Overview of the Collection

Creator: Pettengill, Samuel B. (Samuel Berrett), 1886-1974
Title: Samuel B. Pettengill papers
Dates: 1849-1975 (inclusive)

Quantity: 15 linear feet, (38 containers, 1 package)
Collection Number: Coll 015

Summary: Samuel B. Pettengill was a U.S. Congressman from Indiana and worked on interstate commerce affairs. The collection is divided into biographical material, correspondence, manuscripts, speeches, subject files, articles, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous.

Repository: University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives.
UO Libraries--SCUA
1299 University of Oregon
Eugene OR
97403-1299
Telephone: 541-346-3068
spcarref@uoregon.edu

Access Restrictions: Collection is open to the public. Collection must be used in Special Collections and University Archives Reading Room. Collection or parts of collection may be stored offsite. Please contact Special Collections and University Archives in advance of your visit to allow for transportation time.

Additional Reference Guides: See the Collective Name Index to the Research Collection of Conservative and Libertarian Studies for a cross-referenced index to names of correspondents in this collection, if any, and 37 related University of Oregon collections, including dates of correspondence. See index instructions on use.

Languages: English

Sponsor: Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Historical Note

Samuel Barrett Pettengill was born in Portland, Oregon, on January 19, 1886, the second son of Samuel Barrett and Susan Clagett Pettengill. At the time, his father was editor of the Portland Oregonian. After the death of his mother in 1890, he was brought to Grafton, Vermont and lived on the ancestral farm settled by his great-grandfather in 1787.
He was a graduate of Middlebury College and Yale Law School where he was a member of Chi Tau Kappa. He began the practice of law in South Bend, Indiana in 1912, and was a member of the Bar of the Supreme Court of Indiana and the United States Supreme Court. He was the recipient of honorary degrees from Harding, Franklin, Marietta and Middlebury Colleges and Norwich University.

He represented the Third Indiana District in Congress from 1931 to 1939, during which time he served on committees on military affairs, interstate and foreign commerce and helped formulate much influential legislation. His first book, Hot Oil, published in 1936, summarized the arguments pro and con in reference to the question of federal control or nationalization of the petroleum industry. Mr. Pettengill favored State rather than Federal regulation and the highest degree of industrial freedom consistent with the conservation of our national petroleum resources. He was influential in the enactment of the Connolly Hot Oil Act and the formulation of the Interstate Oil Compact. As a member of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Mr. Pettengill helped formulate the Securities Act, the Motor Carriers Act, the Stock Exchange Act, the National Gas Act and other legislation dealing with railroads, commodity exchanges, public utilities, aviation and the Panama Canal. He became widely known because of his activities in the defeat of the Supreme Court Packing Bill and the Reorganization Bill during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Mr. Pettengill, a Jeffersonian Democrat, after being re-elected three times, terminated his Congressional career in 1939. Although his re-election was generally conceded, because of his disagreement with the policies of President Roosevelt, he re-turned to his law practice in South Bend.

A strong critic of numerous New Deal policies, he was Chair-man of the "No Third Term" campaign meeting at Carnegie Hall in 1940. Two years later, he was appointed Chairman of the Republican National Finance Committee. On January 1, 1943, he became Vice-President and General Counsel of the Transportation Association of America. He resigned early in 1944 to devote more of his time to his law practice, writing and speaking. Since leaving Congress, he had been writing a twice-a-week column as "The Gentleman From Indiana", which was syndicated to over 100 newspapers all over the country. During 1947 and 1948 he spoke on public affairs every Sunday afternoon over the American Broadcasting System. In addition to his first book, Hot Oil, written in 1936, he wrote Jefferson, The Forgotten Man in 1939 to show how far the principles of Jefferson had been discarded. In 1940 he wrote Smoke Screen to show that the increasing Federal controls over every facet of American business had its counterpart in developments in Germany and Italy. Smoke Screen was the best-selling non-fiction book of that year. For Americans Only, published in 1944, brought the same theme up to date.

