

Records of the Executive Relief Committee for the Earthquake of 1886

The Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library

Compiled by Nicholas Butler, Ph.D., Manager, 2007

Scope: primary sources, 1886–1903 (bulk 1886–87); secondary sources, 1886–1986

Collation: 5 linear feet

Description: The Records of the Executive Relief Committee (ERC), consist of correspondence, financial records, repair vouchers, reports, and other materials pertaining to the City of Charleston's relief efforts in the wake of an earthquake that struck the city on 31 August 1886.

The correspondence consists of general letter between the members of the Executive Relief Committee, as well as letters addressed to Charleston Mayor William A. Courtenay from homeowners and contractors addressing building repairs.

Financial lists and documents constitute the bulk of the collection. As news of the disaster spread across the United States, thousands of individuals and organizations donated money to the city's relief efforts. The ERC applied the bulk of this money toward vouchers issued to residents of Charleston and surrounding areas whose homes and businesses had suffered damages as a result of the earthquake. The city began issuing vouchers for general repairs shortly in September 1886, and in December 1886 began issuing separate vouchers for plasterwork repairs. These vouchers have been arranged in sequential order and indexed by the recipients' surnames and street addresses.

The ERC held accounts with three different banks in Charleston: Bank of Charleston, First National Bank of Charleston, and People's National Bank of Charleston. The records of these accounts include bank balance sheets and interest statements from each bank, as well as individual account books and check stub books. Correspondence concerning monetary donations to the ERC is organized by state, and includes international donations. The donations are supplemented by indices of donations arranged chronologically and by city and state. Four account ledgers kept by the ERC span the years from 3 September 1886 through 11 November 1903. Loose financial materials include receipts written for expenses, labor costs, building materials, sundries, as well as payroll lists of laborers and their wages during 1886 and 1887.

Two bound volumes of Executive Relief Committee meeting minutes detail the resolutions and actions of the ERC. In order to handle all damage claims north of Ten Mile Hill, the Summerville Relief Committee was formed as an affiliate of the Executive Relief Committee. Both the ERC and the Summerville Committee summarized their accomplishments in published reports, copies of which are included in these records. The ERC also spawned four sub-committees: the Immediate Relief Committee handled the most dire and extreme cases including the situations of the widowed, the elderly, and sufferers living beyond the city limits of Charleston; the Subsistence Committee, chaired by Arthur Barnwell Rose, bought and distributed food and water to victims; the Shelter Committee formed a headquarters on Marion Square and supplied tents to all those whose homes had been destroyed; and the Special Relief

Committee supervised all donations given to specific causes or institutions such as the Medical College of South Carolina, the Confederate House of Widows, and Charleston Public Schools.

Secondary and supplementary materials photocopied from the National Archives and both nineteenth and twentieth-century newspaper clippings are also included in these records. The clippings are predominantly taken from Charleston newspapers, however a September 1886 issue of the London Newspaper, *The Graphic* is also included. The National Archives materials include engineers' reports on building examinations and damage assessments.

The correspondence, minutes, and published report of the Executive Relief Committee are available on one reel of microfilm and housed in the Charleston County Public Library's South Carolina Room (microfilm reel 1E). In addition, this reel contains selected other materials concerning the earthquake of 1886: a cablegram sent from Queen Victoria to President Grover Cleveland expressing her condolences, portions of the 1886 Year Book of the City of Charleston, the Charleston city directory of 1887, and the *Report of Committee on Condition of Buildings after the Earthquake, with a List of Buildings that Should Come Down* published by Winham and Lester in late 1886.

Historical Note: The powerful earthquake that struck Charleston on the night of 31 August 1886 damaged two-thirds of the buildings in the city, resulting in overall damage estimates of around five million dollars. In response, the City of Charleston promptly established a committee to receive voluntary contributions from around the world and to oversee the distribution of aid in the vicinity. The Executive Relief Committee for the Earthquake of 1886 was formed in Charleston on 3 September, with Mayor William Elliott Huger, Mayor Pro-Tem, acting on behalf of Mayor William Courtenay, who was en route from Liverpool, England, to New York when the earthquake occurred. The committee submitted its final report to Charleston City Council on 22 March 1887, but the final disposition of its funds did not occur until November 1903.

