



*New York State Archives*

**New York State Governor Executive Clemency and Pardon  
Case Files A0597**

---

New York State Archives  
222 Madison Avenue  
Albany, NY 12230  
[archref@nysed.gov](mailto:archref@nysed.gov)  
URL: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/>

---

## Table of Contents

---

Overview of the Records .....	3
Arrangement .....	3
Administrative History .....	3
Scope and Contents .....	4
Related Information .....	5
Other Finding Aids .....	6
Use of Records .....	6
Administrative Information .....	6
Access Terms .....	6

## Overview of the Records

---

<b>Repository:</b>	New York State Archives
<b>Summary:</b>	The case files in this series document the process of application for and granting of pardons or commutations of sentences by the Governor. Convicts and their families, friends, and attorneys applied to have sentences reduced or terminated and, for convicted felons, to have citizenship rights restored. The files may include letters and petitions to the Governor, copies of court documents, inmate data and conduct records, transcripts of testimony, Governor's commutation statement, and inmate's statement accepting terms of release.
<b>Creator:</b>	New York (State). Governor
<b>Title:</b>	Executive clemency and pardon case files
<b>Quantity:</b>	302 cubic feet
<b>Inclusive Date:</b>	1859-1965
<b>Series:</b>	A0597

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Arrangement

---

Chronological order by date of application.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Administrative History

---

Article 18 of the 1777 State Constitution authorized the Governor to grant pardons and reprieves. This power was continued in the constitutions of 1821 and 1846 and was expanded to include commutations by Article IV, Section 5 of the Constitution of 1894.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Scope and Content Note

---

These records document the process of application for and granting of pardons or commutations of sentences by the Governor. Convicts and their families, friends, and attorneys applied to have sentences reduced or terminated and, for convicted felons, to have citizenship rights restored.

Case files were usually wrapped in standard form cover sheets or, beginning in 1910, filed in standard form file folders providing: name of convict; date application received; date sentenced; court; judge's name; county; crime; term of sentence; expiration of sentence; prison; and date application refused or granted and amount of commutation (e.g. in years).

Case files may also contain any of the following types of documents: letters and petitions to the Governor from convicts or others arguing for or against executive clemency, often giving details of the crime; copy of indictment or other court documents; printed case books detailing arguments of plaintiff and defendant; health and conduct reports from prison wardens and chaplains; correspondence from the judge, district attorney, arresting officer, and occasionally a juror involved in a case, giving their opinion as to whether executive clemency is advisable; transcripts of trial testimony or testimony before the Governor; Bertillon cards providing a photograph and physical description of the prisoner; Governor's commutation statement; and prisoner's statement accepting terms of release.

Some documents do not relate to any one particular case or provide information about several cases: correspondence from an institution to the Governor regarding the status of several inmate applicants; and requests from attorneys and others for blank forms or information regarding executive clemency rules and procedures.

A0597-16: Documents in these files resemble those in New York State Archives Record Series A0597 Clemency Application Files, 1859-1926 (185 c.f.), but they include much more inter-agency and external correspondence than the earlier files. Files typically contain the following documents:

copy of clemency grant by Governor; press release by Governor's office announcing clemency grant; inmate's application for clemency grant; additional correspondence with inmate; report by Division of Parole (parole officer) on clemency grant application; report by prison warden on clemency grant application; probation report at time of sentencing in trial court; correspondence with Governor's office, corrections officials, district attorney, trial court judge, regarding the application; and correspondence with private persons supporting or opposing grant of clemency.

A0597-16: Files occasionally contain additional documents, such as: photograph ("mug shot" of inmate, sometimes with Bertillon measurements); certified copy of minutes of sentencing in trial court; and criminal history reports (Federal Bureau of Investigation and/or Bureau of Criminal Identification).

The densest information in the files is found in the reports by probation and parole officers. The reports usually consist of several pages of single-spaced typewritten text containing very detailed accounts of the applicant's personal, criminal, and family history. The reports of parole officers and prison wardens, and the correspondence of prison wardens, district attorneys, and judges contain recommendations and justifications for granting or not granting clemency. Some inmates made applications for clemency two or more times. In such cases there are two or more supplemental reports by a parole officer on the application for commutation or pardon, as well as additional correspondence.

There are a few boxes of miscellaneous materials, such as trial transcripts and appellate court records on appeal that evidently relate to applications for clemency and were filed separately because of their bulk.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Related Information

---

### Related Material

A0629 Executive Clemency and Pardon Application Ledgers and Correspondence contains related records.

A0626 Executive Clemency Application Status Ledgers contains related records.

A0628 Restoration of Citizenship Rights Application Ledgers contains related records.

A0585 Restoration of Citizenship Rights Application Case Files contains related records.

A3217 Executive Statements of the Governor contains references to individuals granted or denied commutations of sentences.

### Related Publications

A0597-16: There is no known index to the clemency applicants and application numbers. Complete lists of persons receiving clemency grants are available in the public papers of the governors for the entire time period of these records.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Other Finding Aids

---

### Available at Repository

Name index is available at the repository.

Container list is available at the repository.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Use of Records

---

### Access Restrictions

Series is partially restricted. State Archives staff will review requests for specific records and disclose as permitted by New York State Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) and other applicable state and federal statutes.

---

## Administrative Information

---

### Processing Information

Several files in this series were originally accessioned as Series A0237, New York State Court of Oyer and Terminer Trial Transcripts, 1865-1868. Upon closer examination in 2014, the documents were identified as having become estrayed from Series A0597. These documents were subsequently interfiled in Series A0597 and Series A0237 ceased to exist.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Access Terms

---

- Executive power
- Criminals--Rehabilitation
- Crime
- Governors
- Pardon

- Criminals
- Case files
- New York (State)
- Pardoning
- Clemency