript boxes 3  
oversize ledgers

Series I, The Thomas Palmer Papers, 1848-1880, Box 1:

Journals and a speech relating to Thomas Palmer's travels to Europe and South America and his daily activities from 1848 to 1855.

Series II, The Charles Merrill Journals, 1850-1869, Box 1:

Journals relating to Charles Merrill's daily business activities from 1850 to 1869.

Series III, Business Records, 1858-1926, Boxes 2-31, Item 41:

Correspondence, financial records, land contracts, deeds, plats, and tax titles relating to the business concerns of Thomas and Lizzie Palmer. There are a few items concerning mutual business interests with Charles Merrill.

Series IV, Thomas and Lizzie Palmer Estates, 1913-1923, Boxes 32-40, Items 42-43:

Correspondence, financial records, land contracts and deeds, legal documents, and maps relating to the estates of Thomas and Lizzie Palmer. Some material concerns Harold Palmer, their adopted son who also acted as agent for Lizzie Palmer.

Series I  
The Thomas Palmer Papers, 1848-1880  
Box 1

Journals, a percentage table book and a speech of Thomas Palmer. The journals are concerned with his travels to Europe and South America, and his daily activities from 1848 to 1855. The speech relates to the 1880 United States Presidential election. The percentage table book was a reference tool for business transactions. Material is arranged chronologically.

Box 1

1. Thomas Palmer; Journal, European and South American trip, 1848
2. Thomas Palmer; Journal, Dec 1848 - Feb 1849
3. Thomas Palmer; Journal, Aug 1852 - Feb 1855
4. Thomas Palmer; Speech and related notes [c. 1880]
5. Thomas Palmer; Percentage table book, n.d.

Series II  
The Charles Merrill Journals, 1850-1869  
Box 1

Journals relating to the daily activities of Charles Merrill. There is also a business account book. The material is arranged chronologically.

Box 1

6. Charles Merrill; Daily journal, Sep 1850 - Feb 1851
7. Charles Merrill; Account book, Nov 1850 - May 1852
- 8-12. Charles Merrill; Daily journals, Jan 1852 - Jan 1869

Series III  
Business Records, 1858-1926

Merrill-Palmer  
Boxes 2-31, Item 41

Correspondence, financial records, land contracts, deeds, plats (land maps), and tax titles relating to the business concerns of Thomas and Lizzie Palmer. Most of the materials are concerned with their land holdings, but is also a small amount of information on mutual business interests with Charles Merrill. Files are arranged chronologically by type of material. An oversized ledger for 1915-16 will be found at the end of the collection.

Box 2

1. Merrill-Palmer Land Ledger; 1862-1919
2. Merrill-Palmer Land Ledger; Township maps, 1862-1919
3. Merrill-Palmer Land Ledger; Related documents, 1862-1919

Box 3

1. Tax Title Ledger; T. W. Palmer, 1858-1881
2. Index to papers, [c. 1870-1912]
3. Tax Title Ledger; Land contract ledger, [1870-1912]

Box 4

1. Index to Business Ledger; L. M. Palmer, 1878-1909
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Box 5

1. Index to Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Jan 1878 - Jun 1884
2. Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Jan 1878 - Jun 1884

Box 6

1. Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Jul 1884 - Oct 1891
1. Index to Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1891 - Oct 1898
2. Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1891 - Oct 1898

Box 8

1. Index to Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1898 - Oct 1903
2. Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1898 - Oct 1903

Box 9

1. Account Sheets, 1905-1910
2. Contract and Mortgage Acct. Adjustment, 1885-1911
3. Index to Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1903 - Jan 1912
4. Business Ledger; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1903 - Jan 1912

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- 1. Daily Blotter; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1900 - Dec 1902 Box 11
- 1. Daily Blotter; T. W. Palmer, Jan 1903 - Oct 1904 Box 12
- 1. Daily Blotter; T. W. Palmer, Nov 1904 - Jun 1906 Box 13
- 1. Daily Blotter; T. W. Palmer, Jun 1906 - Jul 1908 Box 14
- 1. Daily Blotter; T. W. Palmer, Jul 1908 - Mar 1911 Box 15
- 1. Daily Blotter; T. W. Palmer, Mar 1911 - May 1912 Box 16
- 1. Daily Blotter; T. W. Palmer, Jun 1912 - Jun 1913 Box 17
- 1. Accounts Receivable Ledger, 1884-1915 Box 18
- 1. Land Contract Ledger, 1885-1902 Box 19
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- 1. Rent Ledger, Aug 1897 - May 1912 Box 22
- 1. Rent Ledger; Detroit Properties, May 1901 - Jul 1904

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- 1. Deed Ledger, 1902-1914 Box 24
- 1. Monthly Cash Journal, 1903-1926 Box 25
- 1. Stock Ledger; Palmer-Whittier Land Co., 1905-1925

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- 1. Monthly Cash Journal; L. M. and T. W. Palmer, Jan 1908 -Nov 1910

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- 1. Balance Book; T. W. Palmer, Jul 1910 - Jun 1915 Box 28
- 1. Business Ledger; L. M. Palmer, 1915-16

Box 29

- 1-5. Abstracts of Titles, 1871-1915                      6-7. Business  
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- 8-10. Deeds, 1861-1908

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- 1-3. Deeds, 1909-1916
- 4. Land Plats; Summary of Holdings, n.d.                      5-11. Tax  
Titles, 1871-1886

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- 1-9. Tax Titles, 1887-1912

Series IV  
Palmer Estates, 1913-1923 Boxes 32-40, Items 42-43

Lizzie and Thomas

Correspondence, financial records, land contracts and deeds, legal documents, and maps relating to the estates of Lizzie and Thomas Palmer. Most of the material is concerned with the settlement of each estate, but there is also some information on Harold Palmer, adopted son of and agent for Lizzie Palmer. Files are arranged alphabetically by subject or type of material and then chronologically. Two oversized ledgers are placed at the end of the series.

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1. Bills and Vouchers, Oct 1917 - Jan 1920

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- 1-28. Correspondence, 1917-19

Box 36

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1. Thomas Palmer Estate; Correspondence ledger, 1913-15 Box 39
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Box 40

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Oversized Ledgers

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