

Guide to the Rufus and S. Willard Saxton Papers

MS 431



compiled by Diane E. Kaplan and William E. Brown, Jr. and staff of Manuscripts and Archives

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Yale University Library
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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 431

CREATOR: Saxton, Rufus, 1824-1908

TITLE: Rufus and S. Willard Saxton papers

DATES: 1834-1934

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 10.5 linear feet (25 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers include correspondence, journals, memorabilia, and photographs that document the life of Samuel Willard Saxton and the career of his brother General Rufus Saxton during the Civil War. The largest portion of the papers is composed of S. Willard Saxton's multi-volumed journal, which he began in 1847 while at Brook Farm and continued until the 1920s. The journal chronicles his career as a printer, aide-de-camp, and civil servant; his travels; family; his interests in the cultural life of Boston and Washington, D.C.; and his summers spent in Guilford, Connecticut. His journal highlights Saxton's ardent abolitionist and reformist interests, his work on behalf of freedmen's education, and his strong Republican loyalties. The letterbooks reflect Saxton's position as an aide-de-camp for his brother and Rufus Saxton's administration of the Department of the South and the former slaves under his jurisdiction.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0431>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0431>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

A portion of the papers was given by Paul S. Seward in 1965. Additional papers were given by Paul S. and W. Saxton Seward in 1972-1973 and 1980 and by Mrs. Mary S. Williams in 2012.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Rufus and S. Willard Saxton Papers (MS 431). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Rufus Saxton, 1824-1908

Rufus Saxton was born in Greenfield, Massachusetts in 1824 and graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1849. During the Civil War he participated in the Port Royal Expedition and in May 1862, Saxton was appointed the military governor of the Department of the South. From his headquarters in Beaufort, South Carolina, he organized the first black regiment in the United States Army. In 1865 Saxton became commissioner for the Freedmen's Bureau and a year later returned to the Quartermasters Corps. He retired in 1888 and died in 1908.

Samuel Willard Saxton, 1829-1933

Samuel Willard Saxton was born in Deerfield, Massachusetts, in 1829. As an adolescent Saxton was apprenticed to a printer, and from 1845 to 1847 he lived at George Ripley's Brook Farm, where he worked on *The Harbinger*. When Brook Farm was dissolved he went to work in Boston, where he lived off and on for the next fifteen years.

In 1862 Saxton joined his brother General Rufus Saxton in South Carolina. During the remainder of the Civil War Saxton served as his brother's aide-de-camp. He was brevetted major in 1865. Saxton remained in South Carolina on the staff of General Robert K. Howard until 1866 when he became a civilian employee of the Freedmen's Bureau. In 1869 Saxton was appointed to a position in the office of the First Comptroller of the Treasury and eventually rose to be chief of his division. Saxton retired from the government in 1921.

In 1861 Saxton married Mary Grant. They had seven children: Edward, Fanny (d. 1869), Minnie, Mattie, Louise, Katharine, and Beth. Saxton died in 1933 at the age of 103.

Scope and Contents

The Rufus and S. Willard Saxton Papers consist of correspondence, journals, memorabilia, and photographs that document the life of Samuel Willard Saxton and the career of his brother General Rufus Saxton during the Civil War. The largest portion of the papers is composed of S. Willard Saxton's multi-volumed journal, which he began in 1847 while at Brook Farm and continued until the 1920s. The journals chronicle S. Willard Saxton's career as a printer, aide-de-camp, and civil servant; his travels; family; and his interests in the cultural life of Boston and Washington, D.C. They also highlight his ardent abolitionist and reformist interests, his work on behalf of freedmen's education, and his strong Republican loyalties. Rufus Saxton's duties as military governor of the Department of the South are reflected, primarily, in contemporary letterbooks kept by his aides-de-camp.

Arrangement

Arranged in three series: I. Letterbooks and Scrapbook, 1834-1926. II. Journals, 1847-1927. III. Personal Papers, 1849-1934, and one addition.

