

REGISTER OF THE ASBURY FRANCIS LEVER PAPERS, 1895-1986.

Lever, Asbury Francis, 1875-1940

Mss 95, 32 cu. ft., scrapbooks, oversize material, photographs.

Introduction

Asbury Francis Lever, known as "Frank," was born on January 5, 1875 near Spring Hill in Lexington County, South Carolina. His life was devoted to serving the needs of farmers and agricultural interests across the state and the nation. This devotion to the farmer is the underlying theme of this collection.

The Lever papers consist primarily of correspondence with constituents, businessmen, leaders in government, and educators. His career in Congress (1901-1919), as a member of the Federal Farm Board (1919-1922), organizer of the First Carolina Joint Stock Land Bank (1922-1929), his unsuccessful bid for governor of South Carolina (1930) and for Congress (1932), and his affiliation with the Farm Credit Administration (1933-1940) are covered in this collection. The Lever papers hold numerous opportunities for research on South Carolina politics, national politics, and the progress of agriculture and agricultural legislation through the first half of the twentieth century.

The papers were donated by his son and daughter--Judge A. Frank Lever, Jr. and Mary Catherine Lever Sanders--in 1967. Lucile Butler Lever, wife of Mr. Lever, actually processed some of the material and started a biography, but never published it. This collection was re-processed in 1987-1988. It formerly consisted of accession numbers 67-1 and 82-10. There are no restrictions to the use of these papers beyond those of Special Collections. This register was prepared by Christopher M. Poteat in 1988.

Biographical Note

A. Frank Lever was born January 5, 1875 near Spring Hill in Lexington County, South Carolina. The son of Francis Asbury Washington Lever and Mary Derrick Lever, Frank graduated with honors from Newberry College in 1895. He taught school for a short while

before 1897 when his political career started. He became secretary to Congressman J. William Stokes from the 7th Congressional District. While serving as secretary, Lever studied law and received his bachelor of laws from Georgetown University in 1899. The next year he was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives. In 1901, Lever was elected to the U.S. Congress after the death of his former employer, Congressman Stokes. He defeated some strong candidates, including the future Senator Ellison Smith.

On his election to the House, Lever sought and received membership on the Committee of Agriculture. He served as a member until 1910, when the Democrats regained a majority in the House. At this time, Lever had established himself as the most knowledgeable member and was appointed chairman of the Committee. He served in this capacity until he left the House in 1919.

Lever excelled as a leader on the Agriculture Committee. He sponsored and supported many acts of legislation which aided agriculture. Lever and Senator Smith co-authored the Cotton Futures Act. He also helped formulate the Federal Farm Loan act of 1916 which was the forerunner of the Farm Credit Administration. The legislation for which he is best remembered is the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. This established extension services at state agricultural colleges to aid the farmer with new techniques of farming. The Lever Act also helped transform the face of agriculture from 19th century modes to more modern and scientific 20th century modes of farming.

In 1918, Lever announced his intentions to run for the Senate seat of Benjamin Tillman. The thought at the time was that Lever could and would beat anyone running against him. He had all the necessary papers to file when an urgent message reached him at his Lexington home. President Wilson, worried about losing leadership in Congress during the war period, made a desperate plea to Lever not to run for the Senate, but to remain in the House and in his capacity as chair of the Agriculture Committee. This was a tragic mistake because Tillman won the election, but died soon after.

Lever left the House in 1919 to accept a position on the Federal Farm Loan Board offered him by President Wilson. He remained on the Board until 1922. In 1922, he was named president of the First Carolina Joint Stock Land Bank and served until 1929.

Although still in public life, Lever desperately wanted to get back into a position of political prominence. He ran, unsuccessfully, for the

governorship of South Carolina in 1930 and for his old Congressional seat in 1932. When the Farm Credit Administration was formed in 1933, Lever was appointed director of public relations for the southeast. In this capacity, Lever made many speeches and addresses informing farmers of the Farm Credit Administration's duties and of the legislation that was important to the farmer. He served in this position until his death in 1940.

Frank Lever had other interests. He was a trustee of Clemson College and chairman of the board of trustees of Newberry College. Lever was active in Epsilon Sigma Phi, the honorary extension fraternity; the Tuberculosis Society (Lever was stricken with the disease and wanted to help eradicate it); and the Finnish Relief Fund of 1940. Lever started an extensive research project on Dr. Seaman A. Knapp intending to write a biography, however he died on April 28, 1940 before its completion.

Scope and Content

The Lever papers consist of material documenting A. Frank Lever's activities in Congress, his participation on the Federal Farm Board and Farm Credit Administration, his unsuccessful bids for governor and for Congress, and other personal events in his life. The majority of the collection covers the years 1900 through 1940. The papers are arranged in series as follows:

- (1) Congressional Series, 1900-1919
- (2) Gubernatorial Series, 1930
- (3) Federal Farm Board Series, 1930-1931
- (4) Congressional Campaign Series, 1932.
- (5) Farm Credit Administration Series, 1933-1940
- (6) Speeches Series, 1895-1939
- (7) Personal Correspondence Series, 1895-1940
- (8) Mrs. Lever's Biography, 1945-1964

(9) Knapp Biography Series, 1908-1940

(10) Scrapbooks Series, 1901-1932

The Congressional Series is the largest of the collection. His role on the Agricultural Committee, the impact of World War I, post office patronage, and other legislative matters are covered. This series is arranged in an alphabetical subject file.

The Gubernatorial Campaign Series is arranged alphabetically by South Carolina counties. Although a small series, it reveals much about how a campaign was organized and support solicited in South Carolina during the 1930's.

The Federal Farm Board Series documents his work on the Federal Farm Board from 1930 through 1931. Included in this series is correspondence with educators and farmers with questions on loans and new methods of agriculture. This series is arranged alphabetically.

The Congressional Campaign Series covers his unsuccessful bid for his old Congressional seat held by Hampton Fulmer. Arranged chronologically, it documents the rough and tumble nature of South Carolina politics.

The Farm Credit Administration Series consists of his correspondence with the Washington headquarters and with regional offices in the Southeast. As public relations director, Lever answered farmers' questions and sought help for them. This series is arranged chronologically.

The Speeches Series consists of speeches made while he was public relations director for the Farm Credit Administration. Also included are speeches made while in Congress as well as in other capacities. This series is arranged alphabetically.

The Personal Correspondence Series includes letters from his family and business associates as well as items related to Clemson and Newberry Colleges. This series is arranged alphabetically.

Mrs. Lever's Biography Series contains correspondence from friends and colleagues of Mr. Lever to Mrs. Lever. She was compiling stories and anecdotes about her husband for a biography she was writing. Also in the series is the biography itself. Other correspondence in this series relates to the acquisition of the papers for Clemson University

Special Collections. This series is arranged chronologically.

The Knapp Biography Series is comprised of notes and correspondence that Lever collected for a biography of Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, the noted agriculturalist and special agent for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This series is arranged alphabetically.

The Scrapbooks Series contains clippings about Lever from South Carolina newspapers. They are helpful in reviewing the public side of Lever's career. This series is arranged chronologically.

There is some overlap among the series. The Speeches Series contains many speeches from his years in Congress and as public relations director for the Farm Credit Administration. Correspondence between notable South Carolinians--such as James F. Byrnes, Benjamin Tillman, Ellison Smith, and Richard I. Manning--can be found in Lever's Personal Series, Farm Credit Administration Series, and his Congressional Series.