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**Collection 502**  
**Trent House Restoration Collection**  
**1714-2013, Bulk 1923-1936**

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**History**

In 1714, Philadelphia merchant William Trent purchased 800 acres in Central New Jersey from the son of English colonist, Mahlon Stacy. Among the structures that Trent built on his newly acquired land was the Georgian-style, two-story, brick residence that today is known as The William Trent House. Upon Trent's death the house conveyed to his eldest son James who occupied it for approximately five years before selling it to William Morris. After Morris, the house changed hands several times and functioned as a permanent residence, rental property, as well as an inn and tavern. Trenton Mayor Joseph Wood owned the property for a time and lived there with his only daughter Permelia. After Wood's death, Permelia married Edward H. Stokes and the two made it their home. The Stokes Family were the last private owners of the house and surrounding property and it was from them in 1929 that the City of Trenton acquired the property.

Among the owners of the house over the years were ranking members of the Continental Army, governors of New Jersey, and other wealthy and connected individuals. One such person was Edward A. Stokes who was raised there. His father, Edward H. Stokes had owned the house from 1861-1887. After his father's passing, it passed to the younger Stokes who then occupied it with family and staff for several years.

Over the years, Stokes made significant renovations to the home. Before 1929 however it had ceased function as his primary residence. That year he transferred the house and surrounding property to Trenton under certain conditions. The city had to agree to restore the home to the 1719 condition in which William Trent left it. In terms of function, Stokes stipulated that the structure should function only as an art gallery, library, or museum and the city agreed. Two groups, the Trent House Association and the Trent House Commission were formed to organize, oversee, and promote the renovations.

The project was eventually taken on by the Works Progress Administration. Long-time head of the Trenton Free Public Library, Howard L. Hughes, was deeply involved in several areas of the restoration project as reflected by the materials in this collection. In 1936, The Trent House officially opened as a history museum and it continues to serve the city in that capacity today through its tours, public programming, and reenactments.

### **Scope and Content Notes**

This collection is comprised of genealogical documents related to the numerous owners of The Trent House. However, the bulk of materials found here are administrative documents related to the acquisition, renovation, and promotion of the house as well as correspondence between Howard L. Hughes and the wide array of people and organizations that Hughes solicited or was approached by leading up to and during the renovations. The collection spans the years 1714-2013. The bulk of these materials are from the years 1929-1936. The collection consists of three boxes of material.

### **Series Description and Container List**

#### **Series I. Listed Homeowners and Renters (1714-1977)**

This series includes handwritten, typed, and printed genealogical summaries and brief personal histories of the private owners and some of the other inhabitants of The Trent House. The documents include working notes, draft lectures and reports. Many of the documents were prepared by or on behalf of Howard L. Hughes.

Note that several enslaved people lived in the house or on the property over the years. Today, we know practically nothing regarding the personhood of these individuals. These individuals are also listed in the 1726 Trent House Inventory which is found in Series II. This series does not address that gap.

#### **Series II. The House (1714-2007)**

This series contains copies of deeds (1714-1887) to the property. Sketches, maps, and inventories of the property are included as well. Various speeches about the Trent House, some delivered by Hughes, are included. The script for a student produced radio broadcast about the house and notes from a slide deck are remaining materials found in this collection. The folder also contains a draft of a memorial statement dedicated to former Trent House Association President Cora E. Pennington.

The 1726 inventory documents Yaft, Joan, Bob, Dick, Nanny, Tom, Julius, Bossin, Harry, Cupid, and Pedro, enslaved people who inhabited the house while William Trent was the owner. The inventories appear in two formats - a simple list, typed on single sheets of paper and a pamphlet version created and distributed by The William Trent House. While the list is identical across formats, readers will notice that the pamphlets have two different forewords.

The sketches and maps document The Trent House and surrounding property. A map from the April 30, 1913 edition of the *Trenton Times* purports to show "The Site of Trenton in 1714". One sketch is based on an 1800 painting, while another completed in 1804, depicts the house and

surrounding street. There is also a copy of an 1804 document on which someone has indicated the location of The Trent House on a larger map of the main roads from Philadelphia to New York. Finally, the series includes plans created on October 2, 1935 by landscape architect Abram L. Urban. An additional map, whose production date is unknown, depicts the area bordered by John Fitch Way and S. Warren Street to the west and east, and Mill Street and Falls Street to the north and south, is also included.

### **Series III. Reports (1919-1989)**

This series includes a building survey, ordinances and resolutions, reports, a petition, and a report on the chain of title. The 19-page building survey of The Trent House was conducted by the United States Department of the Interior. The ordinances and resolutions address various issues. The reports were generated by the Trenton Free Public Library's board of trustees or the Trent House Association, and like the ordinances and resolutions, address various topics. The series also includes a collection of ordinances and resolutions concerning the restoration.

