

J. Ward Gurley, Jr. Collection

RG 500

Louisiana State Museum Historical Center

May 2021

Descriptive Summary

Provenance: Donated by Mrs. Gurley McGehee Maurin in 2004.

Title: J. Ward Gurley, Jr. Collection

Dates: 1864–1919

Abstract: This collection documents part of the life of J. Ward Gurley, Jr., New Orleans District Attorney.

Extent: 58 items in 25 folders plus one oversized folder

Accession: 2004.28.17–2004.18.45

Biographical / Historical Note¹

This collection documents part of the life of J. Ward Gurley, Jr., Orleans Parish District Attorney. Gurley was born in New Orleans in 1851 and graduated from Washington and Lee University before he was admitted to the bar in 1873. Two years later, he was appointed Register in Bankruptcy for the District of Louisiana. From 1880 to 1883, he served as Orleans Parish Assistant District Attorney, and in 1896 he became U.S. District Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana while continuing a private practice in partnership with Delos C. Mellen. In 1900, Gurley was elected Orleans Parish District Attorney and dissolved his partnership with Mellen.

Gurley married Aurora Huntington in 1878; she died in 1892. They had two daughters, Helen and Aurora. The collection houses several letters written between Gurley and his daughter, Aurora, while she was a student at The Castle School, also known as Miss Mason's School for Girls, in Tarrytown, New York. The school was originally built for John J. Herrick in 1854; Miss Cassity Mason purchased it in 1895 and operated it as a school for girls until her death in 1933. Students from the United States and foreign countries attended the institution, which Mason advertised as a post finishing school for young women. Aurora Gurley married Edward McGehee in 1902; their wedding invitation is included in this collection.

Gurley was known as one of the fathers of Audubon Park. He served as the first president of the Audubon Park Commission from 1886 to 1903. It was his dream to have Frederick Law Olmstead draw up a plan for a million-dollar improvement to the park. The collection houses several items documenting the very early years of the park, including a copy of the original charter.

On July 20, 1903, Gurley was assassinated by Lewis W. Lyons, a disgruntled client. Lyons had been accused of stealing a diamond stickpin in 1895; once he was cleared of the charges, he sued his accusers for \$5,040. Gurley's law partner represented Lyons in the 1895 suit. When the court failed to award Lyons the damages, he hired Gurley to appeal the case to the Louisiana Supreme Court, which upheld the lower court's decision. Lyons, incensed by the court's refusal to reverse,

¹ Prepared by Louisiana State Museum Curator of Maps and Manuscripts Kathryn Page on 31 July 2006.

turned his ire toward Gurley by threatening him, and, in 1901, Lyons challenged Gurley to a duel, which Gurley ignored. Lyons shot Gurley at Gurley's law office in the Mecheca Building on Common Street before turning the gun on himself. Lyons survived his self-inflicted wound. Other than memorials written by his friends after Gurley's death, and a few newspaper clippings, there are no items in the collection concerning Lyons or Gurley's assassination.

Access of Use Restrictions

Access

Collection is **open** for research.

Related or Separated Materials

Oversized material

2004.028.25 large broadside, "In Memoriam" issued to family of J. Ward Gurley, Jr. by Audubon Park Association after Gurley's assassination. July 26, 1903.

Visual Arts Collection

2004.028.01 Carte-de-visite photograph of Rosamond Richards Gurley circa 1870. Photograph by Turner and Cohen, 57 Camp street, New Orleans.

2004.028.02 Cabinet card photograph of Rosamond Richards Gurley circa 1875. Photograph by Theodore Lilienthal, New Orleans.

2004.028.03 Cabinet card photograph of Aurora Wilkinson Gurley as an infant in 1883. Photograph by Theodore Lilienthal, 121 Canal street, New Orleans.

2004.028.04 Cabinet card photograph of Aurora Wilkinson Gurley as a toddler circa 1885. Photograph by Theodore Lilienthal, 121 Canal street, New Orleans.

2004.028.05 Cabinet card photograph of Mr. and Mrs. J. Ward Gurley, Jr. with daughter, Aurora Wilkinson Gurley in July 1885. Photograph by Achille Simon, 21 Hospital street, New Orleans.

2004.028.06 Large photograph of Aurora Wilkinson Gurley at age 4 in 1887.

2004.028.07 Cabinet card photograph of J. Ward Gurley, Jr. in July 1894. Photograph by W. W. Washburn, 111 Canal street, New Orleans.

2004.028.13 Photograph, mounted on cardboard, of Helen Torrey Gurley in July 1903. Photograph by Hitchler-Beattie.

2004.028.16.1–2004.028.16.3 Three photographs of Augusta Louise Tucker McGehee in the dress she wore to her graduation from Soulé Business College in 1934.

Carnival Department

2004.028.08.1–2004.028.08.5 Five photographs, mounted on cardboard, of Aurora Wilkinson Gurley, Queen of the Krewe of Consus, in 1903. Photographs by Hitchler-Beattie.

2004.028.09 Card, handwritten, presented to Aurora Gurley by Krewe of Consus informing Aurora that she has been selected as queen of their 1903 ball.

