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## **William Alden Smith papers at the Grand Rapids Public Library Collection 282**

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Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections  
Department

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
<b>Title:</b>	William Alden Smith papers at the Grand Rapids Public Library
<b>ID:</b>	Collection 282
<b>Date:</b>	no date
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4.8 Linear Feet Eight boxes
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Abstract:</b>	William Alden Smith (1859-1932) was a U.S. Representative and U.S. Senator from the state of Michigan. He was also a lawyer and businessman active in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Smith is known for being in charge of the United State's investigation into the sinking of the Titanic. This is a small, devised collection bringing together miscellaneous accessions and found materials related to Smith. The bulk of the collection are scrapbooks with national news clippings and telegrams of congratulations, relating to Smith's achieving the position of U.S. Senator in 1907. Also included are speeches, ephemera, biographical information and a few photographs.

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## Biographical notes

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William Alden Smith was born in Dowagiac, Michigan, May 12, 1859, one of four known children of parents George Richardson Smith and Leah Margaret Allen Smith. He died October 11, 1932 of a heart attack, which is said to have followed on one of his many impassioned speeches.

William Alden Smith is said to have moved to Grand Rapids in 1872 at age 13, due to his father's serious illness. While some biographical sources list young William Alden Smith as the head of household by the 8th grade, an obituary in the Grand Rapids Press, January 20, 1913, states that his father died in Santa Ana, California at age 82. It does appear, however, that William Alden worked with his brother, George, to help support the family, selling newspapers as a Grand Rapids Herald newsboy, and as a Western union messenger. He is said to have worked as a hotel porter and did menial work in the old Hit House at St. Joseph. He was employed at the Antidel Hotel of Grand Rapids and may also have worked at the Pantlind (Hotel Monthly Jan. 1916). George and Leah moved to California 12 to 20 years before his death, depending upon the source.

Appointed as page in the House of Representatives in Lansing at age 17 by Speaker John T. Rich. Studied law in Grand Rapids, in law office of Marsden C. Burch, then U.S. district attorney at Grand Rapids and Robert M. Montgomery, later chief justice of Michigan Supreme Court. Firm later became Burch & Smith. Admitted to the Bar in 1882 or 1885, depending upon source.

1887 appointed general attorney for Detroit, Lansing & Northern RR and the Chicago & West Michigan RR, which merged into the Flint & Pere Marquette.

1892, joined with Michigan J. Smiley and Frederick W. Stevens to form, Smiley, Smith & Stevens. 1898 constructed railroad, later the Pere Marquette. Later purchased Lowell & Hastings R.R.

1894 nominated for Congress, 5th Congressional District of Mich. Expert in railroad law and financing. U.S. House of Rep. For 4 years. U.S. Senator from 1907 to 1919. Titanic sinks Apr. 15, 1912. Chairman, from the Senate Commerce Committee. Hearing held at New York's Waldorf Astoria. Titanic disaster speech delivered May 28, 1912. The Titanic, a British registered ship, was owned by American financier J.P. Morgan's Company. Outcomes of the hearing led to changes in ship safety, and is said to have led to the formation of the U.S. Coast Guard. [See Titanic: End of a Dream by Wyn Craig Wade] Considered for the U.S. Presidency in the primaries in Michigan in 1916, opposed by Henry Ford. He is said to have been responsible for getting Abraham Lincoln's birthday recognized as a national holiday.

Purchased the G.R. Herald in 1906. Edited by Arthur Vandenberg. An active businessman after his retirement from the Senate.

1904, Director of Grand Rapids Savings Bank and President in 1912, chairman of the board, 1923. GR Savings Bank Building his responsibility, opened in 1917.

Various other boards and directorships.

Member of Young Men's Republican Club, Sons of the American Revolution, officers of Foreign Wars, 33 degree Mason.

Married to Nana Osterhout 10/21/1859-2/15/1936, who's family also moved to G.R. when she was a child. They were married Oct. 21, 1886.

Former residence 456 College Ave., G.R.

