



120 Academy Street, Trenton, N.J. 08608  
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**Frederick W. Donnelly Collection**  
**Circa 1905–1948 (bulk circa 1905-1935)**

**By Chris Loos**

**September 2023; rewritten February 2024; revised March 2024**

**Summary Information**

**Creator(s):**

Donnelly, Frederick William (1866-1935), Creator and Compiler

**Donor:**

Unknown (Found in collections)

**Language of Materials:**

English

**Extent:**

Approximately 12 linear feet.

**Location of Repository:**

Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library, 120 Academy St., Trenton, NJ  
08608

**Subjects:**

City planning--New Jersey--Trenton / Donnelly, Frederick William (1866–1935) /  
Donnelly, Richard Grant Augustus (1841–1905) / Donnelly, Ruth (1896-1982) / Fitch,  
John (1743–1798) / Fourth of July celebrations / F. W. Donnelly & Sons (Trenton, N.J.) /  
Industries--New Jersey--Trenton / Municipal government--New Jersey--Trenton /  
Scrapbooks / Social problems--New Jersey--Trenton / Street-railroads--New Jersey--

Trenton / Strikes--New Jersey--Trenton / Trenton (N.J.)--History--1911-1935 / Trenton (N.J.)--Hospitals / Trenton (N.J.). Mayor / Trenton (N.J.)--Newspapers / Trenton (N.J.)--Politics and government / Trenton (N.J.)--Race relations / World War, 1914-1918--New Jersey--Trenton

### **Administrative Information**

#### **Conditions Governing Access:**

No access restrictions.

#### **Accession Number:**

CITY-FWD

#### **Preferred Citation:**

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Frederick W. Donnelly Collection, Trentoniana Department, Trenton Free Public Library, 120 Academy St., Trenton, NJ 08608

### **Scope/Content**

The papers of Trenton Mayor Frederick W. Donnelly mostly comprise newspaper clippings, pasted into scrapbooks by the mayor or his staff, that detail events from several years before and during his time in office (1911–1932). These scrapbooks include articles from local, regional, and national newspapers, as well as the occasional piece of ephemera or booklet. The books shed light on the mayor’s tenure, particularly his initiatives to improve Trenton’s waterways and harbor, the city’s legal struggles with the local streetcar company, the 1916 polio epidemic, the city’s bicentennial, and the first years of the Great Depression. As Donnelly served as the city’s executive for nearly the entire period it used the commissioner form of city government (the Walsh Act), these clippings also provide insight into government in Progressive Era Trenton. Apart from these items, the collection also contains an assortment of correspondence, ephemera, and written materials on or by Donnelly, including much correspondence relating to the 1905 death of Donnelly’s father. It further includes speeches, conference proceedings, and newspaper clippings from the Atlantic Deeper Waterways Association, in which Donnelly served as President of the New Jersey chapter. Finally, the collection contains

political ephemera, most notably a pamphlet from Donnelly's unsuccessful 1924 senatorial campaign in which he denounces the Ku Klux Klan and declares himself "a true friend of the colored race."

*Archivist's Note:* Many of the scrapbooks are in fragile condition due to their age and the acidity of the newsprint. Previous archivists' efforts may have also led to lost or unordered pages.

Handle them with care and, whenever possible, consult a digital version of an article. Note also that all the scrapbook pages have been foldered in approximately reverse chronological order, as the original binders were filled from back to front.

*Archivist's Note:* Items related to the Donnelly family's clothing store (best known as F.W. Donnelly & Sons) are contained in their own collection.

