

Guide to the Robert Emmet Quinn papers 1936-1975

Phillips Memorial Library, Special and Archival
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Collection overview

Title:	Robert Emmet Quinn papers and Oral Histories
Date range:	1936-1975
Creator:	Quinn, Robert Emmet, 1884-1975
Extent:	1.0 linear feet
Abstract:	The collection contains a small amount of miscellaneous business and personal documents, newsclippings and transcripts of speeches. The heart of this collection is a series of oral history interviews conducted in 1972 and 1973. All but two of these interviews, which covers every phase of his public life, have been roughly transcribed. Of particular value are Quinn's comments on the 1935 "Bloodless Revolution" and on the local political arena of Rhode Island up to World War II.
Language of materials:	English
Repository:	Phillips Memorial Library, Special and Archival Collections
Collection number:	rppc_quinn

Scope & content

The collection contains a small amount of miscellaneous business and personal documents, newsclippings, transcripts of speeches, and photographs. The bulk of the collection is a series of oral history interviews conducted from 20 June 1972 to 20 November 1973 by Providence College Archivist Matthew J. Smith.

These tapes, which have been roughly transcribed, cover all phases of Quinn's public service. Of particular interest are his comments on the 1935 "Bloodless Revolution" and on the local political arena up to World War II.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into two series.

- Subject Files
- Oral Histories

Biographical note

Robert Emmet Quinn was born on April 2, 1894 in Phenix, R.I., in what is now West Warwick, R. I., to Charles Quinn and Mary Ann (McCabe) Quinn. He graduated from Brown University in 1915 and completed his law degree from Harvard Law School in 1918.

During World War I, Quinn served in France with the American Diplomatic Service and upon returning to the United States joined the law firm of his uncle, Col. Patrick Henry Quinn. It was through his uncle, who was the state's Democratic national committeeman, that the younger Quinn became interested in Rhode Island politics.

After serving two terms in the R. I. legislature in the 1920s, Quinn was elected as Lieutenant Governor from 1932 to 1937. Because returns from three Republican districts appeared to be fraudulent in the senatorial election of 1934, on January 1, 1935, Lt. Gov. Quinn opened the State Senate by appointing a committee to recount ballots from the previous November election. The recount led to a majority of Democrats being elected instead of Republicans. Once gaining control of the Senate, the Democrats reorganized the state government and took over many of the former Republican power bases. This action became known as the "Bloodless Revolution of 1935."

When incumbent Governor Francis Green chose to run for a seat in the United States Senate, Quinn was nominated for the governorship of Rhode Island in which he defeated republican Charles P. Sisson by a popular vote of 160,776 to 137,369. He held this office from January 5, 1937 to January 3, 1939 and proved to be one of the most active governor's in the state's history. During his administration, Quinn advocated a merit system for state workers, a personal income tax, and exemption for the poor from real estate taxes.

In addition, during his administration, legal horseracing was just opening up in the state, and Quinn was determined that it be kept honest. Rumors of racketeers controlling the racetrack at the newly opened Narragansett Park prompted Quinn to initiate legal measures against the track and its owner, Walter O'Hara. Known as the "Racetrack War", after lengthy legal and political fighting, Governor Quinn won the fight to keep the industry clean amidst national headlines, which garnered him the nickname "Fighting Bob."

Quinn was unsuccessful in his bid for re-election against republican William H. Vanderbilt and returned to his private law practice. In 1941 he was appointed to a Superior Court judgeship by Gov. Howard J. McGrath.

During the Second World War, he reentered the military as a Lt. Commander in the Navy's legal branch and served for four years, rising to the rank of Captain. During his military career Quinn specialized in developing a way to process court martial trials. He returned to the bench after the end of the war and in 1951, Quinn was named Chief Judge of a new three-member United States Court of Military Appeals by President Truman, a position from which he retired in 1975.

He was a past president of the American Bar Association; trustee of Kent County Hospital, Warwick, Rhode Island; and a member of the Turks Head, Brown, Harvard and Wannamoisett clubs. "Fighting Bob" Quinn, after serving in all 3 branches of Rhode Island government, capped his career with a 25 year tenure as Chief Judge of the United States Court of Military Appeals. Judge Quinn died on May 19, 1975 and was buried in the Quinn Family Cemetery, West Warwick, Rhode Island.

Biographical outline

Date	Event
April 2, 1894	Born in Phenix, Rhode Island
1915	Graduates Brown University
1918	Graduates Harvard Law School
1917-1919	Serves as a member of the U.S. Diplomatic Intelligence Service in England and France
1920	Joins the law firm of his uncle, Col. Patrick Henry Quinn
1923	Marries to Mary Carter - 5 children
1923-1925	Elected to the Rhode Island Senate
1929-1933	Elected to the Rhode Island Senate
1932-1936	Elected as Lt. Governor of Rhode Island
1937-1939	Elected as Governor of Rhode Island

1939-1941	Practices private law
1941	Appointed judge for the Rhode Island Superior Court
1942-1945	Serves as a legal officer at the rank of Lt. Commander for the First Naval District
1942	Promoted to Captain, U. S. Navy
1951-1975	Appointed by President Truman as First Chief Judge of the U. S. Court of Military Appeals
1964	Awarded the first honorary life membership by Federal Bar Association
1966	Elected to Rhode Island Hall of Fame for contribution to the State's heritage
1975 May 19	Dies and is buried in the Quinn Family Cemetery, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Access & use

Access to the collection:

There are no restrictions on access, however, certain collections may have donor restrictions and may not be available, nor may archival or manuscript materials be removed from the Reading Room area or borrowed from the collections.