William Alden Smith, Jr. his only child, d. 4/29/1920, in Grand Rapids at age 27. He had married Marie McRae, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Milton A. McRae of Detroit and San Diego, CA. McRae developed the Scripps-McRae league newspapers, later forming the United Press Association. William Alden Smith, Jr. rose through the ranks at the Herald to become manager at the time of his death. They had 2 children, Marie and William Alden Smith III. Marie McRae Smith later married Major Richmond Temple of London, a diplomat.

William Alden Smith III d. 12/16/1968, San Diego, CA at age 52.

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## Scope and Contents

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This devised collection contains a combination of Old Collection materials, newer accessions and one purchase documenting limited aspects of the political life of this U.S. Senator from Michigan, and former owner of the Grand Rapids Herald newspaper.

William Alden Smith's collection often draws researchers from out of state due to the popularity of the sinking of the Titanic. The Senator was in charge of the United States investigation into the tragedy. Few documents are found in this collection, however, related to this incident.

The Old Collection materials represented here are primarily his speeches, printed and issued from the Government Printing Office. The Old Collection number is S21. Additional items were previously cataloged as books and now transferred to the collection from the Local History Book Collection.

The scrapbooks bring some physical bulk, but less content than desired to the collection. The limited content of the scrapbooks includes headlines from non-Michigan U.S. Newspapers.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

111 Library Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

[localhis@grpl.org](mailto:localhis@grpl.org)

URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Accession numbers 1997.031, 1998.044, 1998.111, 1999. , S21:A1-14, P2002.001D

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## Related Materials

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### Related Materials

William Alden Smith shows up occasionally in other GRPL archival collections and in publications. This visibility often has to do with his business life in Grand Rapids.

See Coll. 259, Grand Rapids Newspapers, and the Grand Rapids Herald on microfilm, for this newspaper from the era of his ownership, including the even better known Arthur Vandenberg as the editor of the paper, before he too became a U.S. Senator.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Politicians -- Michigan -- Biography
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Smith, William Alden

## Collection Inventory

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### Series I. Biographical & Reference

#### Biographical

Title/Description	Instances	
Father of Michigan's Senior Senator Dead : son receives news of death shortly following congratulatory telegram. RE George R. Smith. Grand Rapids Press, 1913-01-20	Box 1	Folder 1
[Michigan Second Annual Attorney(?) Banquet at Owashtanong Club.] "The guest of honor was Hon. Wm. Alden Smith..." Hotel Monthly, Jan. 1916.	Box 1	Folder 1
Senator's Grandson Dies at 52. Grand Rapids Press, 1968-12-17	Box 1	Folder 1
Rags to Riches. Grand Rapids Magazine, June 1976.	Box 1	Folder 1
He was Character of titanic Proportions / Doug Guthrie. Grand Rapids Press, 1998-02-21	Box 1	Folder 1

Associated Press, Sketch no. 11. William Alden Smith, former Senator, sketch for use in event of his death ...	Box 1	Folder 1
Reference Correspondence RE Smith family.	Box 1	Folder 2

## Clippings

Title/Description	Instances
Owosso Daily Argus, Owosso, Michigan.	Box 1
The Republican, St. Johns, Michigan.	Box 1
Off Print, Charlotte Republican per pencil note. "Senator Smith for President, 1916-01-19	Box 1
Senator Smith Must Repudiate N.Y. Interview. Grand Rapids Press, 1916.	Box 1
Heritage Hill Association House record. 456 College Ave. William Alden Smith original owner.	Box 1

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## Series II. Graphics

### Photographs.

Processing Information:

#### Processing Information

Formerly in Coll. 54, Box 35, Folder 1

Title/Description	Instances
Hon. Wm. Alden Smith and Father and Mother Smith. [1923] Neg. 1530.	Box 1
Head #819, cut from an unidentified oversized composite photo.	Box 1
Hon. Wm. Alden Smith. Portrait shot cut from an unidentified oversized composite photo.	Box 1
Photocopy of photographs in an Album in Coll. 074. Includes casual images of William Alden Smith, Arthur Vandenberg, and other unidentified.	Box 2

### Graphic clippings.

Processing Information:

#### Processing Information

Formerly in Coll. 54, Box 35, Folder 1

Title/Description	Instances
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Memorial Portrait Photo from newspaper (Grand Rapids Herald?), 1932, 1932-10-11	Box 1
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Clipping. News?, 1907-01-14	Box 1
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**General**

Three portrait images

- 1 Mrs. William Alden Smith
- 2 Mrs. George R. Smith, Mother of William Alden Smith.
- 3 William Alden Smith, Jr.

