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Timothy Lester Woodruff

A New Home for His Papers



Lieutenant governor of New York, president of the Adelphi Board of Trustees, close friend and confidante of Adelphi's first president Charles H. Levermore and Theodore Roosevelt, **Timothy Lester Woodruff** (1858–1913) was an impressive man and a great friend to Adelphi, even considered by many as the co-founder of Adelphi College. Woodruff Hall bears his name. And thanks to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Allan R. Keith of Massachusetts (Mrs. Keith's father, Hugh Allen Ward, was Mr. Woodruff's nephew), the University has received his papers, which further illuminate the history of Adelphi and Mr. Woodruff's place in it.

The Hugh Allan Ward and Winifred Alling Ward Keith Collection of the Papers of Timothy L. Woodruff consists of thousands of items, among them correspondence with William Taft, Woodrow Wilson, business leaders, and members of Congress, and a trove of letters and other records regarding Adelphi.

A friend of Charles Levermore's from their undergraduate days at Yale, Mr. Woodruff was instrumental in helping Mr. Levermore realize his vision of expanding Adelphi Academy to create a four-year college in Brooklyn. By 1895, when he accepted his friend's invitation to be president of the Adelphi Academy Board of

Trustees (just two years after Mr. Levermore became principal of Adelphi Academy), Mr. Woodruff was already a successful businessman and rising rapidly through the New York Republican Party.

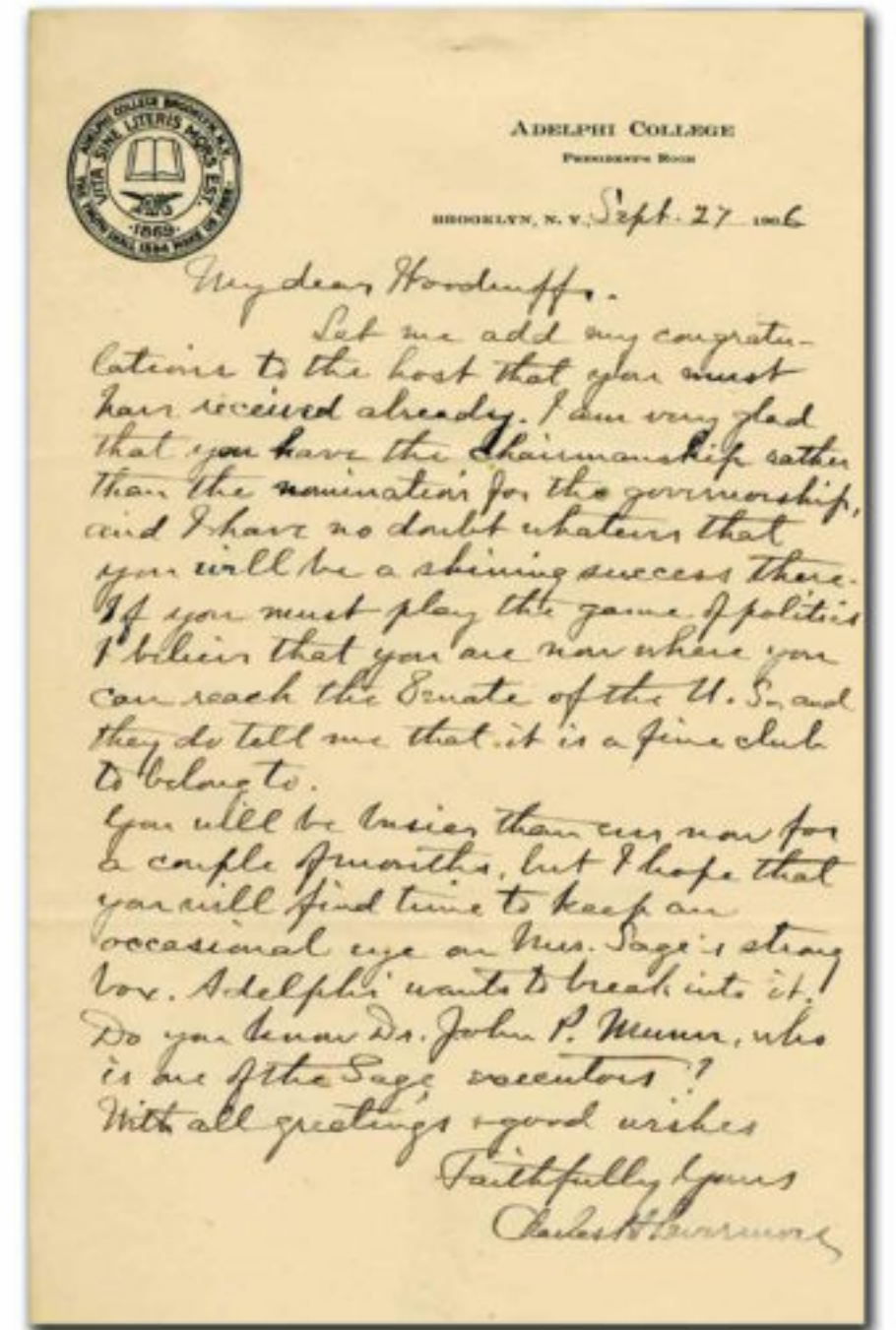
Orphaned as a young boy, and by all accounts an enterprising and self-made man, Mr. Woodruff was owner, president, or director of several corporations, including the Worcester Salt Company and the Smith Premier Typewriter Company. He also developed a lucrative warehousing and wharfing business.

