

Information Sheet

R Torrey, Jay Linn, 1852-1920.
218 Scrapbook, 1893-1920.
One volume.

MICROFILM

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This is a scrapbook of Jay L. Torrey of Howell County, Missouri. Torrey was a rancher, politician, veteran of the Spanish-American War, and promoter of southern Missouri. The scrapbook includes material on the Missouri Immigration Society, the State Fruit Experiment Station, the "Good Roads" movement, relocation of the state capitol, Fruitville Farm and the proposed village of Torreytown, and the campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1918.

Jay Linn Torrey was born on 16 October 1852 at Pittsfield, Illinois. He grew up in Louisiana, Missouri, and St. Louis, where he graduated from Washington University in 1876. He set up a practice in commercial law in St. Louis, specializing in bankruptcy cases. Years of work in the field led him to formulate a new code which was ultimately adopted by the U.S. Congress. Known as the Torrey Bankruptcy Act, it remained in effect for many years. Torrey was also involved in a plan for establishing the appellate court system in Missouri. He was prominent in St. Louis civil, fraternal, and Republican Party circles, and was president of the St. Louis Mercantile Club.

At the invitation of his older brother, a retired Army captain, Torrey moved to Thermopolis, Wyoming, to manage a large cattle and cavalry horse ranch. His work there led to U.S. patents on improvements in branding irons and saddle blankets in 1890. He was elected to the Wyoming legislature on the Republican ticket and served as speaker of the lower house. He attracted nationwide attention at the beginning of the Spanish-American War with a proposal to enlist western cowboys and stockmen for cavalry service. His concept for "Rough Riders" was accepted by the War Department, and Torrey was commissioned Colonel of the 2nd Regiment U.S. Cavalry Volunteers. The regiment organized and trained at Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming, but never reached Cuba. En route to Florida, the troop train derailed at Tupelo, Mississippi, killing and injuring several Rough Riders and crushing both of Col. Torrey's feet. As a veteran and Rough Rider, Torrey was prominently mentioned as a running mate to William McKinley on the Republican ticket in 1900. He was passed by when Theodore Roosevelt accepted the nomination.

Torrey amassed considerable wealth in Wyoming, and in 1905 he returned to Missouri. He acquired the "White Farm" southeast of West Plains in Howell County, adding to it to create a 10,000-acre tract which he named Fruitville Farm. He became known in Howell County as a slightly eccentric philanthropist and civil organizer, and a tireless booster of southern Missouri and the Ozarks, particularly concerning the possibilities of fruit-culture. He was very involved in progressive campaigns for civic improvements in Howell County and West Plains, and was a director of the statewide "Good Roads" campaign in 1912-1913. Through his Republican Party connections, he was appointed to several state posts. Gov. Herbert S. Hadley named him to the Board of Visitors of the University of Missouri and the Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy at Rolla. He was also appointed a trustee of the Missouri State Fruit Experiment Station at Mountain Grove, Missouri, and was elected president of the Missouri Immigration Society in 1912.

Torrey's most ambitious project was the "ideal" village of Torreytown, which he hoped to establish at Fruitville Farm. Designed after the European model, residents were to be urban farmers, living in a central town surrounded by outlying farmsteads. Progressive and patriotic themes were included in plans for Torreytown, whose ritual was to include programs of patriotic ethics and flag-raising on specified days. With generous purchase plans and statewide advertising, Torrey expected to attract "desirable," industrious individuals to inhabit his proposed village. Although there were a few tenant farmers at Fruitville, the ideal village never caught on and development never got underway.

Torreytown was central in a well-publicized feud between Col. Torrey and Gov. Hadley in 1910 after the state capitol in Jefferson City burned. As discussion went on concerning funding its reconstruction, Torrey offered a thousand acres and a million dollars for the capitol to be relocated near Fruitville Farm. The debate grew acrimonious when Torrey alleged fraud on the part of Jefferson City's backers and the bond issue they proposed. Gov. Hadley countered that Torrey was more concerned with promoting his real estate development at Torreytown. The highly public controversy was settled when Missouri's voters approved the bond issue in favor of Jefferson City. Torrey and Hadley staged a widely-reported reconciliation at the Ozark Land Congress at Springfield in 1911.

