

PROVIDENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY
Special Collections
009-02-01
George W. Potter and Alfred M. Williams Memorial Manuscript Collection
1899-1981

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Number: 009-02-01

Title: George W. Potter and Alfred M. Williams Memorial Manuscript Collection

Creator: Potter, George W.
Williams, Alfred M.
Providence Public Library.

Dates: 1899-1981, bulk 1949-1960

Quantity: 2 boxes (total 2 linear feet)

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition: Gift of Alfred M. Williams in 1896 and known as the "Williams Folklore Collection"; Gift of George W. Potter from 1949-1952; the "Easter Rising" broadside was a gift from Dr. John Gormley Walsh in 1949; Gift of broadside ballads and books from the National Library of Ireland in 1950; additional acquisitions made by library purchase following a bequest from Dr. James Phillip Deery. The collection was rededicated as the "George W. Potter - Alfred M. Williams Memorial Collection on Irish Culture" in 1959.

Accruals: Accruals are expected.

Custodial history: Materials were acquired from collectors.

Processed by: The collection was processed by Eric Boutin in 2009. Finding aid was revised by Kate Wells in 2018.

Conservation: Not applicable.

Language: Materials are in English.

RIGHTS AND ACCESS

Access: This collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Providence Public Library, Special Collections department.

Preferred Citation: Researchers are requested to use the following citation format:
[item title], George W. Potter and Alfred M. Williams Memorial Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Providence Public Library

Property Rights: *Copyright has not been assigned to Providence Public Library. All requests for*

permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be obtained by the researcher from the copyright holder.

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS

Separated material	The collection was separated into four main sub-collections based on format. Books and pamphlets are individually cataloged. Broadside ballads and ephemera are processed as archival collections.
Published descriptions	Not applicable.
Location of originals	Not applicable.
Location of copies	Not applicable.
Publication note	Potter, George W. <i>To the Golden Door: the story of the Irish in Ireland and America</i> . (Boston: Little, 1960).
Subject headings	Irish -- United States Ireland -- Emigration and migration Rare books -- Collectors and collecting.

SEE ALSO

Potter & Williams Collection on Irish Culture, Books and Pamphlets
Potter & Williams Collection on Irish Culture, Broadside Ballads Collection
Potter & Williams Collection on Irish Culture, Ephemera Collection

HISTORICAL NOTE

Alfred Mason Williams (1840-1896) was born in Taunton, Massachusetts to Lloyd Hall and Prudence King Williams. He attended the Bristol Academy and entered Brown University in 1860. During the Civil War, he enlisted as a private in the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and wrote letters from the front to various newspapers. After the war, he went to Ireland as a foreign correspondent to report on the Fenian trials for the *Boston Post* and the *New York Herald*. He collected Irish broadside ballads which led to his lifelong interest in folklore. He was also interested in Irish poetry and this led to his publication of an anthology of Irish poetry in 1881. In 1875, he was hired as a reporter for the *Providence Journal* where he wrote editorials. In 1884 he became editor-in-chief of the paper. He started a Sunday edition in 1885 and in it he published poems and articles by Irish writers. He also made the *Journal* one of the strongest advocates in America for Irish home rule. After his wife died in 1886, he made a second trip to Ireland and met many young talented Irish writers including Katharine Tynan and William Butler Yeats. Williams published much of their work in the *Journal* and this gave many Americans weekly access to Irish literature. Williams's ill health due to malaria he contracted during the Civil War led to his retirement from the *Journal* in 1891 and he died five years later while on a visit to St. Kitts in the Eastern Caribbean. Having no children, he donated his entire estate, appraised at \$250,000, to the Providence Public Library.

George W. Potter (d. 1959) was chief editor of the *Providence Journal* and winner of the Pulitzer Prize. He extensively researched and wrote on about Irish history and culture. In 1950, a series of 17 articles written by him in the *Journal* about people, life and culture in contemporary Ireland was published under the title An Irish Pilgrimage. His other work, To the Golden Door: The Story of Irish in Ireland and America was published in 1960, a year after his death.

Additionally, Potter wrote a series of articles about Alfred M. Williams and, in 1949, helped the library establish a center for Irish studies called the "Alfred M. Williams Memorial". He acquired many rare and valuable documents and books during his trips to Ireland including an original copy of the 1916 broadside proclamation declaring Ireland's independence.

In 1950 the library purchased around 400 pamphlets that had been in the library of Holland House, a Tudor mansion. They date from 1730 to 1885 and relate mainly to the Act of Union, Catholic emancipation, and British policy toward Ireland. It was at this time that the National Library of Ireland gave many duplicate broadside ballads and about a hundred books to the Williams Memorial. Potter was responsible for helping the library amass one of the finest collections outside of Ireland of Irish literature and history. After Potter died in 1959 the library renamed the collection the "George W. Potter and Alfred M. Williams Memorial on Irish Culture."

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

The manuscript collection includes materials related to the work of Alfred M. Williams and George W. Potter related to Irish history from 1899-1981 with the bulk 1949-1960. The manuscript collection includes many printed materials, manuscripts to and from Potter as well as other librarians and book distributors, and documents.

