Information Sheet

R Cantwell, Harry J., 1859-1917.
677 Collection, 1898-1950 (bulk 1915-1918).
Forty folders.

This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri. If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

These are the papers of an attorney and developer of mineral properties in southeastern Missouri and Oklahoma. Most of the collection concerns title work and exploration of tracts near Irondale and Palmer in Washington County, Missouri.

Harry J. Cantwell was born in Sonman, Pennsylvania on 3 February 1859. After working in the operating and construction departments of various railroads, he studied law. In 1885, Cantwell was admitted to the bar in Mississippi County, Missouri, and was briefly the city attorney of Charleston, Missouri. He then entered Washington University in St. Louis, graduating in 1888. About the same time, he married Catherine Cornelius, daughter of a prominent St. Louis attorney. Cantwell practiced professionally with Albert N. Edwards before devoting himself to mining investments in southeastern Missouri. He was, successively, associated with the Central Lead Company, National Lead Company, Columbia Lead Company, and Catherine Lead Company operating in St. Francois and Madison counties. In 1900, he organized the St. Francois Town-Site and Mining Company, which platted and sold lots in the town of Cantwell, named after him.

By the period represented by this collection, Cantwell owned or controlled 20,000 acres of mineral properties near Palmer in Washington County. In 1915, Cantwell & O. H. Bilharz formed a company to undertake development of the Eaton-Eversole and Yeargain tracts about three miles southwest of Irondale (9000 acres), and the Cantwell and Parole Mining Company tracts at Palmer (20,000 acres), southwest of Potosi. Other parcels in St. Francois and Crawford counties brought the aggregate to about 31,207 acres. The properties had been test-drilled by the Renault Lead Company in 1899, and “Guggenheim interests” in 1906-1907. Cantwell and Bilharz commenced legal work to clear land titles, defined ore bodies by core-drilling, and corresponded with various investors and mining companies. Unnamed “New York interests,” represented by attorney W. H. Page, joined the project around 1916 and continued legal work and exploratory drilling with a view to developing ore bodies for production or selling the properties to established mining companies. In 1917, restructuring and recapitalization occurred with the organization of the “Missouri Lead Pool” or “Syndicate.” Old and new interests, including investors in New York and St. Louis, contributed an additional $100,000 to continue exploratory drilling in Washington County. Harry J. Cantwell died in August 1917. Mrs. Cantwell died in 1918, after which a Mr. Keene handled the estate. The “Cantwell Project,” as it was known, continued through at least December 1918.

The Cantwell collection consists of primarily of materials concerning his development activities in Washington County and southeastern Missouri. Folders 1-2 contain the only personal material in the collection, including printed reports of law cases in which Cantwell was involved as counsel. Folders 3-34 contain correspondence, reports, maps, and plats by geologists Sydney H. Ball, O. M. Bilharz, Arthur Thacher, and H. A. Wheeler, title searches by the Smith-Bleeck-Forester Land and Abstract Company, prospect drill records by the H. R. Ameling Prospecting Company, progress reports on the Cantwell Project, and legal matters by W. H. Page and William
H. Blythe. The most complete chronology of the Cantwell Project is in folder 12. Folders 35-40 pertain to Cantwell’s mining interests in Ottawa County, Oklahoma, and Eagle County, Colorado.

The collection covers only the last phase of Cantwell’s career in the mineral industries of southeastern Missouri. However, it offers a valuable glimpse into the problems associated with locating and defining ore bodies, clearing titles to land, obtaining rights to mineral deposits, and attracting investors to long-term development projects.

12 October 1998

University of Missouri-Rolla Archives

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Shelf List

These are the papers of an attorney and developer of mineral properties in southeastern Missouri and Oklahoma. Most of the collection concerns title work and exploration of tracts near Irondale and Palmer in Washington County, Missouri.

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F. 02: Lucius Cantwell, 1926-1950

Folders 3-34: Southeastern Missouri mining projects, 1898-1918

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