Col. Torrey entertained lavishly at Fruitville and other locations in the state, befitting his various capacities. Politicians, educators, Rough Riders, and suffragettes were guests at his table, and a Wyoming equestrienne made headlines in 1913 as she made her circuit of Missouri riding on a mule loaned from Fruitville Farm. An active member of the United Spanish War Veterans, Torrey hosted statewide encampments at Fruitville in 1913 and 1918. Torrey's most elaborate affair was the celebration of Memorial Day in 1918. Thousands came from all over southern Missouri and northern Arkansas to attend the public events, which included a display of torpedoes by the U.S. Navy, a flyover by a U.S. Army aviator, the filming of an historical motion picture of Howell County, and music by W. L. Handy and band from Memphis.

Later in 1918, Torrey launched a whirlwind campaign in the Republican primary for U.S. Senator. He ran well in southern Missouri despite a late start and little backing from the party, but he was defeated by Selden P. Spencer. The campaign was the last great public enterprise of his career. He visited his land holdings in Wyoming and traveled to Central America, and was no longer the central figure in southern Missouri that he once had been.

A longtime bachelor, Torrey married Mrs. Frances Reiley, businesswoman and widow of a physician in West Plains, in October 1920. He lived only six weeks afterward, succumbing to Bright's disease at West Plains on 4 December 1920. After ceremonies at West Plains, Louisiana, and St. Louis, his remains were interred in his hometown of Pittsfield, Illinois. His estate, estimated at one hundred thousand dollars, was divided between his widow and his old friend, Rough Rider, and manager of Fruitville, Wallace B. Hodge. The newspapers of West Plains eulogized Torrey as a man of visionary ideals whose motives were altruistic, not mercenary. Although many of his plans were never put into effect, Torrey was clearly one of the most energetic spokesmen ever to represent southern Missouri.

Torrey's scrapbook consists largely of newspaper clippings and miscellaneous printed material from 1910 to 1920. Most of the clippings were extracted from newspapers in Missouri, although a few earlier items from Wyoming are included. There is a large collection of Torrey's personal papers at the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center.

The materials in the scrapbook touch on most aspects of Torrey's career, with the greatest coverage of his work with the Missouri Immigration Society, the Good Roads movement, the fight over restoration of the capitol at Jefferson City, and the development of Fruitville Farm. There is also a considerable amount of coverage of agricultural advancements suitable for the Ozarks, Torrey's career with the Rough Riders and involvement with the United Spanish War Veterans, civic developments in Howell County, and Torrey's futile senatorial campaign in 1918. His attempt to create the ideal village is covered only lightly, but the scrapbook does include a proposed plat of the village, and examples of several promotional brochures describing the plan for Torreytown. A guide to the materials in the scrapbook is available.