It includes Alfred M. Williams's small collection of writings donated posthumously in 1899. The bulk of the material is by George W. Potter and includes his rough draft of To the Golden Door: the History of the Irish in Ireland and America. Also included is Potter's correspondence with librarians, Irish writers and readers, and a collection of newspaper clippings about Irish history and related news. His manuscripts and clippings show how close his relationship was with the Irish literary world and how instrumental he was in printing works by Irish writers in the *Providence Journal*.

Most of the other correspondence is from the Providence Public Library librarians Clarence E. Sherman, Stuart C. Sherman and Virginia M. Adams. These letters span the dates 1949-1981 with the bulk of them dating 1949-1960. These letters show day to day activities of the librarians dealing with developing and maintaining the collection.

The miscellaneous material provides random information such as a list of the Williams Memorial Advisory Committee and their addresses, a list of Rhode Island Irish Societies, the financial history of the collection, collection description with emphasis on the facsimiles of the Lindsarne Gospels, the

Book of Durrow and the Book of Kells, several photographs of Potter and other committee members, and miscellaneous unidentified correspondence. The original order of the collection is unknown.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

The collection is organized into four series that reflect the individual collections of Alfred M. Williams and George W. Potter as well as papers related to the PPL library collection.

Series 1: Alfred M. Williams manuscripts

Series 2: Correspondence

Series 3: George W. Potter materials related to "To the Golden Door"

Series 4: Miscellaneous materials

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION**Series 1: Alfred M. Williams manuscript collection**

Includes a small collection of manuscripts including poems written by Williams and a written account of a British ship captured by pirates in 1828.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
Poems and written accounts	n.d. & 1828	1	1
Photocopies of Williams manuscripts		1	2

Series 2: Correspondence

Includes correspondence of George W. Potter and various librarians at Providence Public Library regarding building and maintaining the Memorial Collection.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
George W. Potter correspondence	1949	1	3
George W. Potter correspondence	1950	1	4
George W. Potter correspondence	1951-1952	1	5
George W. Potter correspondence	1953-1956	1	6
George W. Potter post and note cards	n.d.	1	7
George W. Potter greeting cards	n.d.	1	8
George W. Potter correspondence	1949-1956	1	9
Clarence E. Sherman correspondence, recipient	1948-1956	1	10
Clarence E. Sherman correspondence, sender	1948-1956	1	11
Stuart C. Sherman correspondence, recipient	1948-1965	1	12
Stuart C. Sherman correspondence, sender	1948-1967	1	13
Virginia M. Adams correspondence	1969-1981	1	14
Miscellaneous correspondence	1949-1981	1	15

Series 3: George W. Potter manuscripts

Typed rough draft of Potter's posthumously published book, To the Golden Door: the Story of the Irish and Ireland in America. These manuscripts illustrate extensive research done by Potter on Irish immigration and cultural trends from the late 17th to the mid 19th century. Although he begins with a history of Ireland in ancient times through the Protestant Reformation and English rule, most of the research focuses on immigration trends, and the Irish experience in America up until the Civil War. This draft gives evidence of extensive and time consuming extra research that was not printed in the published version.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
Draft of "To the Golden Door: Where they came from"		1	16
Draft of "To the Golden Door: Prefamine in Ireland"		1	17
Draft of "To the Golden Door: Prefamine in Ireland"		1	18
Draft of "To the Golden Door: Prefamine in Ireland"		1	19
Draft of "To the Golden Door: Prefamine in Ireland", Section II		1	20
Draft of "To the Golden Door: Prefamine in Ireland", Section III		1	21
Draft of "To the Golden Door: Prefamine in Ireland", Section IV & V		1	22
Draft of "To the Golden Door: How they got across the ocean"		1	23
Draft of "To the Golden Door: What befell them in America"		1	24
Draft of "To the Golden Door: What befell them in America"		1	25
Draft of "To the Golden Door: What befell them in America"		1	26
Draft of "To the Golden Door: The building of the Church"		2	1
Draft of "To the Golden Door: The building of the Church"		2	2
Draft of "To the Golden Door: The building of the Church"		2	3
Draft of "To the Golden Door: The building of the Church"		2	4
Draft of "To the Golden Door: The building of the Church"		2	5
Miscellaneous notes		2	6

Series 4: Miscellaneous

Some items in the miscellaneous manuscript folder: The Constitution of the Eire Society of Boston, list of members of the Alfred M. Williams Memorial Advisory Committee, list of Irish Societies, brief descriptions of Irish painters, a description of the 1916 Easter Rebellion Proclamation of the Irish Republic, and other biographical information about notable Irish citizens. Some of the items in the miscellaneous printed material folder include an Irish Digest pictorial calendar, the Providence Public Library's Reader's Guide to Books, announcements of Irish cultural events, the Irish Manuscripts Commission Catalog of Publications and a resolution of the Providence City Council paying tribute to the late George W. Potter. The few photographs and negatives in the last folder are of Potter, several notable politicians and librarians, a photographed portrait of Williams, and one of the Easter Proclamation of 1916.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
Records related to the Collection including inventory lists, item descriptions and receipts.		2	7
Newspaper clippings, bulk from Providence Journal		2	8-10
Manuscripts		2	11
Printed materials		2	12
Photographs		2	13