

John L. Wolcott Collection

1 Box

Reprocessed by
Brigid R. McBride
Spring 2009

Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	One Box.
COLLECTION DATES:	1843-2006
RESTRICTIONS:	None.
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History.
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None.
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None.
LOCATION:	Archives.
NOTES:	None.

History

John Laurens Wolcott was born in Berkshire County, Massachusetts on August 30, 1808. He married Caroline Baker in 1834 and settled in Greigsville, New York before moving to Bloomington in 1843. Wolcott went into business with Goodman and Lyman Ferre manufacturing wagons and furniture, especially coffins.

John eventually left his business with the Ferres to become the first undertaker in Bloomington in 1859. At first he made his own coffins and, in 1870, started ordering coffins from other businesses. Wolcott sold wood caskets and metal caskets (around the Civil War) and had the first horse drawn hearse in Bloomington.

John Wolcott also was a beekeeper for pleasure and profit. He started his beekeeping while living in New York and continued his interest in bees while living in Bloomington. He had up to several hundred colonies on his property at the corner of Wood and Main Streets in Bloomington.

Wolcott spent his life as an active Mason and a respected businessman. In 1887, his son William was accused of killing Mr. George Kurtz and was sentenced to five years in prison. John Wolcott died in December of 1887.

Scope and Content Note

The J.L. Wolcott Collection contains photocopies of newspaper articles and advertisements for Wolcott's undertaking business, his diaries from 1884-1887, biographical information, correspondence and family genealogy materials. The collection materials date from 1843-2006

Folder Inventory

- Folder 1: Newspaper Articles
- Folder 2: John L. Wolcott Diaries
- Folder 3: John L. Wolcott Biographical Material
- Folder 4: Correspondence
- Folder 5: Genealogy

John L. Wolcott Collection

Folder 1: Newspaper Articles (*Pantagraph*, unless noted)

1. "Coffins" (notice), October 19, 1858, p. 3.
2. "Dust to Dust. A Talk with Him who Performs the Last Sad Offices of the Dead," January 5, 1883, p. 3.
3. "The Busy Bees," January 27, 1883, p. 3.
4. "Honey Makers. The Bee Men of Central Illinois Organize an Association," February 12, 1883, p. 3.
5. "Smoking the Bees," Bulletin, September 4, 1883, p. 4.
6. "A Poor Season for Honey" November 4, 1887, p. 4.
7. "Death's Demand" (Wolcott's obituary), December 20, 1887, p. 4.
8. "The First Undertaker. Homer Wolcott Furnishes Annette an Interesting Story," *Daily Bulletin*, April 18, 1899, p. 2.
9. "Reminiscences of an Early Settler," January 11, 1908, p. 15.
10. "John L. Wolcott was Bloomington's pioneer undertaker" ("Page from Our Past" column), July 2, 2006, p. B3.

Folder 2: John L. Wolcott Diaries

1. Tan-colored book, January 1, 1884 to December 31, 1884. This diary contains weather information, who purchased coffins, sicknesses, who purchased other products (vegetables), information about his beehives, family genealogy information. In the back of the diary are two lists of names.
2. Red-colored book, January 1, 1884 to December 31, 1887. This diary contains the weather conditions, local disasters, information about the beekeeping business, his sons William's legal troubles, and John Wolcott's death. The back on the diary includes lists of names, "McLeans Mortality," and some financial records.
3. Typed highlights from 1887 diary, 2 pgs.

Folder 3: John L. Wolcott Biographical Material

1. Biographical sketch, 3 pgs., compiled by Museum volunteer researcher for the 2006 Evergreen Cemetery Discovery Walk.
2. Bloomington City Directory, 1855-56, advertisement.
3. Bloomington City Directory, 1870-71, advertisements.
4. City Directory listings, 1859-60 to 1889, 1 pg., handwritten.
5. 1880 U.S. Census record.
6. Ten pages (photocopies) of Wolcott family scrapbook (from Adrienne Kernaghan), includes letter (typed transcription), October 5, 1843, Bloomington, from John L. Wolcott to Dear Brothers.

Folder 4: Correspondence

Stationery

1. Receipt, September 9, 1875 (photocopy and explanatory letter from Dorothy Woliung, October 12, 2006).

2. Wolcott Co. Undertakers stationery, 189_, 1 sheet (original)

Facsimiles from Adrienne Kernaghan, donated May 2002

1. Ellen E. (Wolcott) Bomgardner to father J. L. Wolcott, May 12, 1867.
2. J. L. Wolcott to daughter Ellen E. (Wolcott) Bomgardner, August 23, 1867.
3. J. L. Wolcott to daughter Ellen E. (Wolcott) Bomgardner, October 4, 1867.
4. (?) Bomgardner to father J. L. Wolcott (?), October 10, 1867.
5. J. L. Wolcott to children and grandchildren, September 15, 1868.

Originals

1. Minnie M. (?) Hill to E. N. Wolcott, April 14, 1890.

Folder 5: Genealogy

Donated by Adrienne Kernaghan, May 2002

1. Descendents of William Wolcott, 2 pgs.
2. Descendents of George Baumgardner (Bomgardner), 8 pgs.
3. Wolcott and Bomgardner grave markers, Old City (Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, Bloomington), 3 pgs.