Records of the Executive Relief Committee for the Earthquake of 1886

Collection Outline

I. Correspondence, 1886–1891

II. Financial Records, 1886–1903

A. Bank Balance Sheets (1886–1887)

B. Individual Bank Records (1886–1903)

i. Bank of Charleston (1886–1903)

Bank of Charleston Bank Account Books (5), Sept. 1886–Nov. 1903
Bank of Charleston Interest Statements, October 1886–Oct. 1903
Bank of Charleston Check Stub Book, Sept. 1886–Nov. 1903 (OVRSZ)

ii. First National Bank of Charleston (1886–1887)

First National Bank of Charleston Bank Books (2), Sept. 1886–Sept. 1887
Personal Checks (3), September 1886
First National Bank Interest Statements, September 1886–October 1887
First National Bank Check Stub Book, Nov.–Dec. 1886 (OVRSZ)
First National Bank Check Stub Book, Dec. 1886–Aug. 1887 (OVRSZ)

iii. People's National Bank of Charleston (1886–1887)

People's National Bank of Charleston bank books (2), Sept. 1886–Oct. 1887
People's National Bank of Charleston interest statements, Sept. 1886–Aug. 1887
Peoples National Bank of Charleston Check Stubs, Nov. 1886 (OVRSZ)
Peoples National Bank of Charleston Check Stubs, Nov. 1886–Sept. 1887 (OVRSZ)

C. Donations (1886–1887)

Register of Donations Listed By State and City
Register of Donations By State and City (OVERSIZED; more complete)
Loose Lists of Subscribers and their donations, 2–16 September 1886
Donations from individual states (Alabama-Wisconsin, including U.S. territories)

D. Vouchers (1886–1887)

General Work Vouchers (September 1886–June 1887)
Plaster Work Vouchers (December 1886–March 1887)
List of Repair Work by Street Name (contains additional vouchers)

Index of General Work and Plaster Work Vouchers (compiled by CCPL staff, 2007)

E. Deposits (Envelopes and Deposits from monies donated 1886–1887)

F. Account Ledgers (4): 3 September 1886–11 November 1903

G. Payroll Records September 1886

H. Expenses and Receipts September 1886–August 1887

III. Minutes

A. Earthquake Relief Committee Minutes September 1886–March 1887

IV. Sub-Committee Records

A. Immediate Relief Committee Records (Vouchers and Correspondence)

B. Subsistence Committee Records

C. Shelter Committee Records

D. Special Relief Committee Records

V. Published Reports

A. The Report of the Summerville Relief Committee

B. The Earthquake Report of the Executive Relief Committee

VI. Secondary Source Materials

A. Materials photocopied from the National Archives, Reports on Examinations of Buildings

B. Newspaper Clippings from 1886

C. Twentieth-Century Newspaper Articles Regarding the Anniversary of the Earthquake

Records of the Executive Relief Committee for the Earthquake of 1886

Container List

BOX 1

Series I: Correspondence

Folder 1: General Correspondence

Series II: Financial Records

Folder 2: Bank Balance Sheets

Folder 3: 5 Bank of Charleston Bank Books, Sept. 1886–1903

Folder 4: Bank of Charleston Interest Statements, October 1886–December 1891

Folder 5: Bank of Charleston Interest Statements, February 1892–December 1896

Folder 6: Bank of Charleston Interest Statements, January 1897–October 1903

Folder 7: Bank of Charleston Check Stub Book (OVERSIZED: see Box 9)

Folder 8: First National Bank of Charleston Bank Books and personal checks

Folder 9: First National Bank Interest Statements

Folder 10: First National Bank Check Stub Books (OVERSIZED: see Box 9)

Folder 11: People's National Bank of Charleston Bank Book

Folder 12: People's National Bank of Charleston Interest Statements

Folder 13: Peoples National Bank of Charleston Check Stubs (OVERSIZED: Box 9)

Folder 14: Register of Donations Listed By State and City

Folder 15: Register of Donations By State and City (OVERSIZED: Box 8)

Folder 16: Loose Lists of Subscribers and the amount of their donations, 2–16 Sept. 1886

BOX 2

(Donations Organized by State)

Folder 1: Alabama

Folder 2: Arizona Territory

Folder 3: Arkansas

Folder 4: California

Folder 5: Colorado

Folder 6: Connecticut

Folder 7: Dakota

Folder 8: Delaware

Folder 9: Florida

Folder 10: Georgia

Folder 11: Illinois

Folder 12: Indiana

Folder 13: Iowa

Folder 14: Kansas

Folder 15: Kentucky

Folder 16: Louisiana

Folder 17: Maine

Folder 18: Massachusetts

Folder 19: Maryland

Folder 20: Michigan
Folder 21: Minnesota
Folder 22: Mississippi
Folder 23: Missouri
Folder 24: Nebraska
Folder 25: New Hampshire
Folder 26: New Jersey
Folder 27: New Jersey
Folder 28: New York
Folder 29: New York (continued)