2004.028.10 Card, handwritten, requesting Aurora Gurley to report to the chairman of the floor committee at the Krewe of Consus's 1903 ball.

2004.028.11 Card, typewritten, from Krewe of Nereus to Aurora Gurley expressing regrets that she could not attend their 1904 ball.

2004.028.12 Card, handwritten, from the 1903 Duke of the Krewe of Nereus to Aurora Gurley expressing regrets that she could not attend their 1904 ball.

Costumes and Textiles Department

2004.028.14 Beaded handbag with colorless seed beads on crocheted gray fabric and silver-toned drawstring chain, made by Aurora Gurley McGehee circa 1915.

2004.028.15 White organdy dress worn by Augusta Louise Tucker McGehee to her graduation from Soulé Business College. Made by her mother, Ida Hoffman Tucker of Ponchatoula, in 1934.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

J. Ward Gurley, Jr. Collection, Louisiana State Museum Historical Center

Acquisition Information

Donated by Mrs. Gurley McGehee Maurin, Aurora Gurley's granddaughter and J. Ward Gurley's great granddaughter, in 2004.

List of Content

Folder	Accession No.	Date	Item Description
1	2004.028.20.1.1– 2004.028.20.1.6	circa 1895	penciled autobiography, written in J. Ward Gurley hand on verso of 6 small printed sheets
	2004.028.20.1.1	circa 1895	typed autobiography of J. Ward Gurley
2	2004.028.17	1864 April 2	note written by J. Ward Gurley, Jr. regarding the difficulty of writing compositions
3	2004.028.19	circa 1890	re-written 1864 composition
4	2004.028.18	1873 April 2	certification of J. Ward Gurley, Jr. to practice law in Louisiana issued by Supreme Court of LA
5	2004.028.30	1895 May 5	poem to Aurora Gurley from J. Ward Gurley, Jr. on the occasion of his daughter's twelfth birthday
	2004.028.32	1897 October 7	empty envelope addressed to Aurora Gurley "at Sherman House" by her father in New Orleans
	2004.028.45	circa 1895	letterhead stationery (fragment—top only), Gurley and Meller
folder 6: Correspondence to Aurora Gurley from J. Ward	2004.028.31.1	1897 October 7	Family news; Aunt Ida "seems to be in constant dread of typhoid fever there and yellow fever here. On "Office of the United States Attorney stationery.
	2004.028.31.2	1897	Christmas and New Year wishes, written on "Department of Justice" card.

Folder	Accession No.	Date	Item Description
folder 6: Correspondence to Aurora Gurley from J. Ward Gurley, Jr.	2004.028.31.3	1899 September 19	Worries; talks with friends; politicians. "The Jackson Democrats are still considering whether they will endorse my nomination ... I spoke last night at the opening of the campaign for the 'Regular' ticket in our Ward."
	2004.28.31.4	1901 September 26	Looking forward to seeing Aurora while he was in New York at the Hotel Marlborough. He "soon found lots of New Orleans people [in New York]. The Grants, Mr. Rouse, Mr. Daniels, our former postmaster, Mr. Machie...Uncle Morgan and Black [Chaffee ?]."
	2004.028.31.5a– 2004.028.31.5b	1901 October 6	"[Y]ou must remember that to read write and spell is of far greater importance than the advanced studies ... you will find that ... friendships will be of great pleasure and comfort as long as you live ... Every deserving person your Mother came in contact with became her friend and you are just like your mother ... You will have to pay for the chaperone [when you go to Dobb's Ferry] ... Hope you will soon enjoy a trip to NY." Be careful as to accidents.
	2004.028.31.6	1901 October 12	"I think your vocal professor is just right in his criticisms and hope you will profit by them ... take your physical exercises regularly and develop your chest—It will benefit you throughout your life and serve as a protection against disease ... I have just finished a murder case which lasted 2 days and 2 nights."
folder 7: Correspondence to Aurora Gurley from J. Ward Gurley, Jr.	2004.028.31.7	1901 October 19	Correspondence regarding family news. "I am very glad that you went to the musical at Mrs. Edwin Gould's."
	2004.028.31.8	1901 December 20	Insisting that Aurora not come home for Christmas. "It is also much the best ... for you to remain at the Castle and not even go to NY too much."
	2004.028.31.9a, 2004.028.31.9b, 2004.028.31.9c	1902 March 23	Letter with envelope thanking Aurora for her support if he should wish to marry again, her devotion to him, his dependence upon her and her sister Helen, and discussions regarding what they would do during the forthcoming summer. "I took [Helen] and your Aunt to see Julia Marlowe in 'When Knighthood was in Flower' last night and we all enjoyed it very much."

