

McLean County Museum of History

George W. Brown Collection

Processed by
Gretchen D. Monti
Summer 2007

Collection Information

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| VOLUME OF COLLECTION: | 1 box |
| COLLECTION DATES: | 1863-1929 |
| PROVENANCE: | Gift |
| 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: | Photograph of George W. Brown at work, 1.1. |

Historical Sketch

George W. Brown, 1823-1910, was a valuable member of the Benjaminville community, located 10 miles east of Bloomington. He was a leader in the Society of Friends of that community. He came to Bentown, as it became known, with wife Abigail (Sharp) and children in 1870 or 1871. Abigail died in 1873, leaving Brown with four children: W. O., Jennie (Mrs. Joseph Warner Coale), A. H. and Phoebe (Mrs. E. J. Smith). In 1875, he married Rebecca Allen, with whom he had two children: B. G. and Mary.

George Brown was a shoemaker by trade and had a cobbler shop that also sold groceries and housed the Bentown post office. He worked briefly on the farm of his father-in-law John Allen. He was active in the Benjaminville Library Association, with his record book recording that he was appointed Librarian in 1893.

According to Bloomington newspaper obituaries, George Brown was a birthright Quaker, born in Ohio, and an elder in the Benjaminville Society of Friends. The McLean County Museum of History houses in its archives an insightful history and description of the Society of Friends in Illinois written by Elizabeth H. Coale, a member of the Bentown organization and the mother-in-law of George Brown's daughter Jennie. Settlers from New York and Pennsylvania constructed the first Bentown meetinghouse in 1859; a larger building was constructed on the same site in 1873. Not only did the society hold religious services, in the early 1870s it operated a school to educate young people. The Benjaminville society was the first of the Illinois organizations to hold meetings in which both men and women participated, rather than holding separate meetings as was tradition.

Scope and Content Note

The George W. Brown collection is a compilation of personal documents of the Brown family and those of the Society of Friends. Among its contents are a handwritten journal, a household record book, a copybook, a few retail receipts, newspaper biographical articles and obituaries. A unique item is a handmade autograph book.

Members of the Society of Friends religious organization, or Quakers as they were called, populated Benjaminville (or Bentown) in the mid-19th Century. The Brown collection includes the record book of the Benjaminville Monthly Meeting of Women Friends, 1867-1912, as well as several publications of higher levels of the Friends organization.

The materials, which are organized in one box, date from approximately 1863 to 1929. Folder 1 contains George W. Brown's biographical information, gleaned from cemetery records and obituaries, as well as his photograph found in *The Illustrated History of McLean County*. Folders 2-4 contain Brown household documents. Folder 5 has a copybook written by Alcinda Allen, possibly a relative of Rebecca Allen Brown, George's second wife. Folder 6 has biographical information about Elizabeth Coale, Bentown area resident and mother-in-law of George's daughter Jennie. Folders 7-9 are Society of Friends materials, while Folder 10 is an advertisement for a toy top. Folder 11 is a miscellaneous collection of personal items.

Folder Inventory

Folder 1: George W. Brown, 1823-1910 – Biographical Information

- 1.1 Cemeteries in Dawson Township, McLean County, Illinois.
- 1.2 “Fall causes death,” obituary in the *Pantagraph*, January 31, 1910.
- 1.3 “George W. Brown called by death,” obituary in the *Daily Bulletin*, January 31, 1910.
- 1.4 George Brown in his Bentown shop, photograph from The Illustrated History of McLean County, Historical Society, 1982.

Folder 2: Home Journal of 1863

- 2.1 Booklet, handwritten, possibly by George W. Brown.

Folder 3: Record Book

- 3.1 Record book of George Brown and possibly wife Rebecca: notes of Benjaminville Library 1893-1910; household accounts; wedding presents (1917); poetry, songs.
- 3.2 Benjaminville Library, itemized list of members (?), 1 p. handwritten.

Folder 4: Receipts

- 4.1 Bunnell Brothers Fine Footwear, Bloomington, IL, undated receipt.
- 4.2 J. W. Turner General Merchandise, Coal, Farm Machinery and Toilet Articles 2 receipts for Mary Brown, no year.
- 4.3 J. W. Turner General Merchandise, Coal, Farm Machinery and Toilet Articles 2 receipts for Mary Brown, no year.

Folder 5: Alcinda Allen Copybook

- 5.1 Handwritten pages, some dated between 1863-1867.

Folder 6: Elizabeth Coale

- 6.1 “Has reached fourscore – Mrs. Elizabeth Coale’s career,” article in the *Pantagraph*, July 26, 1906. [Elizabeth Coale was the mother of J. Warner Coale, husband of Jennie E. Coale, George W. Brown’s daughter.]
- 6.2 Elizabeth Coale’s photograph-newspaper clipping.

Folder 7: Society of Friends publications

- 7.1 Gibbons, William M. D. *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Society of Friends*. Philadelphia: Friends’ Book Association, 1020 Arch Street, 1882.
- 7.2 *A Handbook of the Principles of the Religious Society of Friends*. Baltimore: the Lord Baltimore Press, 1920.
- 7.3 *Directory, Central Meeting of Friends*. Chicago: 18 Van Buren ST., 1895. In envelope addressed to Abraham H. Brown, Clerk, Blue River Quarterly Meeting, Benjaminville, Ill.

Folder 8: S. P. Robinson address to the Society of Friends

- 8.1 Typescript dated February 13, 1912, of speech written by S. P. Robinson of Bloomington, IL and read by Dr. C. C. Mills at the 50th anniversary celebration of the founding of the Society of Friends at Benjaminville, IL.

Folder 9: Elizabeth Roberts memoir

- 9.1 Booklet titled *Memoir of Elizabeth Roberts...a minister in the Society of Friends...also a memorial of Fall Creek Monthly Meeting*. Richmond, IN: DeVarmon Pr. [no date] circa 1885.

Folder 10: Multiform combination top advertisement

- 10.1 Multiform combination top advertisement

Folder 11: George W. Brown Collection Miscellaneous Items

- 11.1 Letter from D. Gibson to [Society of Friends] Blue River quarterly meeting, dated 9/6/1895, and note from Lydia A. Wilson, enclosed in envelope addressed to Clerk of the Meeting, Benjaminville, Ill.
- 11.2 Pages 365-366, *Young Friends' Review*.
- 11.3 Handwritten poem titled "A Little Boy's Thoughts".
- 11.4 Clipping of printed poem titled "Trumps" by Maurice Crayton.
- 11.5 Rebecca Allen's autograph book. Handmade, heart-shaped booklet. (removed to Object Collection by Susan August 21, 2014)
- 11.6 Scrap of paper with 9 names handwritten on it.

Record Book of Benjaminville Monthly Meeting of Women Friends. 1867-1912.

Essays on the Views of Friends by John J. Cornell (Philadelphia, Friends' Book Association: 1884).

The Discipline of the Society of Friends of Ohio Yearly Meeting.... Salem, Ohio: Davis and Griffith, 1842.

Minutes and Accompanying Documents of Illinois Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends....Ninth Month, 1909.

Minutes and Accompanying Documents of Illinois Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends....Ninth Month, 1910.

Minutes of Illinois Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1929.