

# Guide to the Edward Parker Read Papers

GEN MSS 827



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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition .....	3
Conditions Governing Access .....	3
Conditions Governing Use .....	4
Preferred Citation .....	4
Processing Information .....	4
Biographical / Historical .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	4
Arrangement .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
Series I: Professional papers, 1842–1955 .....	6
Tonics and cures .....	6
Legal papers .....	7
Series II: Personal and family papers, 1898–1944 .....	8
Selected Search Terms .....	9

## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** GEN MSS 827

**CREATOR:** Read, Edward Parker, 1868?-1944

**TITLE:** Edward Parker Read Papers

**DATES:** 1842-1955

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 3.33 linear feet (4 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English (Latin script)

**SUMMARY:** The Edward Parker Read Papers contain the professional papers of Edward Parker Read and the personal papers of Read and his wife, Alphonsenia Smith, and her family. Professional papers include business records, advertisements, correspondence, pamphlets, judicial documents, and real estate documents. Personal papers include family photographs, identification cards, social organization membership documents, correspondence, and family history documents.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/>.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Waiting for Godot Books, 2014.

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### Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research

## Conditions Governing Use

The Edward Parker Read Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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## Preferred Citation

Edward Parker Read Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

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## Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

These materials have been arranged and described according to national and local standards. For more information, please refer to the Beinecke Manuscript Unit Processing Manual.

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## Biographical / Historical

Edward Parker Read (circa 1869-1944) was a Black American businessman, author, publisher, real estate developer, legal figure, and self-proclaimed doctor who worked primarily in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Lawnside, New Jersey. Read was born in Keysville, Virginia, and was the youngest of seven children. He claimed to have opened the first Black American owned drugstore in the Commonwealth of Virginia, in 1899. In 1900 he opened a drugstore in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In 1910 Read married Alphonsenia (Allie) Smith, who acted as a partner in Read's businesses and organizations. Smith's family was a prominent Black American family in Lawnside, New Jersey, and her parents, Charles and Josephine Smith, owned properties including the Woodland Terrace Hotel. During this time he increased his business activity, both as a "doctor" and as a real estate developer.

Read's work as a doctor was primarily in the sale of cures, which included mineral water supplements and incense. Despite his assertions, he did not have a medical degree. He also published material that related to his medical work, which includes encyclopedias and publications aimed at the Black American community. In 1920 Read was indicted of illegally calling himself a doctor and found guilty of fraud.

Read's work as a real estate developer was focused in the the town of Lawnside, New Jersey, one of the first independent and self-governing Black American communities in the Northeastern United States. He encouraged the purchase of properties by Black Americans, as well as developing civic buildings and other buildings for his personal businesses. He also served as a justice of the peace.

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## Scope and Contents

The Edward Parker Read Papers contain the professional papers of Edward Parker Read and the personal papers of Read and his wife, Alphonsenia Smith, and her family. Professional papers include business records, advertisements, correspondence, pamphlets, judicial documents, and real estate documents. Personal papers include family photographs, identification cards, social organization membership documents, correspondence, and family history documents.

The professional documents cover Read's professional life as a "doctor", as well as his work in real estate development. Work regarding his businesses in health are primarily advertisements, but also include Read's writings as well as patent applications. There are no business records, excepting correspondence between Read and people who acted as agents to sell his products. Material regarding his work as a real estate developer and civic leader includes judicial papers, city diagrams, and advertisements aimed at the Black American population.

The personal documents primarily document the lives of Read, Alphonsenia Smith, and her family. This includes photographs of the family, but does not identify any of the family members in particular.