Collection Contents

Series I: Letters and scrapbook, 1834-1926

.75 linear feet (2 boxes)

This series includes letterbooks and a scrapbook relating to the careers of both Rufus and S. Willard Saxton. The earliest letterbooks (folders 1-4) date from Rufus Saxton's headquarters in South Carolina during the Civil War. These volumes contain letters signed by Saxton and his assistant adjutants general, including George Merrill, E.W. Hooper, and S. Willard Saxton. Folder 1 contains official communications and reports to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, General Hunter, and O.M. Mitchell. Many of these letters concern the administration of the Sea Islands and reveal Saxton's concern for the health and safety of the black people in his jurisdiction. Some letters relate to Saxton's interest in arming contrabands. Most letters in folder 2 are addressed to civilians and relate to applicants for positions in the South Carolina Volunteers. At the reverse of the letterbook is a list of applicants. Additional letters on the same subject are found in folder 4. The letterbook in folder 3 contains routine official correspondence signed by the various assistant adjutants general by order of Rufus Saxton. These letters relate to the day-to-day administration of the Department of the South and include directions concerning provisions, education, and medical treatment for Blacks in the area and support for their employment in agriculture and commerce.

Letterbooks in folders 3 and 4 carry over to the period when Rufus and S. Willard Saxton worked with the Freedmen's Bureau. Folder 3 includes lists of teachers and missionaries on duty in the department. In folder 4, beginning about February 1866, there are letters only of S. Willard Saxton. These include some by order of General R.K. Scott. The letterbook includes a lengthy report on an inspection tour of Sumter and Marion Counties. There are education reports sent to General O.O. Howard after S. Willard Saxton's transfer to the Washington, D.C., Office, and letters written by Saxton for J.W. Alvord. Some letters relate to Saxton's efforts, as treasurer of the Washington Christian Union's Board of Directors of Colored Schools, to organize freedmen's schools in Washington churches. Additional letters on Freedmen's Bureau business are included in folder 6.

Letterbooks in folders 4 and 6 are marked "Private Letter Book," and in addition to Freedmen's Bureau business these volumes contain letters to S. Willard Saxton's friends and family and concern personal finances or church business. Letters at the end of the volume in folder 6 concern Saxton's work in the First Comptroller's Office, as do letters in folder 7. Certain letters in 1885 relate to Saxton's discharge from office under the new Democratic administration and to his work in Louisville, Kentucky, overseeing shipments of army horses. There are only a few scattered letters after 1887.

Folder 5 contains a scrapbook of letters, orders, and memorabilia kept by S. Willard Saxton. Many items are loose, and the pages are in no particular order. The volume includes the earliest item in the papers. There are several items of memorabilia relating to Saxton's life in Boston, including membership cards, printed programs, and tickets for the Boston Union of Associationists; the fraternity of the 28th Congregational Society; and the Free Soil Party. There are numerous official communications relating to Saxton's government service and there are items of memorabilia from life in Washington, D.C., including tickets for the presidential impeachment, concert and lecture tickets and programs from the Columbian College. The scrapbook also includes biographical information on Rufus and S. Willard Saxton.

This series is arranged roughly in chronological order.

b. 1, f. 1	Letters of Brigadier General Saxton signed by himself; through Assistant Adjutant General	1862 June - 1864 October
b. 1, f. 2	Letterbook: Headquarters Department of the South, Rufus Saxton, Military Governor	1862 December - 1864 June
b. 1, f. 3	Official letters	1863 February - 1865 December

b. 1A, f. 1	Letters Sent 'B'	1863 March - 1868 April
b. 2, f. 5	Scrapbook of S. Willard Saxton The scrapbook includes a letter from Robert Smalls to Rufus Saxton.	1834-1926
b. 2, f. 6	Letters Sent 'C' The letterbook includes two letters from Willard Saxton to Robert Smalls.	1868 April - 1872
b. 2, f. 7	Letterbook	1884-1903

Series II: Journals, 1847-1927

7.75 linear feet (19 boxes)

This series consists of 136 of the 172 volumes of Willard Saxton's life-long journal. Samuel Willard Saxton was not a national leader, but his life and career intersected with many noteworthy people, events, and movements. His journal records these as well as the day-to-day routine of a man's life from adolescence to old age in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Saxton began keeping his journal in 1847 and continued daily recordings until he was well into his nineties. On almost every day he wrote one to two pages, which summarized his work, leisure time, family health and activities, and personal feelings. Often Saxton inserted newspaper clippings in the journals to more fully record the concerts and plays he attended or the world or national events he noted. Generally each volume covers from three to six months and contains between 100 to 300 pages.

The first twenty-two volumes of the journal (boxes 3-6) cover Saxton's career before joining the army in the winter of 1862. These volumes document Saxton's happy life at Brook Farm, the succeeding years of financial uncertainty as a printer in Boston and elsewhere in Massachusetts, and the domestic instability of an itinerant single male. Saxton refers to his attendance at or participation in the Boston Union of Associationsts; the Young Inductive Communion; William Henry Channing's church; lectures by Theodore Parker, Joshua Giddings, and Wendell Phillips; performances by Jenny Lind and Edwin Booth; Free Soil Party meetings; events at Tremont Temple; social evenings with Elizur Wright; and abolitionist and temperance rallies.