BOX 3

(Donations by State, continued)
Folder 1: New York—Western Union Telegrams
Folder 2: North Carolina
Folder 3: Ohio
Folder 4: Oklahoma (Indian Territory)
Folder 5: Oregon
Folder 6: Pennsylvania
Folder 7: Rhode Island
Folder 8: South Carolina
Folder 9: South Carolina (continued)
Folder 10: Tennessee
Folder 11: Texas
Folder 12: Utah
Folder 13: Vermont
Folder 14: Virginia
Folder 15: Washington
Folder 16: Washington, D.C.
Folder 17: West Virginia
Folder 18: Wisconsin
Folder 19: Multi-State Donations
Folder 20: Donations from Unknown Locations
Folder 21: International Donations

BOX 4

Folder 1: General Work Vouchers, 0001–0300
Folder 2: General Work Vouchers, 0301–0600
Folder 3: General Work Vouchers, 0601–0900
Folder 4: General Work Vouchers, 0901–1200
Folder 5: General Work Vouchers, 1201–1475

BOX 5

Folder 1: General Work Vouchers, 1501–1800
Folder 2: General Work Vouchers, 1801–1999

- Folder 3: Plaster Work Vouchers, 0001–0400
- Folder 4: Plaster Work Vouchers, 0401–1000
- Folder 5: Index of General Work and Plaster Work Vouchers (compiled by CCPL staff)

BOX 6

(Financial Records, continued)

- Folder 1: Bound List of Repair Work by Street Name (OVERSIZED: see Box 8)
- Folder 2: Alphabetical Index (By Last Name) of General Work Vouchers
- Folder 3: Deposits, monies mainly donated 1886–1887
- Folder 4: Account Ledger No.1, September 3, 1886–September 28, 1886
- Folder 5: Account Ledger No. 2, September 28, 1886–November 27, 1886
- Folder 6: Account Ledger No. 3, November 27, 1886–February 19, 1887
- Folder 7: Account Ledger No. 4, February 21, 1887–November 11, 1903
- Folder 8: Employee Payrolls and Receipts of checks written to laborers, Sept. 1886
- Folder 9: Expenses (Labor Costs)
- Folder 10: Expenses (Materials and Sundries, September 1886–November 1886)
- Folder 11: Expenses (Materials and Sundries, December 1886–August 1887)
- Folder 12: Expenses (Charleston Public School Board)

Series III. Minutes

- Folder 13: Earthquake Relief Committee Minutes (loose papers, 6–10 Sept. 1886)

BOX 7

- Folder 1: Earthquake Relief minutes (1 volume, 10 Sept. 1886–17 Jan. 1887)
- Folder 2: Earthquake Relief Committee minutes (1 volume, 19 Jan. 1887–121 Mar. 1887)

Series IV. Sub-Committee Records

- Folder 3: Immediate Relief Committee Correspondence
- Folder 4: Immediate Relief Committee Vouchers
- Folder 5: Subsistence Committee Records
- Folder 6: Shelter Committee Records
- Folder 7: Special Relief Committee Records
- Folder 8: Miscellaneous

Series V. Published Reports

- Folder 9: Summerville Relief Committee Report
- Folder 10: The Earthquake Report of the Executive Relief Committee

Series VI. Secondary Sources/Supplementary Materials

- Folder 11: Documents copied from the National Archives: Report of Captain W.H. Bixby, Corps of Engineers, “A Report on Examination of Buildings in Charleston Damaged by Quake of 1886.”
- Folder 12: Daily Report of the Government Inspecting Committee To Examine Buildings Injured in the 1886 Quake.
- Folder 13: Newspaper clippings from 1886, including London’s *The Graphic*.

Folder 14: Twentieth-century Charleston newspaper and magazine articles on the 1886 earthquake

BOX 8 (Oversized materials)

Bound List of Repair Work by Street Name
Register of Donations By State and City

BOX 9 (Oversized materials)

Bank of Charleston Check Stub Book
First National Bank Check Stub Books
Peoples National Bank of Charleston Check Stub Books