The Archives recently acquired the Jackson County Circuit Court case files of the D'Autremont Brothers' trials from 1927 and 1956-1957.

The D'Autremont brothers rose to notoriety after they murdered four men in their attempted train robbery in the Siskiyou Mountains in 1923. The robbery failed because they used too much dynamite on the mail car doors and ended up completely destroying it instead. Ray, Roy and Hugh all managed to escape the scene of the crime, but they left behind forensic evidence authorities were able to use to identify the brothers. Their wanted posters were spread far and wide which was how Hugh was eventually apprehended in the Philippines in 1927, where he was serving in the army under an assumed name.

Hugh was extradited back to Jackson County for trial and sentenced to life imprisonment. His brothers were caught in Ohio and shortly after the verdict, accepted a plea deal where they too were sentenced to life in prison. Incarcerated at the Oregon State Penitentiary, Ray and Hugh proved to be model prisoners. Ray took up painting and taught art classes while Hugh ran the Penitentiary's print shop and edited the prison newsletter. Hugh died of cancer in 1959. However Roy did not adapt well to prison life and authorities had to send him to the State Hospital in 1949, where he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Roy died in a nursing home in 1983. Ray was paroled in 1961, received a commutation of his sentence from Governor McCall in 1972 and died in 1984.

These new records are most notable in that they include copies of the brothers' self-written confessions. Both Hugh and Ray wrote theirs out in a couple pages each, while Roy wrote 54 pages of autobiography. The case files also include more information provided by Postal Inspector Tennyson Jefferson, who aside from having a very distinguished sounding name, maintained a lifelong interest in seeing the D'Autremont brothers remain in prison. The new records, especially when combined with other records at the State Archives, are also notable in how they illustrate the criminal justice system from multiple perspectives and provide insights into the purpose and intent of incarceration.

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