



BHC-MSS 0220  
Guide to the Papers of Henry Sanford  
By Lisa Furchtgott  
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**Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Henry Sanford III

**Title:** Papers of Henry Sanford

**Dates:** 1843-1971

**Quantity:** 1 manuscript box; 0.42 linear feet

**Abstract:** This collection contains mostly correspondence written from 1894 through 1901 by Henry Sanford, an executive of the mail-shipping firm Adams Express Company and a heavy investor in railroads, other major industries, and banks. His communiques were sent to brokers, purveyors of everyday goods, publications, friends, and relatives. Other documents concern land purchases and leases. They are joined by a small set of photographs.

**Language:** English

**Repository:** Bridgeport History Center

**Administrative History:**

Ultimately one of the magnates supervising the private delivery service Adams Express Company, Henry Sanford was born into a wealthy, long-established family in Redding, Connecticut in 1825. After he studied and tutored at the White Plains Academy, he ran a grocery store in Bridgeport. In 1856 he joined the Adams Express Company, then three years old, and soon began to rise in rank, appointed president by 1891. In 1894, he resigned from the presidency and became vice-president.

Sanford married twice. His first wife, Nancy Judson Sanford, died in 1894; they had one child, Samuel Simons, born in Bridgeport in 1849. An eminent pianist, Samuel helped found the Yale School of Music and served as a professor there. In 1898, Sanford married his second wife, Olive Wilmot. She would die in June of 1903. He maintained homes in Bridgeport and New York City, in addition to a number of rented properties, primarily in Bridgeport. After suffering a stroke, he died in his Bridgeport residence, located near the city's downtown, in October, 1903. It was razed in 1919 and replaced by an apartment building. Samuel died from kidney disease in New York City in 1910.

The collection's creator, Henry's great-grandson, Henry III, was born in 1910 in New York City and died in Fairfield, Connecticut, in 1996. He reached the rank of captain in the U.S. Army during World War II and then served on the trustee boards of several charities. He donated the collection in 1971.

For more information on the lives of Henry and his descendants, please request the "Biography" folder.

**Scope and Content:** The collection contains hundreds of copies of letters primarily composed by Sanford from 1894 through 1901, with the bulk concentrated in 1898 and 1899. Almost all are typewritten.

Very few concern the death of his first wife or his involvement in the Adams Express Company, the primary source of his wealth in addition to his family fortune. Founded in 1854, Adams Express was a company dedicated to transporting goods and valuables in the Northeast. Over the next decade, it spread to the American South – where its discreetly subsidiary branches would continue to function during the Civil War – then to the West Coast and finally to nations abroad, making use of major shipping and train lines. From its beginning, the Adams Express was a stockholding company; its richer holders, in turn, invested in shipping companies, especially in the railroad industry. By 1891, Sanford owned the majority of Adams stock among directors sitting on its board of management. That year he was designated president after an investigation he headed proved that corruption had stricken the executives then in power. Sanford stepped down to the role of vice president in 1894, a position he would retain for the rest of his life. In 1929, having been bought out by a new railroad monopoly and sitting on a bounty of stock and investment capital, Adams Express shut down its transport services and reinvented itself as a closed-fund investment firm.

Letters buying stocks in other companies and requests that his brokers ensure their financial stability make up a high proportion of Sanford's correspondence. These firms occupy a wide range of sectors, including gold mines, railways, oil, and banks, as well as steel, iron, silver mines, the American Linseed Company, National Biscuit Company, the Glucose Sugar Refining Company, and Steinway & Sons. Brief letters indicate Sanford's staggering investments: in 1899, for instance, his casual purchase of \$300,000 in assets of the Central Pacific Railroad Company would be worth more than \$11 million in 2023.

A number of letters concern everyday financial matters, many of them related to property: purchases and sales, mortgage and utility payments, maintenance, rent collection, quality of tenants in the houses and offices he let out, and renovations to his Bridgeport buildings as well as Manhattan apartment. The series also includes letters of recommendation for his servants and Adams employees, orders for such goods as whiskey, chickens, and grapefruit, and letters to the *Country Gentlemen* journal, reflecting his interest in cattle-raising.