Use of materials:

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Preferred citation:

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rppc_quinn, Phillips Memorial Library, Special and Archival Collections

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Administrative information

About the collection

Aquisition: The taped interviews were conducted from 1972 to 1973 by Providence College Archivist Matthew J. Smith, with the subsequent paper files donated by Quinn's family after the Judge's death in 1975.

About the finding aid

Author: Finding aid prepared by Russell M. Franks.

Encoding: Finding aid encoded by Russell M. Franks 2008
November 03

Descriptive rules: Finding aid based on Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)

Additional information

Related material: There are no known related materials.

Separated material: No materials have been removed from this collection.

Search terms

Names: Robert E. Quinn, 1894-1975
United States. Court of Military Appeals
United States. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces

Subjects: Courts-martial and courts of inquiry United States

Governors -- Rhode Island
Rhode Island -- Politics and government -- 1865-1950

Types of materials:

clippings
letters (correspondence)
photographs
press releases
speeches

Inventory

Subject Files, 1936-1975

(29 folders)

This series contains miscellaneous business and personal documents, newsclippings, printed materials, transcripts of speeches and photographs.

This series is arranged alphabetically.

Container	Description	Date
Box 1, Folder 1	Awards	1972
Box 1, Folder 2	Biographical information	1963-1993
Box 1, Folder 3	Clippings and Press Releases	1937
Box 1, Folder 4	Clippings and Press Releases	1966
Box 1, Folder 5	Clippings and Press Releases	1971
Box 1, Folder 6	Clippings and Press Releases	1975
Box 1, Folder 7	Correspondence - Alice Lafond	1936
Box 1, Folder 8	Correspondence - J. Howard McGrath	1937
Box 1, Folder 9	Correspondence - Franklin D. Roosevelt	1938
Box 1, Folder 10	Correspondence - John E. Fogarty	1941
Box 1, Folder 11	Correspondence - Carolyn Sherman	1946
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence - re: Bertha Clarke	1947
Box 1, Folder 13	Correspondence re: Robert E. Quinn	1951

Box 1, Folder 14	Correspondence re: Robert E. Quinn	1955
Box 1, Folder 15	Correspondence -	1957
Box 1, Folder 16	Correspondence - John E. Fogarty	1963
Box 1, Folder 17	Correspondence - John E. Fogarty	1964
Box 1, Folder 18	Correspondence re: Robert E. Quinn	1966
Box 1, Folder 19	Correspondence - Aime J. Forand	1970
Box 1, Folder 20	Correspondence - Fr. W. A. Wallace, O.P.	1971
Box 1, Folder 21	Photographs	undated
Box 1, Folder 22	Photograph - RI Senate with Lt. Gov. Quinn presiding	1935
Box 1, Folder 23	Printed Material - The Cornell Law Forum	1969
Box 1, Folder 24	Printed Material - Journal of the Beverly Hills Bar Association	1971
Box 1, Folder 25	Printed Material - Langdell Lyrics of 1938	1938
Box 1, Folder 26	Printed Material - Collection of Writings and Speeches of Robert Emmet Quinn	1967

Box 1, Folder 27	Speeches	1936
Box 1, Folder 28	Speeches	1938
Box 1, Folder 29	Speeches	1940

Oral Histories, 1972-1973

(10 folders)

Scope and Content Note

This series is comprised of 12 taped interviews and their corresponding transcripts. Two of the recordings do not have transcripts. Box 2 contains the audio cassette recordings for each transcript in box 1. In the fall of 2008 the recordings from the cassette tapes were digitized and transferred to CD disc.

Arrangement This series is arranged by the date the interview took place.

Container	Description	Date
Box 1, Folder 30	Transcript	1972 Jun 28
Box 1, Folder 31	Transcript	1972 Jul 14
Box 1, Folder 32	Transcript	1972 Jul 19
Box 1, Folder 33	Transcript	1972 Jul 24
Box 1, Folder 34	Transcript - session II	1972 Jul 24
Box 1, Folder 35	Transcript	1972 Jul 31

Box 1, Folder 36	Transcript	1972 Aug 7
Box 1, Folder 37	Transcript	1972 Aug 21
Box 1, Folder 38	Transcript	1972 Sep 11
Box 1, Folder 39	Transcript	1973 Nov 20
Box 2,	10 Audio cassette recordings	1972 Jun 28-1973 Nov 20
Box 2,	Audio cassette recording - blank	1972 Dec 27
Box 2,	Audio cassette recording - The Bloodless Revolution, 1935	undated
Box 2,	Audio cassette recording - Judge Quinn on recent RI politics, post WWII	undated