This series also contains several histories of the house. "Trenton's Historical Assets," read by Dr. John J. Cleary to the Trenton Historical Society in 1919 is an appeal for the preservation of Bloomsbury Court (Trent House). A report written by David E. Rounds, possibly in 1934, was designed to document the history of the house, some stories of its inhabitants, and to "reconstruct" the original house which by the time of the writing had undergone significant renovation. Another report produced by the New Jersey Writers' Project again provides a history of the house and its owners but having been written in 1941 includes commentary on the restoration project. Another document, possibly a speech transcript, is addressed to "Jerseymmen" [sic], dated November 11, 1971, and covers a longer time period than the New Jersey Writers' Project report. This folder includes copies of chapter 6 from *History of Trenton, Vol. 1*, in which William J. Backes summarizes the chain of custody for The Trent House from William Trent Sr. to Edward A. Stokes. Also present is a radio script produced by students of Junior High School No. 2 and notes on the slides that were supposed to accompany the script. The slides are not included. Reports compiled by the Trent House Association, the Trenton Free Public Library Board of Trustees, the Rotary Club, and William J. Backes are included.

### **Series IV. Accession Book and Copies (1939-1942)**

This series contains the original accession book kept by the Trent House Association during the restoration, subsequent to its transfer from Edward A. Stokes to the city of Trenton. The series also contains a copy of the book. The original book was compiled by Margaret Hilson, and lists donors who have lent articles to the Association for the purpose of populating The Trent House and the items donated. Readers will see that the book has been updated by the Association over the years.

### **Series V. Correspondence (1923-1989)**

This series includes correspondence related to the transfer of The Trent House from Edward A. Stokes to the city of Trenton. Various aspects of the restoration and administration of the house are also covered in the correspondence.

### **Series VI. Financial Statements (1934-2011)**

This series contains mostly budgets, invoices, and receipts related to the restoration.

**Series VII. Minutes – Committee on Branches and Extensions (1934-1936); Trent House Association and Trent House Commission (1946-1991)**

This series includes meeting minutes. Most of the minutes were taken from meetings of the Committee on Branches and Extensions. Additionally, the series contains minutes from the meetings of the Trent House Association and the Trent House Commission.

**Series VIII. Administrative Records (1944-2008)**

This series contains documentation of by-laws, membership rolls, and policies related to the Trent House Association and the Trent House Commission.

**Series IX. Clippings (1849-1975)**

This series contains clippings from books, magazines, and newspapers. Of particular interest is the October 1936 issue of *The Dawn* magazine, published in New Jersey by the Works Progress Administration. Of note as well are the drafts of advertisements for the sale of The Trent House which was called “Bloomsbury” at the time.

**Series X. Brochures, Newsletters, and Pamphlets (1952-2013)**

The series contains numerous versions of various brochures and pamphlets that have been distributed by The Trent House over the years. Because of the number of different versions, to avoid confusion, this series has been separated from the series that follows. The series also includes newsletters created by the Trent House Association.

**Series XI. Flyers and Programs (1964-2000)**

This series contains flyers and programs for special events held at The Trent House. Most of the material is related to Colonial Crafts Day but other events are documented as well.

**Series XII. Ephemera (1936-1984)**

This series contains general and themed greeting cards, invitations, and reservation forms for various events hosted by The Trent House.

**Series XIII. Picture Frame**

This series contains one folder holding a wooden frame. This frame may have held a photo of Daniel Coxe, one of the owners of the house, or belonged to him. The frame came to the archive already separated from any image it may have once held.

## Container List

### Box / Folder / Title

Box	/	Folder	/	Content
1	/	1	/	Trent Family Genealogy
1	/	2	/	Biographical Information for William Morris (1729-1733)
1	/	3	/	Biographical Information for George Thomas (1733-1753)
1	/	4	/	Biographical Information for Lewis Morris (1742-1746)
1	/	5	/	Biographical Information for Robert Lettis Hooper (1753-1769)
1	/	6	/	Biographical Information for Dr. William Bryant (1769-1778)
1	/	7	/	Biographical Information for Col. John Cox (1778-1792)
1	/	8	/	Biographical Information for Simeon Worlock (1792)
1	/	9	/	Biographical Information for Martin B. Gaston (1792-1795)
1	/	10		Biographical Information for Daniel William Coxe (1802-1835)
1	/	11	/	Biographical Information for Philemon Dickerson (1835-1838)
1	/	12	/	Biographical Information for James M. (1838-1839, 1844-1852) and John C. Redmond (1839-1844)
1	/	13	/	Biographical Information for Joseph Wood (1852-1853, 1859-1861)
1	/	14	/	Biographical Information for Jeremiah Stull (1853-1859)
1	/	15	/	Biographical Information for Rodman Price (1854-1857)
1	/	16	/	Biographical Information for Edward H. Stokes (1861-1887)
1	/	17	/	Biographical Information for Edward A. Stokes (1887-1929)
1	/	18	/	Transcribed Deeds
1	/	19	/	Sketches and Maps
1	/	20	/	Inventories
1	/	21	/	Scripts, Slides, and Speeches
2	/	1	/	Building Survey
2	/	2	/	Ordinances and Resolutions
2	/	3	/	Rotary Club Petition
2	/	4	/	Report on Chain of Title
2	/	5	/	Correspondence, 1923-1935
2	/	6	/	Correspondence, 1935-1989
2	/	7	/	Financial Documents
2	/	8	/	Minutes – Committee on Branches and Extensions (1934-1936); Trent House Association (1966); Trent House Commission (1989-1991)
2	/	9	/	Member Roll and Policies
2	/	10	/	Clippings
3	/	1	/	Brochures and Pamphlets
3	/	2	/	Flyers and Programs
3	/	3	/	Greeting Cards, Invitations, and Reservations
3	/	4	/	Accession Book and copy
3	/	5	/	Picture Frame