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17 July 1985

Dorothea Reavis

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Shelf List

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<u>Page</u>	<u>Description</u>
001	Casper (Wyo.) Masonic Lodge, 20 December 1893.
002	National Good Roads Congress, 1911; Torrey Appointed Delegate. Mr. & Mrs. J. N. White -- 40th Anniversary, 1911. Hadley, Grace T., editor of the St. Louis Electric Magazine, visits Fruitville, 1911.
003	List of Premiums donated for the Road Work in Howell County.
004	Jefferson City, Capitol Restoration.
005	Missouri at Springfield Land Congress, 1910 - Missouri Board of Immigration.
006	Swiss Maltese Goats (advertisement).
007	Tolerton, Jesse A.; Capitol Restoration; Herbert Hadley; Brandsville (Mo.) Peach Festival, 1911.
008	Torrey Resigns as head of Missouri State Fruit Experiment Station & University of Missouri Board of Visitors, 1911; Capitol Restoration.
009	Torreytown (Mo.), 1912; Chillicothe (Mo.), Missouri Immigration Society, 1912; Pearl Mitchell, Missouri Immigration Society, 1912; Joplin (Mo.), Missouri Immigration Society, 1912.
010	Howell County Road Work, 4 July 1911; Bee Keeping at Fruitville, 4 July 1911.
011	Missouri State Immigration Society, 1912.
012	West Plains (Mo.); Howell County Road Work, 11 May 1911; Fruitville (Mo.); Missouri, Arkansas & Gulf Railroad, 11 May 1911.
013	Missouri State Immigration Society, 29 March 1912; University of Missouri Board of Visitors at Columbia and Rolla, 3 March 1912.
014	Missouri State Immigration Society, 1912; Spanish Maltese and Improved Swiss Goats (advertisement).
015	Capitol Restoration, Jefferson City -- Dispute Between Gov. Hadley & Judge Evans, St. Louis; Missouri Land Congress, Springfield (Mo.), 1912; Missouri State Immigration Convention, Sedalia, 14 February 1912.
016	Swiss Maltese Goats; Missouri State Immigration Society, Annual Tour, 1 May 1912.
017	Immigration Society Organized at Sedalia, February 1912, Col. Torrey elected President; Frisco Lines Seed Agricultural Give-a-way Program for Demonstration Farms, February 1912.
018	Thayer (Mo.) Commercial Club Meeting.
019	Missouri State Immigration Society Tour, 1912.
020	Capitol Restoration at Jefferson City -- Bond Issue Approved; A Visit to Fruitville Farm.
<u>Page</u>	<u>Description</u>
021	Missouri State Immigration Society Tour, 3 May 1912; Masonic Temple Association of Louisiana (Mo.), 3rd Annual Report, 8 May 1912.
022	Fourth of July Celebration at Fruitville (advertisement).
023	Missouri State Immigration Society Tour Schedule for April 29 to May 4, 1912.
024	Capitol Restoration, Jefferson City.
025	Fruitville Farms (advertising brochure); Missouri State Immigration Society Tour, 1912.
026	Capitol Restoration.
027	Missouri State Fruit Experiment Station, Mountain Grove, Missouri, June 1911.
028	Fourth of July Celebration at Fruitville, 1911; Motion Pictures Made at West Plains, Missouri, July 1911.
029	Hadley and Torrey Reconcile Differences; Fruitville Post Office Established.
030	Hadley-Torrey Feud, July 1911; Missouri State Immigration Society, 1912; Capitol Restoration Bond Issue, "A Legal Opinion" (Cont'd. page 32), 12 July 1911.
031	West Plains Bids for Drury Preparatory School, 28 December 1911.
032	Capitol Restoration Bond Issue (Cont'd. from page 30).
033	Missouri Land Congress, Springfield, 1911; Missouri State Immigration Society, 1912; Sham Battle of Spanish-American War Veterans at Fruitville, 1913.

- 034 Capitol Restoration Bond Issue, Bond Issue Opinion (Cont'd. on page 36).
- 035 F. S. White's Discussion of Johnson Grass; Howell County News; Missouri State Immigration Society Invites all former Missourians to return, March 1912.
- 036 Capitol Restoration Bond Issue (Cont'd. from page 34); Appeal by Torrey for Betterment of all State Institutions, July 1911.
- 037 Biographical Sketch of Cyrus P. Walbridge, 1912; West Plains Commercial Club, January 1912.
- 038 Fourth of July Celebration at Fruitville, 1911; Miscellaneous Fruitville News.
- 039 Angora Goat Raising, 29 July 1911; Hadley-Torrey Feud Reconciled, 1911; Thayer Y.M.C.A. Building Photo.
- 040 Bee Keeping, 1911; Miscellaneous pictures.
- 041 Frisco Good Roads Train, 1912; Thayer, Missouri Y.M.C.A. Dedication, 1912.
- 042 "Clean-up Day" at West Plains, April 1911; Road Work Postponed in Howell County, 1911; Fruitville Post Office, 1911; Fourth of July Celebrations at Fruitville, 1911.
- 043 Howell County Exhibit at Ozark Land Congress, 1911; Spanish-American War Vets meet at Fruitville, 1911; Meeting of the West Plains Commercial Club, 24 May 1912.
- 044 Tent City at Fruitville, 1911; Fruitville News, 1911; Peach Crop at Fruitville, 1911.
- 045 West Plains-Fruitville Road Work, 1912.
- 046 West Plains-Fruitville Road Work, 1912; Bee Keeping; "Clean-up" at West Plains.
- 047 West Plains-Fruitville Road Work, 1912.
- 048 Angora Goats, May 1911.
- 049 West Plains-Fruitville Road Work, 1912.
- 050 Goat Raising, 1911; Missouri State Immigration Society Tour, 1912.
- 051 Spanish-American War Veterans Meet at Springfield, 1912.
- 052 West Plains/Willow Springs Commercial Clubs Endorsement of Ozarks.
- 053 Warranty Deed (Blank) for Fruitville Farm; Memorial Day Observances, 1914.
- 054 Capitol Restoration at Jefferson City (continued from page 58).
- 055 Plat of the Village of Torreytown; Plat of Fruitville Farms.
- 056 Capitol Restoration at Jefferson City (Cont'd.).
- 057 Letters Testifying to Desirability of Fruitville Farms.
- 058 Capitol Restoration Brochure (begins).
- 059 Spanish-American Veterans Elect State officials, 1912; Spanish-American Veterans Encamp at Fruitville, 1913; Cape Girardeau-West Plains Road Work.
- 060 Capitol Restoration, 1911; Peach Culture in Ozarks, 1911.
- 061 Missouri State Immigration Society; Missouri National Land Congress, 1912.
- Page Description
- 062 Capitol Restoration (Cont'd.); Peach Culture (Cont'd.).
- 063 Howell County Teachers Association, 1912; Foreign Capital to come to Missouri, 1913.
- 064 Capitol Restoration (Cont'd.); Apple Culture; Picture of Tent House.
- 065 Governor Hadley's Address to Republicans; Booster Press Association Convention, 1912.
- 066 Capitol Restoration (Cont'd.).
- 067 Missouri State Immigration Society, 1912.
- 068 Missouri State Immigration Society, 1912.
- 069 Missouri State Arbor Day Program, 1912.
- 070 Missouri State Arbor Day Program, 1912.
- 071 Article on Good Roads, 1911.
- 072 Article on Good Roads, 1911.
- 073 Missouri State Immigration Society, Constitution and by-laws, Address by Col. Torrey.
- 074 Missouri State Immigration Society, Constitution and by-laws (Cont'd.).
- 075 Ozark Land Congress, Springfield, 1911.
- 076 Ozark Land Congress, broadside.
- 077 Bond for Warranty Deed for Fruitville Farm Purchases; Ozark Booster Press Association Quarterly Meeting, 1912.