By 1949 Mr. Pettengill decided that he had had enough of public life. He had resigned from his law firm in South Bend, of which he was a partner, a year or two before, as his columns, weekly broadcasts and the speeches he was making all over the country interfered with his practice of the law. He accepted the offer of Henry M. Dawes, brother of Charles G. Dawes, Vice-President under Calvin Coolidge, to come to Chicago as Assistant to the President of the Pure Oil Company, and consultant to the legal department. He wrote his last column on January 1, 1949. While there he was editor of the History of the Pure Oil Company, and also wrote many articles on politics and economics.

On July 1, 1956, he retired to his boyhood home at Grafton, Vermont, where he continued to engage in writing and speaking in defense of Constitutional Government and the competitive free enterprise system. He also conducted courses for teachers of American History in various colleges and was a trustee of the Vermont Historical Society. He was one of the founders of the Grafton Historical Society in 1962 and its President for the next ten years. His intense interest in the early history of Vermont and its settlers, led him to write his fifth book, The Yankee Pioneers -- A Saga of Courage, published in 1971.

Samuel B. Pettengill papers, 1849-1975
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv01044
A 33rd Degree Mason, Mr. Pettengill had been Master of Lodge # 294 and past deputy Grand Master of the Indiana Grand Lodge. In 1973, he received a citation and a medal of honor from the Masons in recognition of distinguished service to the craft.

On June 1, 1912, Mr. Pettengill married Josephine Campbell of Napoleon, Ohio, who died on June 26, 1948. They had one daughter, Susan, (Mrs. Thomas B. Douglas), who lives in Washington, D.C. On July 16, 1949, he married Helen M. Charles, of New York City. He was a Congregationalist and a member of the Grafton Church all his life.

Mr. Pettengill died on March 20, 1974, at the age of 88. His autobiography, My Story, edited by his wife Helen, was published posthumously in 1979.


Content Description

The collection is divided into biographical material, correspondence, manuscripts, speeches, subject files, articles, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous.

Correspondence includes letters from 1849 to 1975, and is arranged chronologically. It includes many letters from his years on Capitol Hill, from and to constituents and fellow Congressmen. The majority of the later letters concern his dealings with various conservative political organizations, and reactions to his newspaper and radio spots. A selected name index is appended. Manuscripts include some material from Smoke Screen, the complete texts of For Americans Only, Yankee Pioneers, and the unpublished Fugitive Writings in Prose and Verse, poetry, and writings by Pettengill's father. Speeches are divided into two categories: addresses made in person, and those made over the radio. All speeches are arranged chronologically. The subject files were developed by Pettengill, and every attempt has been made to retain his organization and subject headings. As a result, the contents of the subject files vary widely. A researcher can expect to find any and all combinations of correspondence, articles, speeches, and printed material in the individual folders. Articles by Pettengill, arranged chronologically, are divided into two categories: those which appeared in magazines, including the manuscripts for same, and those which appeared in newspapers. Pettengill's column "The Gentleman from Indiana" can be found here; however, the collection is not complete. The University of Vermont has a complete set, numbering over a thousand essays. The majority of the articles, speeches as well, have a conservative orientation, and generally take as their subject politics or economics. Newspaper clippings covering Pettengill's activities are roughly sorted by decade. The bulk of the clippings come from his years in Congress in the 1930s. The miscellaneous category includes scrapbooks assembled by Pettengill's autobiography.

The photographs in the collection include portraits and images of Pettingill at work, including some from his appearance on The March of Time. Some personal images are included. Collected conservative publications have been added to an as yet uncataloged series of other conservative publications.

Administrative Information

Detailed Description of the Collection
Guide to the Samuel B. Pettengill papers

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms:
Lawyers--Indiana--Correspondence
Legislators--United States--Correspondence

Personal Names:
Peale, Norman Vincent, 1898-1993
Peale, Norman Vincent, 1898-1993
Pettengill, Samuel B. (Samuel Berrett), 1886-1974
Pettengill, Samuel B. (Samuel Berrett), 1886-1974
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945
Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972
Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972
Willkie, Wendell L. (Wendell Lewis), 1892-1944
Willkie, Wendell L. (Wendell Lewis), 1892-1944

Corporate Names:
Pure Oil Company

Finding aid prepared by Brian Lematta
2007

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