Folder	Accession No.	Date	Item Description
folder 7: Correspondence to Aurora Gurley from J. Ward Gurley, Jr.	2004.028.31.10a– 2004.028.31.10b	1902 May 7	<p>Aurora had an operation to remove a growth from her nose, and her father expressed great concern and hoped that it had “not again gone up into the cavity in the forehead ... as it did before.”</p> <p>Gurley expressed hope that Dr. Custis was “doing the right thing” by removing Aurora’s growth. “I greatly fear ... most doctors are too fond of cutting.” Aurora wished to go to the Cornell [boat] races in Ithaca, New York, and Gurley expressed concern about the protection of Aurora’s virtue while she was at the races and during her return train trip to New Orleans at the end of the school year.</p> <p>Gurley believed “young ladies” should be “properly protected . . . for the purpose of commanding from the world the proper respect ... and good opinion due a lady.” He believed men would judge Aurora “according to the measure of protection” by which she was “surrounded” and that they might “rank [her] accordingly.” He observed that she knew “all the dangers to which” Aurora “may be subjected” and the importance of not deviating “from the most dignified, cautious, and proper conduct.”</p>
	2004.028.31.11a– 2004.028.31.11b	1902 May 18	<p>Gurley expressed grave concern for his daughter during her train trip home. “It is very unfortunate for a young girl to have to travel alone. Men, and those who look like gentlemen, are so apt to attempt to annoy [young girls] if they do not actually insult them, and there are always men around who are constantly watching for any and every opportunity to take whatever advantage of a girl they can when they see her unprotected. It is perfectly detestable ... Many young ladies have had very unpleasant experiences even in sleeping cars and sometimes even with the conductors. When traveling, be dignified and quiet always. Do not become sociable to or with any stranger ... don’t do anything to attract attention.” Gurley admonished Aurora to avoid any medical procedures until she returned to New Orleans.</p>

Folder	Accession No.	Date	Item Description
8	2004.028.33a, 2004.028.33b, 2004.028.33c	1901 December 17	letter and envelope from Aurora Gurley to her father, advising him that she would not come home for Christmas—she would go into New York whenever there was something to do, but would buy a book of train tickets so that each trip to the city would cost thirty-two cents instead of fifty-one cents.
9	2004.028.34	1904 September 7	Marriage announcement of Aurora Wilkinson Gurley to Edward McGehee, Jr., M. D. in New Orleans.
10	2004.028.35	1904	letter accompanying a present to Aurora on the occasion of her marriage, from J. Webb McGehee, M. D., her husband's brother.
11	2004.028.22	1898 January 10	certificate issued to J. Ward Gurley, Jr., signed by Louisiana Governor Murphy J. Foster, after Gurley's election as Orleans Parish District Attorney.
12	2004.028.23	1899 June 4	certificate issued to J. Ward Gurley, Jr., signed by Louisiana Governor W. W. Heard, appointing Gurley as Orleans Parish District Attorney.
13	2004.028.24.1– 2004.028.24.5	1900	five broadsides: program, July fourth celebration in Hammond, Louisiana, J. Ward Gurley, Jr., "Tangipahoa's gifted son," was the featured orator.
14	2004.028.26.1– 2004.028.26.6	1903 November 2	Typed memorial read to Supreme Court of Louisiana regarding Gurley, Jr., after his death.
15	2004.028.27.1– 2004.028.27.3	circa 1903	Typed synopsis of the address delivered by H. Gibbes Morgan to the Federal Court in New Orleans after Gurley's death.
16	2004.028.43	circa 1897	pamphlet from the Fifth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals, <i>Walter W. Girault, v. United States</i> . Autographed by J. Ward Gurley, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern Division of La.
	2004.028.44	circa 1898	pamphlet from the Fifth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals, <i>Joseph N. Wolfson, v. United States</i> . Autographed by J. Ward Gurley, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern Division of La.
17	2004.028.21.1– 2004.028.21.6	circa 1896	5 political buttons, "Gurley 14th Ward," for election and partial envelope
18	2004.028.37.1– 2004.028.37.9	1894 June 20	Typed copy, charter of the Audubon Park Association.

Folder	Accession No.	Date	Item Description
19	2004.028.36	1891	Audubon Park Improvement Association's address of the board of directors and financial statement
20	2004.028.38.1– 2004.028.38.7	1897 November 26	Typed copy, remarks of J. Ward Gurley, Jr., President of the Board of Commissioners of Audubon Park, at the hearing of the Texas and Pacific Railroad Company's request to build a railway through the park.
21	2004.028.39	1903	Pamphlet autographed by Gurley: Year Book Audubon Park New Orleans.
22	2004.028.40	1919 September 1	booklet. <i>Glimpses of Audubon Park</i> . Includes image of J. Ward Gurley, Jr. "Memories of J. Ward Gurley" written in Aurora's hand on the cover.
23	2004.028.28.1– 2004.028.28.2	1951 March	Two issues of <i>Rider's Digest</i> , which include article regarding both J. Ward Gurley's deaths, 1803 and 1903.
24	2004.028.29	1959 November 1	article from <i>Dixie</i> newspaper tabloid, "Pistols on the Bayou," regarding an 1803 duel near Bayou St. John. This duel was between the first John Ward Gurley (J. Ward Gurley, Jr.'s grand-uncle) and a man named "Jones."
25	none		Miscellaneous photocopied newspaper clippings