

MSS. Collection #57

George W. Pritchett Papers, ca. 1899-1937. ½ box (17 folders), 75 items.

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this collection is **George W. Pritchett**, inventor, businessman, native and longtime resident of Greensboro in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Researchers will find it strong in materials regarding Pritchett's life and the **tamping mechanism** he invented, for which he received a **U.S. patent** in 1910.

Arrangement: The George W. Pritchett Papers are arranged into ten series, and within each series the folders are arranged alphabetically. The following are the ten series: **Correspondence**, ca. 1914-26; **Documents**, ca. 1917-24; **Drawing**, 1927; **Financial**, 1899-31; **Legal**, 1906-37; **Patent**, 1910; **Photographs**, ca. 1900-25; **Printed**, ca. 1914-27; **Pritchetts' Funerals**, 1923-27; **Universal Machine Company**, 1911.

Provenance: This collection purchased by the Greensboro Historical Museum on 26 September 1985 and assigned accession number 1985.168.1.

Processing: This collection was organized and the finding aid prepared by Francis D. Pitts III in June 1997.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

George W. Pritchett (1869-1927), a native and longtime resident of Greensboro, NC, was an inventor, salesman, member of the **Greensboro Fire Department**, and self-taught mechanical engineer. The bulk of the collection pertains to his life and work.

Educated in the "district school" until the age of seventeen, Pritchett quit school before graduating to work as a rodman for the **Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad**. He subsequently was engaged in various surveying and engineering projects over the next fourteen years before becoming a salesman of mechanical equipment.

In 1910 Pritchett was awarded a U.S. patent for the invention of a tamping mechanism, which was employed in a machine used to firmly and evenly pack materials onto roads and into ditches and holes. Shortly after receiving the patent, he incorporated the **Universal Machine Company**, which built and sold machines using his invention; it does not appear that this business evolved into a successful enterprise.

In 1915 he was hired to be the southern manager of the **Morse Chain Company**, headquartered in Ithaca, NY, but based in Charlotte, where he worked for at least ten years. While employed there, Pritchett became a specialist in **chain power transmission engines**, a

type of design that required a thorough knowledge of electrical, steam, and hydraulic engineering.

Toward the end of his life, Pritchett applied for admission to the **American Society of Mechanical Engineers** and certification with the **State of North Carolina Board of Registration for Engineers**. It is not clear whether he received the professional recognition he sought; however, judging from the list of people who paid tribute to him at his funeral, Pritchett appears to have been held in high esteem by his friends and associates.

Biographical Sources: The chief source of information on Pritchett is contained in the collection.

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

Types of materials in this collection include **applications, certificates, correspondence, deeds and mortgages, an engineer's rendering, a financial statement, funeral materials, photographs, a prospectus, a silhouette,** and a U.S. patent.

The bulk of the Pritchett Papers primarily consists of items associated with the life and work of George W. Pritchett between the years 1899 and 1927. Among these items perhaps the most interesting materials are those that pertain to his invention of a tamping mechanism (1:2; 6:1; 7:1; 8:1; 10:1), for which he was awarded a U.S. patent in 1910.

Other interesting materials that relate to Pritchett's work as a businessman and an engineer are a rendering and a proposal to lay railroad track around a portion of the city (2:2), a financial statement on commissions for the Pritchett Machinery Company (4:2), and the material relative to the Universal Machine Company (1:2; 10:1).

The balance of the collection is useful to the extent that it could answer questions about other aspects of Pritchett's life.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

1. Correspondence. 2 folders (6 items). Ca. 1914-26.

This series contains correspondence to and from George W. Pritchett. The former are inquiries about the machine employing the tamping mechanism he invented. The latter consists of a letter from Pritchett to his family, placed in an envelope with instructions on the front stating to open it only after his death, and a Christmas card from him and his wife. The letter is revealing in that it shows how Pritchett felt toward his family just prior to his death.

2. Documents. 2 folders (5 items). Ca. 1917-24.

The documents series consists of application forms (for admission to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and certification by the NC Board of Registration for Engineers) and a grouping of materials (2:2) relating to a railroad engineering project proposed by Pritchett around 1917. It is unclear whether the three items in folder 2:2 pertain to the same project.

3. Drawing. 1 folder (1 item). 1927.

Series three contains one item, a silhouette of an unidentified man wearing a fez. The card to which the image is affixed bears the signature of a person named **Vernen**.

4. Financial. 3 folders (10 items). 1899-1931.

The financial series consists of forms from the NC Dept. of Revenue, receipts, stock certificates, and a statement about commissions earned by the **Pritchett Machinery Co.** during the years 1907 through 1908. In addition to the latter item, the most interesting materials are certificates from the **South Side Hose Co., No., 4** (share of stock) and the **Southern Loan and Trust Co.** (confirmation of a life insurance policy), both Greensboro companies.

5. Legal. 3 folders (11 items). 1906-37.

The legal series contains deeds, mortgages, wills, and Geo. W. Pritchett's estate settlement. These items reveal much about the Pritchett's finances during their lifetime. For the most useful information about the Pritchett's, see folders 5:1-2.

6. Patent. 1 folder (4 items). 1910.

The items in the patent series represent one of the highlights of the collection. Included here is the U.S. patent for a tamping mechanism granted to Pritchett in 1910. In addition, there are three copies of the drawing of the mechanism and the accompanying text from the **U.S. Patent Office**.