- 078 Bond for Warranty Deed to Fruitville Farm (Cont'd.); Road Association Picnic, 1913; Ozark Booster Press Association (Cont'd.).
- 079 Testimonials on Possibilities of Ozarks, 1910; Missouri State Fruit Experiment Station; Site for Missouri State Park in the Ozarks, 1913; Fruitville Road Association, 1913.
- 080 Missouri Spanish-American War Veterans Annual Meeting, 1912.
- 081 Terms of Purchase of Fruitville Farm.
- 082 Blank Warranty Deed; Ozark Trails Association; Howell County Highway Board, 1913.
- 083 Fruitville Advertising Brochure.
- 084 Fruitville Advertising Brochure (Cont'd.).
- 085 Fruitville Advertising Brochure (Cont'd.).
- 086 Booster Press Association, 1912; Spanish-American War Veterans Encampment, 1913.
- 087 Biographical Sketch of Jay L. Torrey.
- 088 Farmers' Demonstration Picnic, West Plains, 1912.
- 089 Reunion of Col. Torrey with his old Army Horse; Farmers' Picnic at West Plains, 1912; Fruitville Road Work, 1913.
- 090 Torrey's Rough Riders to be Re-enlisted for War with Mexico, 1914; Pigeon Keeping; Mississippi Valley Newspaper Men's' Association, 1912.
- 091 Visitors from Brandsville & Koshkonong at Fruitville; Article on Good Roads, 1913.
- 092 Frisco "Good Roads" Train at West Plains, 1912; Commercial Club to Beautify West Plains Depot, 1913.
- 093 Report of University of Missouri Board of Visitors, 1912; a Letter from John C. Charles, Mexico, 1914 (also photographs of the Charles family).
- 094 Board of Visitors Report (Cont'd.); reception for Frisco Superintendent C. H. Baltzell, 1913.
- 095 Thayer Y.M.C.A. Grand Opening, 1912; Lecture on Panama by Torrey & H. A. Buehler, 1913.
- 096 Booster Press Association Quarterly Convention at Mammoth Springs, 1912; Missouri Fruit Experiment Station, Mountain Grove, 1912; Torrey Attends National Road Convention at St. Louis.

