
Simon Gratz

Mr. Gratz, born in Philadelphia, 1838; graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1855; member of the Bar; elected to the Pennsylvania Legislature before he was twenty-one; member of the Board of Education; President of the Board of Revision of Taxes; President of the Free Library of Philadelphia; Vice-President of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania and President of its Council at the time of his death.

Mr. Gratz was descended from one of the oldest families in Philadelphia. His great-grandfather was a prominent merchant in colonial days, having been engaged in the India trade, and was one of the signers of the Non-Importation Resolutions adopted by the citizens of Philadelphia in 1765. His father, Edward, took an active part in the public affairs in the city and was interested in furthering a scheme for the construction of the Pennsylvania Railroad and also in the consolidation of the old city with its outlying districts in 1854. Entering the University at the age of thirteen he became a Bachelor of Arts in 1855. He was Assistant City Solicitor for three years and became a member of the Board of Education in 1869. He was for many years a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jefferson Medical College. Mr. Gratz's life during the last fifty years was devoted to the Public Schools of Philadelphia. More particularly his interest centered in the Girls' Normal School and he was chairman of that committee. He was thoroughly familiar with the history of his country and his state. As an autograph

collector he was never satisfied with the clipping of signatures, which has done so much to despoil both public and private depositories, but he sought the best letter to be found as indicative of the character of each individual and this was generally accompanied by a portrait of the writer. Mr. Gratz has given some 66,000 manuscripts to the Historical Society. The American portion is divided into 86 series, containing from 1 to 22 boxes in each series. In this collection is included the finest collection of autographs of the Signers in existence. There is a complete set representing the early members of Congress and an excellent series from the Colonial Governors; a complete series from those conducting the administrations from the First to the Thirty-third Congresses. In addition there are large collections representing prominent men in the legal profession, in literary fields, scientists, artists, musicians, the clergy, the military, beginning with the earliest Colonial Wars up to and including the Civil War period and a special series containing Washington, his aides and secretaries. The Navy of the Revolution is represented and a special series has been made of the Washington family. William Penn is there and all of the Governors of Pennsylvania following him, and all the Presidents of the United States. There are 500 letters of generals of the Revolution and about 600 manuscripts from the American Navy. Aside from the American collection there are letters of most of the Royal personages of European countries; a special collection of British Prime Ministers, statesmen and jurists; Napoleon and his marshals and the French generals; the prose writers and poets of all the European countries. Luther and the Reformation are particularly well illustrated, and there is a special series on the family of Napoleon. Queen Elizabeth is illustrated with Mary Queen of Scots, and there are individual letters of Henry VIII, Oliver Cromwell,

Sir Walter Raleigh and Catherine de Medici. The associated portraits form a collection of great rarity.

In all his associations Mr. Gratz showed the firmness and indomitable courage of a man thoroughly versed in public affairs. He was absolutely free from the vanity which demands recognition, and his kindly and intelligent helpfulness will be missed in all his ways. It is quite possible that Mr. Gratz will be best remembered by the citizens of Philadelphia through his presidency of the Board of Revision of Taxes. Taking up the work when it was without system his firm grasp of all the details of the office joined with the good order maintained in the records have inspired a confidence in the mind of the taxpayer which will always be associated with his name.