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## **Arrangement**

This collection is organized into two series: I. Professional papers, 1842-1955; II. Personal papers, 1898-1944. The Professional papers series is further organized into two groupings: Tonics and Cures, and Legal Papers.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Professional papers, 1842–1955

Tonics and cures		
b. 1, f. 1	Assorted multiple product advertisements	circa 1940
b. 1, f. 2	Correspondence envelopes	undated
b. 1, f. 3	Divinum advertisements	undated
b. 4, f. 1	Divinum Herbarium Remedium Natures broadside	undated
b. 4, f. 2	Dr. Read's corn, warts, and callous remedy advertisement	undated
b. 4, f. 3	Dr. Read's Eureka nerve body tonic advertisement	undated
b. 4, f. 4	Dr. Read's Herb Tonic for constipation, nervousness, kidney and bladder conditions	undated
b. 1, f. 4	Eureka perpetual calendar	undated
b. 4, f. 5	Eureka Remedy poster	undated
b. 1, f. 5	Life Prosperity Chart product advertisements	undated
b. 1, f. 6	Natural remedy and Snake Oil advertisements	undated
b. 1, f. 7	Portrait and business cards	1940
b. 1, f. 8	Product advertisements	1929
b. 1, f. 9	Professional correspondence	undated
b. 1, f. 10	Professional correspondence	1899–1939
b. 1, f. 11	Read's Encyclopedia	undated
b. 1, f. 12	Read's Encyclopedia	undated
b. 1, f. 13	Read's Encyclopedia product advertisements	undated
b. 1, f. 14	Read's Encyclopedia Ready Reference	undated
b. 1, f. 15	Read's Encyclopedia Ready Reference	undated
b. 1, f. 16	Read's Encyclopediac	undated
b. 1, f. 17	TB Donaldson company product advertisements	undated
b. 1, f. 18	Tonic and mineral water correspondence	1940–1941
b. 1, f. 19	Tonic and mineral water correspondence	1942–1944
b. 1, f. 20	Tonic and mineral water correspondence	1944–1955
b. 1, f. 21	Tonics and cures writings	Circa 1939

## Tonics and cures (continued)

b. 1, f. 22	Virginia medical mineral spring advertisements	undated
b. 1, f. 23	We and Me herb tonic advertisement	undated
Legal papers		
b. 1, f. 24	Business Trust letterheads and forms	undated
b. 1, f. 25	Deeds	1875-1943
b. 1, f. 26	Edward P. Read as judge of small claims court	1920
b. 1, f. 27	Edward P. Read as Superintendant of Mail article	Circa 1900
b. 1, f. 28	Eureka Land Trust documents	Circa 1920
b. 2, f. 1	Government and Borough formation writings	undated
b. 2, f. 2	Land trust legal	1927-1932
b. 2, f. 3	Miller's Business directory	1927
b. 4, f. 6	National Cooperative Association	undated
b. 2, f. 4	Patents	1926-1954
b. 4, f. 7	Readville, New Jersey map and layout	undated
b. 4, f. 8	Readville, New Jersey rules of safety for home owners	undated
b. 4, f. 9	Supreme Lodge membership certificate	circa 1900
b. 2, f. 5	Tax documents	1930
b. 2, f. 10	Union township	1842
b. 2, f. 6	Watchman - publication	undated
b. 4, f. 10	White Horse Pike diagram	undated

**Series II: Personal and family papers, 1898–1944**

b. 3, f. 1	Allie and Charlie Smith photographs	circa 1900
b. 3, f. 2	Car photographs	undated
b. 3, f. 3	Checks and receipts	1898–1933
b. 3, f. 4	Edward Read and Josephine Smith photographs	
b. 3, f. 5	Elk Lodges constitutions	undated
b. 3, f. 6	Elk lodges initiation documents	undated
b. 3, f. 7	Eric Chandler ID cards	1944
b. 3, f. 8	Health information	undated
b. 3, f. 9	Home photographs	undated
b. 3, f. 10	Josephine Smith personal photographs	circa 1940
b. 3, f. 11	Josephine Smith, Charles Smith, legal and financial documents	1898–1911
b. 3, f. 12	"Money" poem	undated
b. 3, f. 13	Portrait photographs	1942
b. 3, f. 14	Religious material	undated



## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

African American business enterprises -- New  
Jersey  
African American business enterprises --  
Pennsylvania  
Encyclopedias and dictionaries -- United States  
Patent medicines -- United States

### **Genres / Formats**

Advertisements -- Medicines, Patent,  
proprietary, etc.  
perpetual calendars