In 1849 Saxton joined a printers' union and records a printers' union strike. Unable to support himself during the strike, he resorted to working for non-union wages and petitioned to be allowed to resign from the union. With the prospect of no steady employment in Boston in 1852, Saxton first went to New York and then to Washington, D.C. Here he found work with Boyd Hamilton, a contractor for congressional printing, only to lose his job because of blacklisting by the Boston printers' union. In 1853 Saxton records his move west to Indiana to work as an axeman for the Lake Erie, Wabash, and St. Louis Railroad. After a year of this work he returned to printing and sought work in Cincinnati and Memphis. The journal reveals further union difficulties in Memphis.

Saxton returned to Boston in 1856, and he filled his journals with more details of Boston cultural life as well as family troubles. He records hearing lectures by Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Ward Beecher. By 1860 Saxton reveals his discouragement with the printing trade, his loneliness with boarding house life, and his difficult financial circumstances which resulted in an arrest for debt. At this time he became engaged to Mary Grant and went into business for himself. The journals reflect the vicissitudes of a storekeeper's life. In 1862 Saxton moved to Port Royal, South Carolina, to join his brother Rufus, who offered him financial relief in the form of steady employment.

Volumes 23 through 27 (1862-1866) document Saxton's years in South Carolina. These journals are not as inclusive as those for the previous years. There are several gaps, and Saxton frequently notes that he is writing to his wife and now finds maintaining a journal "dull." He writes also of his concern for his pregnant wife in Massachusetts and for his brother's career. The journals also reveal a degree of tension between the two brothers. There is little detail of Saxton's work; more of the entries concern social life and leisure activities. The late 1864 and 1865 entries give some detail of the disruption of the South, the prisoners, and the wounded as the Union army marched toward the sea. Saxton also notes his travels with his brother on tour as superintendent of plantations and settlements. When Rufus Saxton was relieved of his command, S. Willard Saxton remained in South Carolina on the staff of General R.K. Scott. In May 1866 he records an inspection tour of interior South Carolina. In June Saxton was ordered to report to General O.O. Howard in Washington. He was then mustered out of the army but became a civilian employee of the government. Volumes 28 through 32 cover the period of Saxton's employment in the Freedmen's Bureau (1866-1869). In these volumes Saxton writes less of his work for the bureau and more about domestic arrangements and family life, including the death of his young daughter Fanny. He does record some of the gossip concerning Andrew Johnson's appointees, his teaching duties in a freedmen's school, Unitarian church politics, the impeachment hearings, and events leading to his discharge from the Freedmen's Bureau in April, 1869.

The journals from volume 33 (1869) until Saxton's retirement in 1920 (volume 156) trace Saxton's career as a government clerk in the Treasury Department and reflect the changes in the civil service system

as they affected Saxton. Through examination Saxton rose through the various classes of clerk in the First Comptroller's Office to the rank of division chief in 1878. Here he made the acquaintance of John Burroughs, and visits with his friend are recorded in the journals. With the financial security of government employment, Saxton began plans for building a house. The journals are filled with routine domestic concerns, details of loans and debts, the development of his garden, and interests in the governmental administration of the Mt. Pleasant section of Washington, D.C. Saxton also records the births of his daughters, including his assistance at two of them, and his increasing level of parental responsibility. He notes all the musical and theatrical events he attends, lectures at the Unitarian Church (All Souls), public funerals, and political events. He records his and his wife's participation in women's suffrage meetings. In volume 37 he describes his 1871 trip on government business to Santa Fe, New Mexico; a similar mission to London is described in volume 48 (1877). Volume 46 contains a lengthy description of Saxton's stay in Philadelphia to view the Centennial Exhibition.

Each time there is a change in administration Saxton expresses his concern over job security. He notes payments to the Republican Party's political assessor and sees this as a price for holding office. He also expresses concern over the financial situation of his son Ned and his brother Miraud. Financial worries increase during the tight money year of 1884 and come to a head after the election of Democrat Grover Cleveland and Saxton's subsequent demotion and dismissal from office. Volumes 62 and 63 (1885-1886) relate Saxton's fight to save his position, including an interview with the president, while volumes 64-68 (1886-1888) record his temporary residence in Louisville, Kentucky, once again on the staff of his brother Rufus, but separated from his family.