William Alden Smith, Attorney for C. & W. M. and D. L. & N. R'ys. [Railways; railroads] Cut from an unidentified source. Neg. 3874.	Box 1
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Honorable William Alden Smith, Toastmaster. Cut from an unidentified source.	Box 1
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**Series III. Speeches**

**William Alden Smith, speeches, handwritten and typed, n.d.**

Title/Description	Instances
S21:A9.1. The Benefactor Reaps His Reward. 2 handwritten sheets.	Box 1
S21:A9.2. "The indiscriminate application of political theories is always a source of much confusion ..."	Box 1
S21:A9.4 small typed pages.	Box 1
S21:A9.3. "I have never believed in a civil service diplomacy ..." 7 typed pages, with corrections, on the back of Postal Telegraph Cable Co. paper.	Box 1
S21:A9.4. An Empire Realizes 'All Men art Mortal"'. 2 handwritten sheets.	Box 1
S21:A9.5. Memorandum of Some objections to the So-Called Excess Profits Bill ... 4 typed sheets.	Box 1
S21:A9.6. Speech of William Alden Smith at the Lincoln Club Banquet. Masonic Temple, Jackson, Mich. 13 typed pages, 1916-02-14	Box 1
S21:A9.7 The Mixed Races in History. 4 typed sheets.	Box 2
S21:A9.8 "Do you, boy or girl, know anything about the history of your numerals?" 4 handwritten sheets.	Box 1



S21:A9.9 "The President of this Republic is in many respects the most potential single figure in the world ..." 12 small typed pages in a booklet held with 2 items of brass hardware.	Box 1
S21:A9.10 Constitutional Government. "The spirit of the last century found its most fitting and unobstructed field of action in the boundless territory and inexhaustible resources of our country." 4 small typed pages.	Box 1
S21:A9.11. United State Senate. Memorandum. Letterhead. Handwritten note. "Goethe, the great German poet?..."	Box 1
S21:A9.12 "To have the privilege of speaking to a people of their own native land ..." 9 small typed pages. RE: Poland.	Box 1
S21:A9.13 "The Star Spangled Banner" Blue cover sheet inscribed with his name is detached. 3 sheets, handwritten front and back on various topics. Lined notebook type pages.	Box 1
S21:A9.14 The United States in Asia. 8 typed sheets.	Box 2
S21:A9.15 "Will my nation ever set up a claim against the United States which this country could not under any circumstances entertain ..." Handwritten on front & back of 1/2 sheet.	Box 1
S21:A9.16. "The States deliberately vested the Senate with authority in the Conduct of Foreign Affairs ..." Notes on both sides of sheet with United States Senate, Washington, D.C. letterhead. Handwritten.	Box 1

**Belligerent Rights for cuba : Speech of Hon. William Alden Smith, of Michigan in the House of Representatives, Mar. 2, 1896. Washington, 1896. Formerly MGK308.Sm6. 00.[0991].1-5**

Title/Description	Instances
Soldiers' Pensions, Condemnation of Spy System speech ... House ..., 1896-04-23	Box 1
Hawaiian Annexation : American Foreign Policy: Vigorous, Progressive and Human : Speech ... House ..., 1898-06-15	Box 1
The Philippine Tariff Bill : will Close Every Sugar Market in the World Against the Philippines without Compensating Advantage Here : Speech ... House, Jan. 16, 1906.	Box 1
The Emergency Currency Bill : speech ... Senate ..., 1908-03-02	Box 1
Protection and Prosperity : Speech ... House. 00.[0991].6, 1897-03-31	Box 1

