

∞ The Ward M. Canaday Center ∞
for Special Collections
The University of Toledo

Finding Aid

➤ **John Renick Osborn Papers, 1831-1876** ◀

MSS-018

Size: 11 Items

Provenance: The items in this collection passed from Osborn to his nephew and law partner Alexander L. Smith after the former's death in 1897. Gustavus Ohlinger, later Smith's partner, assumed ownership after Smith died in the 1920s. The John R. Osborn papers were donated to the Ward M. Canaday Center by Alice O. Weaver on April 28, 1986 (the earlier collection records indicate 1975 as year of accession).

Access: open

Collection Summary: Collection consists of memoirs written in 1876 giving an account of Osborn's to 1837, nine incoming letters dating from 1831 to 1836, and a militia officer's commission of 1834.

Subjects: [Social Life and Customs](#)

Related Collections:

Processing Note:

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Completed by: Paul Gifford, March 1986

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John Renick Osborn
Papers, 1831-1876

Introduction

The papers of John Renick Osborn, a lawyer of Toledo, Norwalk, and Circleville, Ohio, consist of memoirs written in 1876 giving an account of his life to 1837, nine incoming letters dating from 1831 to 1836, and a militia officer's commission of 1834. During the period to which his papers relate Osborn lived mostly in Columbus and Circleville.

Biographical Sketch

- 1813, Apr. 1 born Circleville, Ohio, son of Ralph and Catherine (Renick) Osborn, the father a lawyer

- 1817 - the family moved from Chillicothe to Columbus

- 1827 - entered Ohio University

- 1831 - graduated from Ohio University; went to Circleville to study law

- 1832 - began law studies at Transylvania University

- 1833 - attended law school in Cincinnati

- 1834 - admitted to bar; located in Circleville; commissioned major in 1st Rifle Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 16th Division in Ohio Militia

- 1835 - located law practice in Norwalk

- 1837 - moved to Toledo

- 1839 - returned to Norwalk

- 1844 - state senator from Norwalk, a Whig

- 1845, 1847 prosecuting attorney, Huron and Erie

- 1853 - promoter of, and officer in, Toledo and Illinois Railroad

- 1858 - moved to Toledo; attorney for Wabash Railroad

- 1865-1879 1879 -partner, Osborn and Swayne

- 1883-1891 partner, Osborn and Smith

- 1897, July 5 died in Toledo

Scope and Content Note

In 1876, 63-year-old John Renick Osborn wrote his memoirs. The surviving copy in his papers ends abruptly with his first arrival in Toledo in 1837. The last page in the manuscript ends in the middle of a sentence, so the narrative originally did continue past that point, but it is now impossible for us to determine how far his memoirs actually progressed. To his manuscript, Osborn appended nine letters. Although they were placed chronologically within the memoirs, they did not form an integral part of the narrative. In order to preserve them and prevent further deterioration due to acid migration, the letters have been separated from the memoirs, encapsulated in mylar, and placed in a separate folder. Finally, Osborn's papers include his commission as a major in a militia unit from 1834.

Osborn was born to the political and legal elite of pioneer Ohio. His father Ralph, a lawyer, was State Auditor for many years and was an important force in the state Whig Party. Uncles on his mother's side were judges and legislators from Pickaway County. John R. Osborn discusses his father's activities and the genealogy and lives of his mother's family. He devotes a considerable part of the memoirs on his education, from the various schools and academies he attended in Columbus and elsewhere, to his college life at Ohio University and at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. He notes the strengths and deficiencies of his educational experiences. He describes Columbus as an intimate, and to be sure, undeveloped, community. Osborn mentions how he met his future wife and describes the difficulties of starting a law practice. The memoirs give a good account of the education and early professional life of an early-19th-century upper-class Buckeye.

The letters to John R. Osborn are, with one exception, from family members. His father wrote five of them, in which he admonished his son against straying from the path of righteousness. Others show concern about his health. Finally, a friend writes about some of the ladies he has met at a resort.

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Folder List

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Incoming letters, 1831-1836
	2	Memoirs
	3	Militia commission, 1834
	4	Typescript version of memoirs