Page Description

- 097 Order of Overalls Organized at West Plains, 1912; Banquet Program, Celebrating Installation of Electric Power by Mammoth Spring Electric Power & Light Company.
- 098 Lecture on Panama Canal by Torrey & Buehler; Women's Library Club, West Plains, has New Quarters; Women's Library Club visits Fruitville, 1913.
- 099 Sweet Clover Growing; Equestrienne from Wyoming Rides Fruitville Mule, 1913.
- 100 Missouri State Immigration Society, Newspaper Supplement, 1912.
- 101 Missouri State Immigration Society, Newspaper Supplement (Cont'd.).
- 102 Missouri State Immigration Society, Newspaper Supplement, (Cont'd.).
- 103 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912.
- 104 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 105 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 106 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 107 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 108 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 109 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 110 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 111 *Howell County Gazette*, Booster Edition, 29 August 1912 (Cont'd.).
- 112 Ozark Booster Press Association Meets at Willow Springs, April 1913; Sewer System Campaign at West Plains, 1913; Wyoming Equestrienne & Fruitville Mule, 1913.
- 113 U.S. Senate Bill for Construction of Post Roads, 1913; Eulogy on Death of Lewis Godlove, St. Louis, 3 June 1913; Testimonial on Benefits of Ozarks, 1913.
- 114 Sacred Concert at Fruitville, 1914; West Plains Hosts Road Commissioners from 7

- Counties, 1913; Spanish-American Veterans at Fruitville, 1913.
- 115 Pamphlet Arguing for West Plains Sewer System, 1913.
- 116 Pamphlet Arguing for West Plains Sewer System, 1913.
- 117 Spanish-American Veterans at Fruitville, 1913; Sewer System at West Plains, 1913.
- 118 "Good Roads Days" in Howell County, 1913.
- 119 Spanish-American War Veterans Encampment, 1913; Arcadia Country Club, St. Francois County (Mo.), Files for Bankruptcy, 1913.
- 120 Spanish-American War Veterans Encampment at Fruitville, 1913; Ozark Bankers' Development Committee Organized, 1913.
- 121 Spanish-American War Veterans Encampment at Fruitville, 19 June 1913.
- 122 Encampment Notes, 26 June 1913; Fruitville Photos Appear in *Leslie's Weekly*, 8 July 1913; Col. Torrey Comments on Meat Packing Monopoly, 1 November 1916.
- 123 Consolidated School Systems.
- 124 West Plains-Fruitville Road, 2 June 1913; Sacred Concert at Fruitville, 1914.
- 125 Col. Torrey United with Old War Horse, 1913; Peach Harvest in Ozarks, 1913.
- 126 Howell County Poultry & Pet Stock Association, 21 August 1913; Mass Meeting at West Plains to Discuss Sewers, 11 July 1913.
- 127 West Plains-Fruitville Road, 23 October 1913.
- 128 Ozark Bankers' Development Committee, 1913; Biographical Sketch of John E. Osborne.
- 129 Veterans Encamp at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania & Fruitville, Missouri, 1913.
- 130 United Spanish-American Veterans Army and Navy Club (Pamphlet), 15 July 1914; West Plains Vote on Sewer System, 10 July 1913; Howell County Poultry & Pet Stock Association Picnic, 4 September 1913.
- 131 West Plains Commercial Club Endorsement of Fruitville Farms, 1911.
- 132 Women's Library Club of West Plains, 1913; West Plains Road Work, 19 August 1913; Farm Betterment Body is Organized; Southeast Missouri Good Roads Association Meeting, 9 October 1913.
- 133 Circular on San Jose Scale Disease in Trees, 7 March 1914; Proceedings of Retail Grocers' Convention.

Page Description

- 134 Article in Wyoming Newspaper on Fruitville Farms; Torrey Plans to Enter Hog Market, 1914; Myatt Creek Bridge on West Plains-Fruitville Road, 30 July 1914.
- 135 Promotional Sketch of Col. Torrey and Fruitville Farms, n.d.
- 136 Promotional Sketch of Col. Torrey and Fruitville Farms, n.d. (Cont'd.); West Plains-Fruitville Road Work, 1914.
- 137 Promotional Sketch (Cont'd.); Myatt Creek Bridge on West Plains Fruitville Road, 1914.
- 138 Rough Rider Reunion in Denver for Col. Torrey; Torrey Visits Washington, D.C. to Reorganize Regiment for Service Against Mexico, 14 June 1914.
- 139 Hog Cholera -- Prevention and Treatment; Frisco Railway Company, Development Department, Circular on Crimson Clover, 1914; Howell County Pedigreed Livestock Association is Organized.
- 140 Poem, "While We Go Riding With Torrey"; Sacred Concert at Fruitville, 1914.
- 141 Historical Movies of Howell County Shown at West Plains; Torrey Explains Plans Concerning Removal of School of Mines from Rolla to Columbia, 1915; Spring Park to be Site of New Post Office at West Plains.
- 142 Aviator to Land at Fruitville During Memorial Day Celebrations, 24 May 1918; Frisco Rail Road Development Department, Circular on Pruning, 1914.
- 143 Ozarks Described as Rich Field for Fruit Culture, 1915; Wood-Alcohol Plant Would Profit in Ozarks, 28 March 1915.
- 144 Torrey For U.S. Senator, Republican Primary Handbill, 1918; Torrey's "Rough Riders"; Torrey to Support Selden P. Spencer's U.S. Senate Campaign, 1918.
- 145 Sacred Concert at Fruitville; Suffragette Visits Ozarks, 17 August 1914; Handbills Supporting "Good Roads" Amendments, 1914; Torrey is not Militarist, 1916.