### **Biographical Note**

Frederick W. "Fred" Donnelly was the son of Richard A. Donnelly (1841–1905), New Jersey's Quartermaster General and mayor of Trenton from 1884 to 1886. He first became known in the city for his work as a businessman, after he took control of his father's haberdashery store on Broad Street (items from this store are housed in a separate collection). When Trenton adopted the commissioner form of municipal government under the Walsh Act of 1911, Donnelly became its first executive: the president of the commission with the additional ceremonial title of "mayor." As mayor, he oversaw the development of roads and highways, the opening of the Trenton Municipal Colony (a medical center to isolate those with infectious diseases like Tuberculosis, now the Trenton Geriatric Center), and other reformist causes associated with the Progressive Era. He steered the city through the devastating 1916 polio epidemic, the First World War and influenza epidemic, and the first years of the Great Depression. Donnelly was most known for promoting improved river transportation throughout the state, and his obituary in *The New York Times* refers to him as "the Father of New Jersey Waterways." While his most ambitious plan to build a canal from Trenton to Raritan Bay never materialized, he did accomplish a project to dredge the Delaware River to allow ships to reach Trenton from Philadelphia. After a protracted fight against those opposing the initiative, he opened the Port of Trenton (today's Marine Terminal Park) in 1932. That same year, his son Frederick S. Donnelly unexpectedly died, and Mayor Donnelly resigned his position to once more take over the family business. He passed away just three years later.

## **Arrangement**

### **Series I: Personal Items**

Box 1, Folder 1: Sympathy cards from after the death of Richard Donnelly (1905)

Folder 2: Announcements of other deaths (1905)

Folder 3: Correspondence re: Richard Donnelly's sickness and death

Folder 4: Clippings (photocopied) on Richard Donnelly's death

*Archivist's Note:* The items in the above four folders were likely part of the scrapbook that makes up Folders 3 and 4 in Box 12, having been cut out and reorganized by past librarians.

Folder 5: Other personal documents/ephemera

### **Series II: Donnelly as Mayor of Trenton**

Box 1, Folder 6: Correspondence--Other (misc. from time as mayor)

Folder 7: Speeches, Addresses, and Statements (from mayoral tenure)

Folder 8: Election publicity/ephemera (for mayoral and senatorial campaigns)

Folder 9: Citations/certificates awarded to Donnelly

### **Series III: Donnelly and Waterways**

Box 1, Unfolded: Atlantic Deeper Waterways Association (ADWA) Conference proceedings, 1908-1910 (3 volumes)

Box 2, Unfolded: "Bulletin of the Atlantic Deeper Waterways Association," 1912-1918 (4 bound volumes)

Folder 1: ADWA bulletins, Oct. 1914; 1919; June 1920

Folder 2: ADWA--Other bulletins/publications

Folder 3: ADWA--Conference proceedings, 1907

Folder 4: ADWA--Conference proceedings, 1932-1936 (missing 1935)

Folder 5: Donnelly's addresses to ADWA and other waterways associations

Folder 6: Waterways/Port of Trenton--Other publicity from Donnelly

### **Series IV: Scrapbooks**

Box 3, Folders 1-7: “Waterways” scrapbook (circa 1909-1916, bulk 1915-1916)

Box 4, Folders 1-4: Loose scrapbook pages (circa 1902-1914--likely once part of the same volume but now in unclear order)

Unfolded: “Scrapbook of Public Officials, Trenton,” September 1911-  
April 1916 (formerly SB290; photocopies only)

Box 5, Folders 1-7: “City Administration Clippings 1911-1914” scrapbook

Box 6, Folders 1-8: “City Admin Clippings, 1915-1916” scrapbook, Parts 1-8;  
original front cover

Box 7, Folders 1-4: “City Admin Clippings, 1915-1916” scrapbook, Parts 9-12

Box 8, Folders 1-5: “City Admin Clippings, 1916-1917” scrapbook, Parts 1-5

Box 9, Folders 1-4: “City Admin Clippings, 1916-1917” scrapbook, Parts 6-9

Folders 5-7: “City Admin Clippings, 1920-1922” scrapbook, Parts 1-3

Box 10, Folders 1-3: “City Admin Clippings, 1920-1922” scrapbook, Parts 4-6

Folders 4-7: “City Admin Clippings, 1923-1926” scrapbook, Parts 1-4

Box 11, Folders 1-3: “City Admin Clippings, 1923-1923” scrapbook, Parts 5-7

Folders 4-7: “City Admin Clippings, 1929-1931” scrapbook, Parts 1-4

Box 12, Folders 1-2: “City Admin Clippings, 1927-1929” scrapbook

(incomplete), Parts 1-2

Folder 3: Additional clippings/notes on Donnelly (includes photocopies of  
scrapbook pages from circa 1910-1928)

Folder 4: Additional clippings/loose scrapbook pages (also includes  
clippings on death and funeral of Richard Donnelly)