In 1896, he was appointed Brooklyn park commissioner. A few months later, he won his first election as lieutenant governor of New York and was subsequently re-elected for two additional terms, serving his second term under Governor Theodore Roosevelt. A powerful player in the Republican Party organization, particularly in Manhattan and Brooklyn, he narrowly missed becoming president of the United States. In 1900, he had been promised the vice presidential nomination, but the McKinley campaign preferred Theodore Roosevelt. Had he been chosen, he would have succeeded to the presidency upon President McKinley's assassination in 1901.

Mr. Woodruff's energy, dedication, and clout served him, and ultimately Adelphi, well in his role as president of the Board of Trustees. Almost immediately upon his appointment, he led the Board to apply to the New York State Board of Regents for a new charter authorizing Adelphi to grant baccalaureate degrees. In record time, the Regents unanimously approved the application, effective at 4:30 p.m. on June 24, 1896. Thus, Adelphi College was born. As a result of the new charter, the Academy remained intact, sharing the same board of trustees as the College until 1925 and the same campus until 1929.

Mr. Woodruff was also an adept fundraiser. In 1902, he secured from John D. Rockefeller a \$125,000 challenge grant. In just three weeks, Mr. Woodruff raised, almost single-handedly, the required matching funds. For the first time in history, Adelphi was debt-free. In his *Fifty Years of Adelphi College*, Professor Chester L. Barrows aptly refers to Mr. Woodruff as "a tower of strength to Adelphi."

Mr. Woodruff resigned as president of the Board in 1908 but remained an active member until his untimely death, at age 55, on October 12, 1913. (He suffered an "attack



of apoplexy" while giving a speech at Cooper Union on September 29, 1913 and died thirteen days later.) An editorial in the *New York Times* the day after his death described him as "a man of genial personality, generous in his dealing with others and possessed of the social gift, highly developed." The Board of Trustees' resolution read in part, "The College and the individual members of the Board have by his death lost a wise counselor, an earnest advocate, and a true friend." On October 12, 1953, the 40th anniversary of his death, the Adelphi gymnasium, which had simply been called the "R" or Recreation Building since its construction in 1929, was

renamed and dedicated in memory of Timothy L. Woodruff.

Mr. Woodruff's papers will provide a rich resource for researchers, both within and beyond the University, who are interested in New York and U.S. politics, the early history of Adelphi, or the biography of a truly remarkable man.

— EUGENE T. NEELY,
University Archivist and
Special Collections Librarian