- 146 Torrey for Senate Handbill, 1918.
- 147 Sacred Concert at Fruitville, 1914.
- 148 Tribute to Robert Augustus Torrey, 1917; Reception for Dr. and Mrs. E. C. Atkins, West Plains (Mo.).
- 149 Dr. and Mrs. H. A. Torrey move to Georgia Estate; Hog Cholera Serum.
- 150 "Buffalo Bill" Monument Near Denver, Colorado, 1917; Missouri Centennial Celebration.
- 151 Handbills Concerning History & Culture of Emmer.
- 152 Aid Hardware Company Advertisement of Emmer; Handbill Announcing Fruitville Farms; Historical Film of Howell County to be Completed.
- 153 U.S. Senate Bills 5811 & 5812, to Re-enlist Members of "Rough Riders" in Event of War, 1914; Torrey For U.S. Senate Campaign, 1918.
- 154 Letter From Torrey Concerning Re-enlistment of Members of 2nd U.S. Volunteer Cavalry in Event of War with Mexico, 1914; Frisco Rail Road, Development Department, Circular on Moisture Loss, 1916.
- 155 Letter to J. E. S. Pentecost, Brandsville (Mo.), Concerning Termination of Lease on Farm at Fruitville, 1916; Torrey Family Reunion, 1917.
- 156 Constitution of "Torrey Families And Their Children In America."
- 157 Recommendation of West Plains Commercial Club for Fruitville Farms; Reception for J. D. Woodruff, Thermopolis, Wyoming, 1916.
- 158 Reception for J. D. Woodruff, Thermopolis, Wyoming, 1916 (Cont'd.).
- 159 Advertisements for Cattle at Torrey Ranch, Wyoming, 1916.
- 160 Temperance poem, no author; Letterhead of Embar Cattle Co., Embar (Wyo.).
- 161 Auction Handbills, Fruitville, Missouri, 1919.
- 162 Auction Handbills, Fruitville, Missouri, 1919 (Cont'd.); Road Committee Election Notice, Howell County (Mo.); Memorial Day Celebration at Fruitville, 1918.
- 163 Helen Nicolay Visits West Plains, 26 June 1918; Memorial Day Celebration at Fruitville, 1918.
- 164 Meeting of West Plains, Fruitville and Salem Road Association, 1919.
- Page Description
- 165 Torrey For Senate Campaign, 1918; Handbill Advertising Pedigreed Mule at Fruitville, 1919.
- 166 Torrey Senatorial Campaign, 1918; Essay on American Involvement in World War, 1917.
- 167 Essay on American Involvement in World War, 1917 (Cont'd.).
- 168 Essay on American Involvement in World War, 1917 (Cont'd.).
- 169 Essay on American Involvement in World War, 1917 (Cont'd.).
- 170 Report on Fruitville Farms; "Story of the Rough Riders", draft by Walter B. Stevens.
- 171 Thousands Attend Memorial Day Celebrations at Fruitville, 1918.
- 172 Torrey Senatorial Campaign, 1918; Torrey Senatorial Plans in Wyoming, 1894.
- 173 "Story of the Rough Riders," 1900 (completed version); election broadside, Selden P. Spencer for U.S. Senate, 1918.
- 174 Torrey Mentioned as McKinley's Running Mate, 1900.
- 175 Selden Spencer Addresses Veterans at Ex-Confederate Home at Higginsville, 1918; Passenger List, Steamship Service to Panama, 1913; Letter to Torrey From Cornelius Roach, Missouri Secretary of State, 1915.
- 176 Torrey Senatorial Campaign, 1918.
- 177 Torrey Engaged to Mrs. Sarah Frances Reiley, 1920.
- 178 Torrey Senatorial Campaign, 1918 (Cont'd.).
- 179 Torrey Senatorial Campaign, 1918 (Cont'd.).
- 180 Col. J. L. Torrey Weds Mrs. Frances Reiley, 26 October 1920.
- 181 Jay L. Torrey Dead at Age 67, December 4, 1920, Obituaries.
- 182 Jay L. Torrey Dead at Age 67, December 4, 1920, Obituaries (Cont'd.).
- 183 Broadside: Memorial Day Celebration at Fruitville, 1918.
- 184 Jay L. Torrey dead at age 67, December 4, 1920, obituaries (cont'd.); Polled Hereford Cattle.