7. Photographs. 2 folders (19 items). Ca. 1900-25.

Folder 7:1 contains a miscellaneous collection of photographs, many of which are of unidentified subjects. Included among the photographs that may be of interest to researchers are ones that appear to be of machines similar to the one employing the tamping mechanism. Also worthy of note is a photograph identified on the back as having been of the **Baracca Bible class** at the **Asheboro St. Baptist Church**.

The second folder in the series contains photographs exclusively of George W. Pritchett during approximately a twenty-five year period.

8. Printed. 1 folder (13 items). Ca. 1914-27.

The most significant item in this grouping of miscellaneous items is the Fireman's Certificate of Service awarded to Geo. W. Pritchett in 1917. Other items of interest include pages from the 27 February 1926 issue of the *Greensboro Daily News*, which gives information about the building zone ordinance of the city in that same year, and pictures from a magazine of Pritchett's tamping machine.

9. Pritchetts' Funerals. 1 folder (2 items). 1923-27.

This series is composed of two items associated with the deaths of Geo. W. Pritchett (1927) and **Etta Pritchett** (1923). One item is a document entitled "List of Flowers," which itemized the kinds of flowers and who they were from, given in memory of the former. The other item is a remembrance card with a poem and the death date of the latter.

10. Universal Machine Company. 1 folder (4 items). Ca. 1910-11.

The materials in this series pertain to the company started by Geo.W. Pritchett after he received a U.S. patent for his tamping mechanism. Included here are a certificate of incorporation from the state of North Carolina, a stock certificate for three thousand shares, and a prospectus for the company

FOLDING LISTING**Series Folder Contents**

1	1	Corresp. -- From George W. Pritchett (ca. 1926)
	2	" -- To George W. Pritchett (1914)
2	1	Documents -- Applications -- Pritchett, Geo. W. (ca. 1922-24)
	2	" -- Engineer's materials (ca. 1917)
3	1	Drawing -- Silhouette (1927)
4	1	Financial -- Miscellaneous (1903-22)
	2	" -- Pritchett Machinery Company commissions (1907-08)
	3	" -- Stock certificates (1899-1931)
5	1	Legal -- Deeds and mortgages (1911-37)
	2	" -- Estate settlement -- Pritchett, Geo. W. (1931)
	3	" -- Wills (1906-31)
6	1	Patent -- Tamping mechanism (1910)
7	1	Photographs -- Miscellaneous (ca. 1900-25)
	2	" -- Pritchett, Geo. W. (ca. 1900-25)
8	1	Printed -- Miscellaneous (ca. 1914-27)
9	1	Pritchetts' funerals (1923-27)
10	1	Universal Machinery Company (ca. 1910-11) \

Index to the George W. Pritchett Papers (ca. 1899-1937)

Note: The numbers following the name/subject entry -- e.g. 1:1 -- indicate in which Series#:Folder# (or, if no ":", Series only) that name/topic can be found. Dates of the items are given in parentheses for an individual Series/Folder or, if at the end, for the entire subject/name entry. The abbreviation GSO indicates a Greensboro association.

American Society of Mechanical Engineers: 2:1 (ca. 1922-24)
Asheboro St. Baptist Church: 7:1 (1917)

Baracca Bible class: 7:1 (1917)
Brown, C. O. Inc.: 4:3 (1925)

Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad: 2:1 (ca. 1922-24)
Certificates: stocks, 4:2; 10:1 (1899-1931); Greensboro Fire Dept., 8:1 (1917)
Chain power transmission: 2:1; 8:1 (ca. 1915-24)
Charlotte, NC: 2:1; 5:2; 8:1 (ca. 1915-31)

Flint Motor Co.: 4:3 (1924)

Greensboro Daily News: 8:1 (1926)
Greensboro Fire Dept.: 8:1 (1917)
Greensboro National Bank: 4:1 (1922)

Inventions: road equipment, 1:2; 6:1; 7:1-2; 8:1; 10:1 (ca. 1910-14)
Ithaca, NY: 2:1; 5:2 (ca. 1922-31)

Matthews, F. A.: 5:3 (1906)
Matthews, H. E.: 5:2; 10:1 (1911-31)
Morse Chain Co. (Charlotte): 2:1; 5:2; 8:1 (ca. 1915-31)

NC, state of: Board of Registration for Engineers, 2:1 (ca. 1922-24); Dept. of Rev., 4:3 (1931)

Pritchett, Annie M.: 1:1; 5:1-3 (1906-37)
Pritchett, Etta: 9:1 (1923)
Pritchett, F. A.: 5:2; 7:1 (ca. 1900-31)
Pritchett, George W.: 1-2,4-10 (1899-1931)
Pritchett, Maggie: 5:3 (1931)
Pritchett, Mrs. Geo. W.: 1:1; 5:1-3 (1906-37)
Pritchett Machinery Company: 4:2 (1907-08)

Silhouettes: 3:1 (1927)
South Side Hose Co. (GSO): 4:3 (1899)
Southern Life and Trust Co. (GSO): 4:1 (1917)
Southern Loan and Trust Co.: 4:1 (nd)

Tamping mechanism: 1:2; 6:1; 7:1-2; 8:1; 10:1 (ca. 1910-14)

U.S. Patent Office: 6:1 (1910)

Universal Machinery Company (GSO): 10:1 (ca. 1910-11)