

Mayor John F. Ficken, Jr., Mayoral Papers, 1891-1895

Descriptive Summary

Title and Dates:

John F. Ficken Mayoral Papers, 1891-1895

Creator:

John F. Ficken, Jr., Mayor of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, 1891-1895

Quantity:

11 items (1 folder)

Forms of Material:

Correspondence, contracts

Processed by:

Rebecca Schultz, 2019

Biographical Sketch

John F. Ficken, Jr., was born in Charleston on June 16, 1843 to an affluent family of German immigrants. As the son of successful merchant, he attended the best private schools prior to enrolling in the College of Charleston. The outbreak of hostilities during the Civil War interrupted his studies, as he became a member of German Artillery, Company B. A special order of the Confederate Secretary of War, James Seddon, allowed Ficken and his classmates to complete their studies during a short detachment from service in 1864.

At the close of the war, Ficken studied law under the tutelage of Colonel John Phillips. In 1869, he attended courses in Civil Law at the University of Berlin and the following year received a Master of Arts degree from the College of Charleston, at which point, he began his own law practice. In 1877, he entered the political field as a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives. He remained in that position until 1891 when he won election as the forty-eighth mayor of Charleston.

In his mayoral campaign, Ficken represented the “reform” wing of the Democratic Party. This newly emerged faction identified with Governor Ben Tillman’s repudiation of the “Broad Street Ring” of elite lawyers and bankers who typically controlled politics in Charleston. They likewise supported his efforts to suppress the African-American vote. Despite his appeal to working-class Democrats, Tillman’s generally antagonistic attitude towards Charleston, along with his efforts to shut down illegal saloons, ultimately led to the reform wing’s decline in popularity. The 1895 mayoral election, thus, saw the reform candidate supported by Mayor Ficken, George D. Bryan, lose the democratic nomination to J. Adger Smyth.¹

¹ “The Voice of Reform,” *Charleston News and Courier*, October 16, 1891. Fraser, Walter J., Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 319-329. Hemphill, J.G. *Men of Mark in South Carolina*;

Scope and Content Notes

The collection consists of the papers of John F. Ficken, Jr., mayor of Charleston from 1891-1895. Mayor Ficken's papers consist of eleven items including correspondence and a memorandum of understanding arranged in chronological order. Topics of interest include the East Shore Terminal Company and the extension of Concord Street.

ABBREVIATIONS:

AD = autograph document
ALS = autograph letter signed
DS = document signed
TLS = typed letter signed

Item

- 1 TLS, Acting Secretary of the US Treasury Department, Washington, D.C., to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 28 December 1891: correspondence re: right-of-way easement granted to East Shore Terminal Company for the extension of Concord Street to the US Custom House in Charleston
- 2 TLS, Acting Secretary of the US Treasury Department, Washington, D.C., to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 11 December 1893: correspondence re: revocation of right-of-way granted to East Shore Terminal Company for the extension of Concord Street to the US Custom House in Charleston
- 3 TLS, W.E. Curtis, Acting Secretary of the US Treasury Department, Washington, D.C., to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 6 April 1894: correspondence re: East Shore Terminal Company, expenses associated with the extension of Concord Street to the US Custom House in Charleston
- 4 ALS, Mrs. John Stanton, New York, N.Y. to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 27 April 1894: correspondence re: request for information about a former slave of John McMillan named Tom who now preaches in Charleston
- 5 ALS, J. Adger Smith, City Alderman, Charleston, S.C. to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 22 May 1894: correspondence re: delegation to the Trade and Grain Convention in New Orleans
- 6 TLS, Acting Secretary of the US Treasury Department, Washington, D.C., to John H. Devereux, US Public Buildings Superintendent of Repairs, Charleston, S.C., 9 June 1894: correspondence re: revocation of right-of-way granted to East Shore Terminal Company for operation of a railroad through grounds of the US Custom House in Charleston

Ideals of American Life: A Collection of Biographies of Leading Men of the State vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Men of Mark Publishing Company, 1908), 112-116.

Item

- 7 TLS, P. Morris, Standard Oil Company, Charleston, S.C. to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 18 July 1894: correspondence re: City Ordinance concerning the storage of oil
- 8 ALS, Marion P. Sellmer, Lansdale, P.A. to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 28 July 1894: correspondence re: request for daughter's birth certificate who was born while her father, Capt. Charles Sellmer, was stationed with the US Army in 1870 in Charleston
- 9 ALS, Dr. R. Atmar Smith, Charleston, S.C. to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 6 August 1894: correspondence re: Calhoun St. drainage
- 10 TLS, Smythe & Lee, Attorneys and Counsellors, Charleston, S.C. to Hon. John F. Ficken, Charleston, S.C., 30 October 1894: correspondence re: examination of the Standard Oil Company premises
- 11 DS, Memorandum of Agreement between the City Council of Charleston and the Lucas Richardson Company, Charleston, S.C., 12 September 1894: contract re: printing of the Revised Ordinances of the City of Charleston