- 185 Memorial Day Celebration at Fruitville, 1918.
- 186 West Plains, Fruitville, and Salem Road Association, 1919.
- 187 Petition Regarding Discontinuance of Fruitville Post Office, 1916; Torrey Senatorial Campaign, 1918.
- 188 West Plains, Fruitville, and Salem Road Association, 1919; Automobile Tour to Fruitville, 1919.
- 189 Howell County State Roads; Myatt Township Good Roads Association, Howell County, Missouri; Ozark Scenic Highway.
- 190 West Plains, Fruitville and Salem Road Association, 1919, Mass Meeting in Myatt Township, 1919.
- 191 Federation of Missouri Commercial Clubs.

Enclosures: U.S. Patent office documents pertaining to Jay L. Torrey's improvements in branding irons and saddle blankets, 1894.

r299

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Index Cards

Advertising—Real estate business
Arcadia Country Club (Saint Francois County, Mo.).
Baltzell, C. H.
Bartholomew, L. O.
Bee culture
Brandsville (Mo.)
Buehler, Henry Andrew, 1876-1944
Charles, John C.
Chillicothe (Mo.)
Clarke, M. B.
Drury Academy
Embar Cattle Company (Embar, Wyo.)
Emigration and immigration
Evans, W. M.
Federation of Missouri Commercial Clubs
Fruit-culture—Missouri—Howell County
Fruitville (Mo.)
Fruitville Farm
Goats—Breeding
Godlove, Lewis
Jefferson City (Mo.)
Gist Goat Company
Hadley, Grace T.
Higginsville (Mo.)
Hodge, Wallace B.
Howell County (Mo.)
Howell County Poultry and Pet Stock Association (Mo.)
Krone, Charles F.
Livestock—Missouri—Breeding
Louisiana (Mo.)
Mammoth Spring Electric Power and Light Association (Ark.)
McDearmon, Mary Irwin
Mississippi Valley Newspapermen's Association
Missouri, Arkansas and Gulf Railroad Company
Missouri. Board of Immigration
Missouri. State Fruit Experiment Station (Mountain Grove, Mo.)
Missouri Immigration Society
Mountain Grove (Mo.)

Mules—Missouri.
Myatt Township Good Roads Association (Howell County, Mo.).
Myatt Creek Bridge (Howell County, Mo.)
National Good Roads Congress
Nicolay, Helen
Osborne, John E.
Ozark Bankers' Development Committee
Ozark Land Congress (Springfield, Mo.)
Ozark Boosters Press Association
Ozark Trail Association
Pentecost, J. E. S.
Reiley, Sarah Frances
Roach, Cornelius
Roads—Missouri—Howell County
Rough Riders [SEE United States. Army. Volunteer Cavalry, 2nd.]
St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company
Spanish-American War, 1898
Spencer, Selden P.
Southeast Missouri Good Roads Association
Stevens, Walter B. (Walter Barlow), 1848-1939
Thayer (Mo.)
Tolerton, Jesse A.
Torrey, Jay Linn, 1852-1920
Torrey, Robert Augustus
Torrey, Sarah Frances Reiley
Torrey family—Genealogy
Torreytown (Mo.)
United Spanish War Veterans
United States. Army. Volunteer Cavalry, 2nd
United States—History—War of 1898 [SEE Spanish-American War, 1898.]
University of Missouri. Board of Visitors
Veterans—United States—Societies
Walbridge, Cyrus Packard, 1849-
West Plains, Fruitville and Salem Road Association
West Plains Commercial Club (Mo.)
West Plains (Mo.)
White, Fulton S.
Williams, Walter, 1864-1935
Willow Springs (Mo.)
Willow Springs Commercial Club (Mo.)
Women's Library Club (West Plains, Mo.)
Woodruff, J. D.