**Six speeches bound together.**

Title/Description	Instances
Speech of Honorable William Alden Smith on the Occasion of the Celebration of the One Hundred and Fifteenth Anniversary	Box 1

of the Adoption of the Constitution of Poland, at Grand Rapids, Mich. Grand Rapids : Herald. 00.[0992].1, 1906-04-31

President Grant and San Domingo : Speech of Congressman William Alden Smith of Michigan at the Annual Banquet of the Middlesex Club of Boston, Mass., in Honor of the Birthday of Ulysses S. Grant, ... 00.[0993].1, 1895-04-27	Box 1
Address of Congressman William Alden Smith, temporary Chairman, Republican State Convention, Detroit, Michigan. 00.[0994].1, 1902-06-26	Box 1
Foreign Affairs and Domestic Obstacles : Speech ... House ... 00.[0995].1, 1900-02-06	Box 1
Key Note Speech of William Alden Smith, United States Senator, as Temporary Chairman, Republican State Convention, Detroit, Mich. 00.[0996].1, 1910-10-06	Box 1
Grant's Foreign Policy : Speech ... Annual Banquet of the Americus Republican Club, Pittsburgh, Pa. in Commemoration of the Birthday of Ulysses S. Grant. 00.[0997].1, 1897-04-29	Box 1
Canadian Reciprocity : remarks of Hon. William Alden Smith of Michigan in the Senate of the United States. (Extract from the Congressional Record.), 1911-06-16	Box 1
Panama Canal Tolls : Speech ... Senate. 00.[3416].1, 1914-06-08 - 1914-06-09	Box 1
The Ship Purchase Bill : Speech ... Senate, Jan. 30 and Feb. 1, 1915. 118 pgs.	Box 1
Extension of Remarks of Hon. J.M.C. Smith of Michigan. From Newsboy to the Senate : article from the Cosmopolitan for Oct. by John Temple Graves RE William Alden Smith. Formerly MKG92.Sm5Sm5. 00.[1451].1, 1915-02-25	Box 1

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## Series IV. Ephemera.

Title/Description	Instances
Graphic memorial clipping of President McKinley (1843-1901), with caption remarks by William Alden Smith. Compliments of the Grand Rapids Herald. P2002.001D.	Box 1
Titanic : the Official Story, April 14-15, 1912 : Reproduction of facsimiles from the Archives of the Public Record Office in London. N.Y. : Random House, 1997. Portions of two kits, used 2008.019.3	Box 2
Program. Dinner given by the Citizens of Grand Rapids, Michigan to the Honorary Commercial Commissioners from Japan, Wed. September 29th, 1909. + menu. "Paper made in Japan." 2 copies, but both are inscribed with Japanese names, and GR & other U.S.	Box 1

participants including James H. Campbell, Henry Idema, R.W. Irwin. William Alden Smith was toastmaster. 1986.313

GR Herald. Sept. 30, 1909. "Invaders came, Saw Conquered." Box 1  
Clipping re the occasion. Oversized, folded. 1986.313, 1909-09-30

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## Series V. Scrapbooks

Title/Description	Instances
Congratulatory Letters and Telegrams upon the election of William Alden Smith as United States Senator. v.1-4. Formerly MKG92.Sm5C74, 1907	Box 3
William Alden Smith Scrapbook, 1914-1915	Box 4
William Alden Smith Scrapbook, v. 1-4, 7-8. Formerly MKG 92 Sm5N47	Box 5
William Alden Smith Scrapbook, v. 5. Formerly MKG 92 Sm5N47.	Box 6
William Alden Smith Scrapbook, v. 6. Formerly MKG 92 Sm6L56, 1896-1913	Box 7
Letters of Sympathy on Apendicitis. Formerly MKG92 Sm6L56, 1910	Box 4

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## Series VI. "Titanic" informational materials.

Title/Description	Instances
Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters / edited by Logan Marshall. 1912. 00.[2487].1	Box 1

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