Saxton's fortunes change with the election of a Republican president in 1888. By August, 1889 he is returned to the office of clerk in the First Comptroller's Office. The journal is once again filled with details of domestic life, the education and marriage of daughters, and the boarders that help the family budget. Numerous concerts and plays are recorded, as are meetings of the Loyal Legion and encampments of the G.A.R. Following a Democratic victory in the 1892 presidential elections, Saxton was able to retain his position, but the Financial Panic of 1893 and a reorganization of the Treasury Department in 1894 led to continuing financial hardships, which are enumerated in the journal. The journals for 1894 through 1896 also document the progressive deterioration of daughter Mattie's health and her unsuccessful pursuit of treatment for consumption in North Carolina and Saranac Lake, New York.

The volumes of journals for the late 1890s include some discussion of the inequities the civil service system, but by 1898 Saxton is able to pay off his debts and to write of his enjoyment of travels, cultural events, and summer visits to his daughter Minnie Seward at Sachem's Head, Connecticut. He notes all productions at the New National Theater, seeing performances by Lily Langtry, G.A.R. meetings, and attending women's suffrage meetings.

There is a large gap in the journals between 1901 and 1913; volumes 101 through 135 are missing from the papers. By 1913 S. Willard Saxton was 84 but his journal continues to chronicle a daily routine of walks to work, hours in the office, and summers spent in New England. In 1915 Saxton records a trip by himself through the West, and the 1921 journal describes a 60th anniversary trip to Atlantic City. The journals follow the lives of Saxton's children and grandchildren, and volumes 136 to 139 (1913-1915) also note the decline and death of Saxton's daughter Beth. Cultural activities recorded include plays at the Belasco; performances by the Marx brothers; and concerts by Mischa Elman, Enrico Caruso, Walter Damrosch, Leopold Stokowski, and Jascha Heifetz. Saxton also notes his participation in events at All Souls Church, hearing Billy Sunday preach, and meetings of the Loyal Legion and the Association of Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia. There is no indication as to why Saxton quit making entries in the journal after May, 1927. At the time, he was 98 years old. He does not complain of failing health and he writes in the same legible hand.

This series is arranged by volume number from 1 to 172. The volumes are in chronological order. Volumes 42 and 101-136 are not included in the papers.

Saxton, S. Willard

A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.

b. 3, f. 8-16	1847 June 26 – 1849 March 11; 1849 September 1 – 1853 May 19	1847 June 26 – 1849 March 11; 1849 September 1 – 1853 May 19
b. 4, f. 17-22	1853 May 25 – 1854 April 9; 1854 May 10 – 1858 June 5	1853 May 25 – 1854 April 9; 1854 May 10 – 1858 June 5
b. 5, f. 23-28	1858 June 6 - 1861 April 4	1858 June 6 - 1861 April 4
b. 6, f. 29-34	1861 April 5 - 1863 November 10; 1864 March 5 - 1867 July 20 A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1861 April 5 – 1863 November 10; 1864 March 5 – 1867 July 20
b. 7, f. 35-41	1867 July 21 - 1871 January 31 A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1867 July 21 - 1871 January 31
b. 8, f. 42-47	1871 February 1 – 1872 June 22; 1872 November 1 – 1873 August 25	1871 February 1 – 1872 June 22; 1872 November 1 – 1873 August 25
b. 9, f. 48-52	1874 February 25 - 1877 June 7	1874 February 25 - 1877 June 7
b. 10, f. 53-58	1877 June 8 - 1880 July 4	1877 June 8 - 1880 July 4
b. 11, f. 59-64	1880 July 5 - 1883 September 19	1880 July 5 - 1883 September 19
b. 12, f. 65-69	1883 September 20 - 1887 March 28	1883 September 20 - 1887 March 28
b. 13, f. 70-75	1887 March 29 - 1889 December 24	1887 March 29 - 1889 December 24
b. 14, f. 76-83	1889 December 25 - 1892 August 23	1889 December 25 - 1892 August 23
b. 15, f. 84-90	1892 August 24 - 1895 August 10	1892 August 24 - 1895 August 10

