

Copyrighted Cartoons Recall Notorious French Trial

WENDI A. MALONEY

When Homer Davenport died in 1912, he was one of America's foremost political cartoonists. Last month, Patrick Madden of the Junior Fellows Summer Intern Program found a number of Davenport cartoons among copyright applications from 1899. For the past several years, summer interns have researched and inventoried historical copyright applications. Many still include deposits that reveal previously undiscovered examples of American creativity.

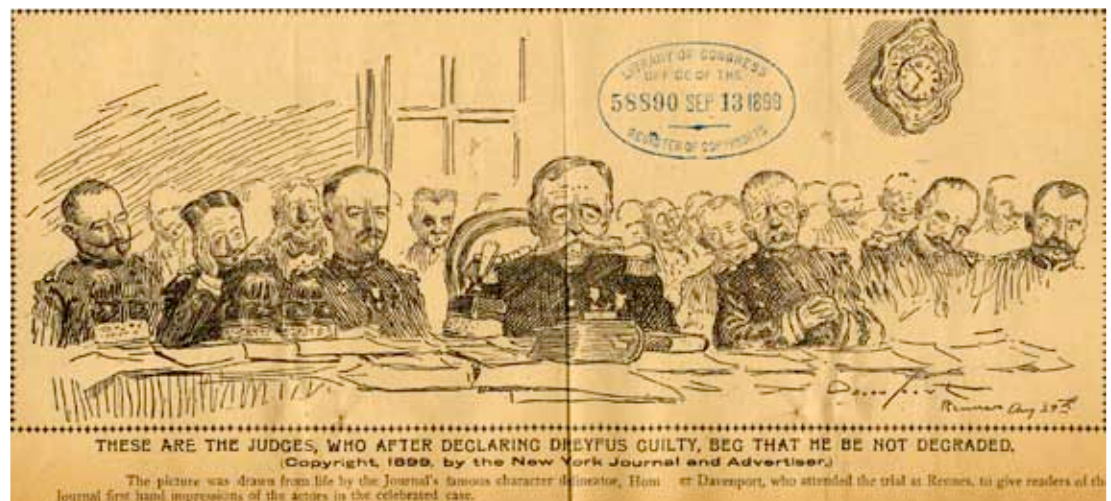
The Davenport cartoons Madden unearthed all relate to the 1899 court martial in Rennes, France, of Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jewish army captain charged with selling military secrets to the Germans. In 1895, Dreyfus was sentenced to life in prison on Devil's Island in French Guiana. Later, evidence emerged suggesting that an army major was the real spy and that Dreyfus had been framed. The case inspired strong reaction in France, touching on issues of military honor, nationalism, and anti-Semitism.

Dreyfus was brought back to France in 1899 for a second court martial that captured

worldwide attention. Again, he was found guilty. But the French president pardoned him 10 days later, and in 1906 he was proclaimed innocent.

Homer Davenport covered the Dreyfus trial for the *New York Journal and Advertiser*, owned by publisher William Randolph Hearst. On the same trip, he visited England and caricatured prominent figures there. Born near Silverton, Oregon, Davenport sketched from an early age, inspired by his mother's ambition for him to be a political cartoonist. He first worked for Hearst in San Francisco, moving to New York in 1895. Davenport often took on the political establishment and was best known for his cartoons about politics and industrial reform.

Davenport died on May 2, 1912, at age 45. He caught pneumonia after drawing cartoons on the New York docks the night survivors of the shipwrecked *Titanic* arrived. "Few cartoonists had attained such great fame, or dealt stronger blows than Davenport," read an obituary in the *American Review of Reviews*. "His death removed a potent force in American journalism." ©



The *New York Journal and Advertiser* registered this Homer Davenport drawing in September 1899, charging the fee to its deposit account. The cartoon shows the judges who declared Dreyfus guilty in his second court martial. The caption cites Davenport as the newspaper's "famous character delineator."