Other letters are more personal, mentioning travel, illnesses, and family updates, although these too often involve discussions of finances. Letters sent to his friend General John Frisbie, an officer during the Mexican-American War and later an executive of the California Pacific Railroad and a resident of Mexico City, suggest he look into investing in the city's streetcar construction, a project to be carried out by a European railroad syndicate. Sanford occasionally offers his views on national economic conditions, the Democratic party, Populism, Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, and William Jennings Bryan. Some letters in the collection were sent to relatives; the majority of these went to his son, Samuel.

#### **Arrangement Notes:**

Series I contains correspondence.

A letter in folder 13 narrates Sanford's role in cooperating with railway supervisors to help protect Abraham Lincoln during his journey to Washington, D.C. for his inauguration in 1861. Sanford worked in alongside Allan Pinkerton, later the founder of Pinkerton National Detective Agency, in doing so. Pinkerton's recounting of the experience is available at:

<https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln%3A37167>

Notes by Henry Sanford III listing certain letters' dates and recipients can be found in Folder 9.

Series II contains land-related papers ranging from 1843 through 1914 and involving both Henry and Samuel Sanford. These include rent checks, contractor bills, legislation, deed purchases, and probate documents.

Series III contains an 1874 report on a woman identified as "Mrs. Enos" and an admission card to Samuel's memorial, held in 1910.

Series IV contains three undated photos: Sanford's home in Bridgeport, a portion of the city's downtown, and a portrait of Sanford.

Administrative information:

Provenance: Donated by Henry Sanford, III

Preferred Citation:

Papers of Henry Sanford (BHC-MSS 0220), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

### **Names and Subject Tracings**

#### *Corporate names*

Adams Express Company

#### *Personal names*

Sanford, Henry (1825-1903)

#### *Subject tracings*

Express service

Railroads

Banks

Stocks

Stockholders

### **Box 1**

#### **Series I**

#### **Correspondence**

Folder 1, Henry Sanford correspondence, 1894

Folder 2, Henry Sanford correspondence, 1895

Folder 3, Henry Sanford correspondence, 1896

Folder 4, Henry Sanford correspondence, 1897

Folder 5, Henry Sanford correspondence, Jan.-May, 1898

Folder 6, Henry Sanford correspondence, June-Aug., 1898

Folder 7, Henry Sanford correspondence, Sept.-Nov. 1898

Folder 8, Henry Sanford correspondence, Dec., 1898

Folder 9, Henry Sanford correspondence, Jan., 1899

Folder 10, Henry Sanford correspondence, Feb., 1899

Folder 11, Henry Sanford correspondence, Mar., 1899  
Folder 12, Henry Sanford correspondence, Apr., 1899  
Folder 13, Henry Sanford correspondence, May, 1899  
Folder 14, Henry Sanford correspondence, June, 1899  
Folder 15, Henry Sanford correspondence, Jul., 1899  
Folder 16, Henry Sanford correspondence, Aug.-Sept., 1899  
Folder 17, Henry Sanford correspondence, Oct.-Dec., 1899  
Folder 18, Henry Sanford correspondence, Jan.-June, 1900  
Folder 19, Henry Sanford correspondence, July-Dec., 1900  
Folder 20, Henry Sanford correspondence, 1901  
Folder 21, Notebook extracting and listing selected letters' dates and recipient names,  
Henry Sanford III, 1971

## **Series II**

### **Legal documents and bills**

Folder 22, Bills and notes, 1872-1910  
Folder 23, Court case, Henry Sanford vs. George Hayes, et. al., 1879  
Folder 24, Land deeds, 1843-1904  
Folder 25, Leases, agreements, indentures, 1887-1914  
Folder 26, Probate documents, 1864, 1870s, 1904

## **Series III**

### **Misc.**

Folder 27, Investigation papers concerning Mrs. Enos, 1874  
Folder 28, Samuel Simons Sanford memorial admission card, Mar., 1910

## **Series IV**

### **Photographs**

Folder 29, Photographs, undated