Saxton, S. Willard (continued)

b. 16, f. 91-96	1895 August 11 – 1896 December 13; 1897 May 1 – 1898 January 21	1895 August 11 – 1896 December 13; 1897 May 1 – 1898 January 21
b. 17, f. 97-102	1898 January 22 - 1900 January 22	1898 January 22 - 1900 January 22
b. 18, f. 103-108	1900 January 23 – 1901 March 20; 1913 October 9 – 1915 July 9	1900 January 23 – 1901 March 20; 1913 October 9 – 1915 July 9
b. 19, f. 109-113	1915 July 11 - 1918 August 17	1915 July 11 - 1918 August 17
b. 20, f. 114-119	1918 August 18 - 1922 April 26	1918 August 18 - 1922 April 26
b. 21, f. 120-124	1922 April 27 - 1927 May 8	1922 April 27 - 1927 May 8

Series III: Personal papers, 1849-1934*1.5 linear feet (3 boxes)*

This series includes personal papers of both Rufus and S. Willard Saxton, including reminiscences, clippings, photographs, and printed material. The reminiscences highlight important periods in the lives of both men, including Rufus's Civil War service and S. Willard's years at Brook Farm. Photographs include portraits of both Saxtons and photographs of Civil War Beaufort, South Carolina. Some pictures depict Blacks in their freedom schools. The album of pictures in folder 140 is stamped "Stebbins A. Smith, M.D. Charleston S.C.," but it probably belonged to S. Willard Saxton. It contains nearly two hundred photographs, which depict the Saxtons and their wives, Union military officers, friends of S. Willard Saxton, portraits of women's suffrage leaders, and vacation travel. Folder 137 contains bound volumes of papers presented to Loyal Legion meetings and folder 138 contains a partial index to the volumes. Folder 138 also includes items of Saxton's father and a letter by Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Rufus Saxton's wife.

Material in this series is arranged by name of the creator of the papers and by record type.

Saxton, Rufus		
b. 22, f. 125	Biographical data A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	undated
b. 22, f. 126	Memorabilia	1849-1904
b. 22, f. 127	"Reminiscences of a Quartermaster" English A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	undated
Saxton, S. Willard		
See also: box 2, folder 5		
b. 22, f. 128	Biographical data A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1934
b. 22, f. 129	"Reminiscences of Brook Farm" English A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at mssa.assist@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	Circa 1915
b. 22, f. 130	Report of a Committee Appointed to Count the Cash in the Treasurer's Office	1869
b. 22, f. 131	"A Trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico" English	1871
Miscellaneous		
b. 22, f. 132	Clippings	1866-circa 1920s
b. 22, f. 133	Papers	1867-1925

Miscellaneous (continued)

Photographs

See also: [Box 23, folder 139](#)

b. 22, f. 134-135	General	Circa 1860s-1890s
b. 22A	Daguerreotype of Beaufort, South Carolina home, "Boardwalk to bath house"	Circa 1860s
b. 22, f. 137	Volumes: <i>Military Order of the Loyal Legion</i>	1887-1910
b. 22, f. 138	Miscellanea	1853-1909
b. 23, f. 139	Scrapbook, includes photographs	Circa 1860s
b. 24, f. 140	Photograph album with label: "Stebbins A. Smith, M.D., Charleston, S.C."	1866-circa 1890s

Accession 2013-M-039: Additional material, 1903-1906

This accession includes volumes 107-114 of S. Willard Saxton's journals. There are newspaper clippings inserted between the pages of most of the journals.

b. 1, f. 1-7

Journals of S. Willard Saxton

1903 March
11-1906 August
9

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Abolitionists
African Americans -- Education
African American soldiers
Civil service -- United States
Freedmen
Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877)
Slaves -- Emancipation
Unitarians

Geographic Names

Beaufort (S.C.)
Boston (Mass.) -- Social life and customs
Guilford (Conn.)
Southern States
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
-- African American troops
United States -- Officials and employees
Washington (D.C.) -- Social life and customs

Genres / Formats

Diaries
Photoprints

Occupations

Printers
Public officers
Soldiers

Names

Alvord, John Watson, 1807-1880
Burroughs, John, 1837-1921
Howard, O. O. (Oliver Otis), 1830-1909
Parker, Theodore, 1810-1860
Saxton, Rufus, 1824-1908
Saxton, Samuel Willard, 1829-1933
Scott, Robert K. (Robert Kingston), 1826-1900
Smalls, Robert, 1839-1915

Corporate Bodies

All Souls Church (Washington, D.C. : Unitarian)
Brook Farm Phalanx (West Roxbury, Boston, Mass.)
Grand Army of the Republic
Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. District of Columbia Commandery
United States. Army. South Carolina Volunteers
United States. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands
United States. Department of the Treasury -- Officials and employees

Contributors

Saxton, Rufus, 1824-1908
Saxton, Samuel Willard, 1829-1933