

# **Amos and Louis Dwight Pilsbury Scrapbook 1872 - 1879**

**Special Collections of the Lloyd Sealy Library  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
899 Tenth Avenue  
New York, NY 10019**

Collection arranged by Ellen Sexton, August 1997.

## Introduction

This scrapbook was purchased from a Boston dealer, Kenneth Shure, along with the Ainsley C. Armstrong Collection, for Lloyd Sealy Library by the Chief Librarian Dr. Larry Sullivan during the summer of 1996. Originally, they were considered as one collection, but as the scrapbook appears to have no direct relationship to the Armstrong collection, it is now being considered as a separate collection.

## Biographical note

Amos Pilsbury was born in New Hampshire in 1805 and died in 1873. After serving an apprenticeship in the tanning trade, he started work as a prison guard in the New Hampshire state prison, where his father was warden. He served under his father both there and in Weatherfield prison, Connecticut, where he served as deputy warden to his father, until his father's retirement in 1830. He was invited to administer the new Albany Penitentiary in 1845, which he did almost continuously until his death in 1873. He spent the years from 1855-1859 working at Ward's Island and from 1859 to 1869 served as the general superintendent of the New York City police.

Louis Dwight Pilsbury was born in Wetherfield , CT. in 1848. At 16 he started working as a guard in the Albany Penitentiary. In 1873 he was appointed as Superintendent of the prison, upon the death of his father, a position he held for 6 years, when he resigned amidst a public outcry. He then accepted the nomination as Superintendent of State Prisons for New York State. In 1896 he became the warden of the penitentiary on Blackwell's Island, a position he resigned in 1898, having spent fifty years working in the prison system. He apparently became wealthy through some real estate transactions in upstate New York.

Sources:

Warden Pilsbury resigns. (1898, March 8). New York Times, p. 5.  
Pilsbury, Amos. (1967). In Who was who in America ( Historical volume 1607-1896, p. 483). Chicago, IL: Marquis Who's Who.

Papers from the scrapbook.

## Scope and contents

The collection consists of one large scrapbook containing newspaper cuttings and some handwritten pages. The years covered are 1872 to 1879. Most of the newspaper cuttings concern General Pilsbury, Superintendent of the Albany Penitentiary, and former Chief of Police in New York City, and his son Captain Louis Pilsbury, who was given the post of Superintendent on the retirement of his father. The cuttings appear to be mainly from Albany newspapers. The early cuttings cover the visit to Europe by the elder Pilsbury to attend the International Prison Reform Congress, held in London in July 1872. The cuttings include some letters from Europe written by Pilsbury which were published in a newspaper. Two more letters in the scrapbook, apparently from the same series, are handwritten. There are also some loose pages entitled "A visit to Chatham jail" that have been written in the same handwriting.

General Pilsbury resigned from the penitentiary in February 1873, for reasons of ill health, according to the cuttings. His son, who had been acting superintendent during his father's absence in Europe, was then appointed as superintendent by the Board of Supervisors.

The cuttings then cover the controversy which resulted in the resignation of Captain Pilsbury from the position of Superintendent. Apparently he instigated a program of convict labor, which ensured that the prison became financially independent. This program was not popular with members of the labor movements outside the prison.

## **Series description**

The collection is composed of a single series consisting of one scrapbook containing newspaper cuttings and some handwritten sheets, all housed in one box.