

**McLean County Museum of History**

**Grover C. Helm  
(National Bank of Bloomington)  
Collection**

Processed by  
Museum intern Kenny Tymick  
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**Collection Information**

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	2 boxes
COLLECTION DATES:	1933 - 1955
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:	None

**Historical Sketch**

This collection consists of a series of scrapbooks put together by Grover C. Helm, who wrote most of the newspaper advertisements and banking reports in the scrapbooks. Helm presided over the merger of Bloomington's crippled banks during the Depression to

create the National Bank of Bloomington, the most respected and financially stable in the city. The National Bank of Bloomington was originally organized in 1857 as the Bank of Bloomington, though there were numerous changes to the bank's name and board membership until the merger under Helm in 1934. Besides being president of the National Bank of Bloomington (1934-1955), Helm was also president of the First National Bank in Mackinaw for 20 years prior. He was a successful businessman and a highly respected banking expert. On the local level, Helm was also recognized as an outspoken advocate for the agricultural concerns of farmers along with being an influential community leader. This collection was donated by the estate of Helen Falkingham, a daughter of Helm.

## Scope and Content Note

The Grover C. Helm collection consists primarily of newspaper articles and advertisements concerning the National Bank of Bloomington's financial success and stability throughout the years 1933-1945. There are also letters, magazine articles and speeches regarding Helm's opinion on agriculture, politics and business. Many of later scrapbooks include newspaper articles, correspondence and other items regarding Helm's leadership in local World War II loan drives.

## Folder Inventory

### BOX 1

#### Folder 1: Magazines

- 1.1.1 "Men and Events," published by The Union League Club of Chicago, December 1955, *Union League*, 44 pages.
- 1.1.2 *Telephone Topics*, published by The Gary Group Operating Telephone Companies, October 1952, 10 pages.
- 1.1.3 *The Burroughs Clearing House*, published by Burroughs Adding Machine Company, October 1942, 44 pages.

#### Folder 2: Newspaper Advertisement

- 1.2.1 "New Look for An Old Friend," advertisement and open house invitation for the National Bank of Bloomington, *Pantagraph*, March 29, 1962, includes photo essay tour of building and personnel, 16 pages.

### **Folder 3: Miscellaneous**

- 1.3.1 Gift Agreement, Ray Meliza (via Helen Falkingham estate), April 4, 1998.
- 1.3.2 City Directory listings for Grover C. Helm, 1919-1955/56, compiled by Museum volunteer Milan Jackson, October 2013.
- 1.3.3 Earlier typed inventory of collection, 3 pgs.

### **Loose Items**

#### **Binder:**

#### **Radio Talks 1938**

Radio talks on Bloomington station WJBC AM 1230 by Helm on agriculture, banking, credit, taxes and other opinions. Helm supported the Agrol Gasoline program that would consume 5,000 - 30,000 bushels of corn per day, and general corn production and agricultural and banking reforms. Binder includes letters from listeners as well as comments on duck hunting. Helm spoke about progressive and Christian consciousness in America and the impact of the existence of Santa Claus in American society. There are also various opinions on the expectations of American agriculture, business, and government policy and action for 1939.

#### **Scrapbook:**

#### **Agriculture 1933-34**

Newspaper articles from *The Pantagraph* covering, among other topics, the decline in corn prices and unrest among farmers, and the debate in the agricultural community whether to support formal U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union. Helm was an advocate of an increase in the minimum price of corn to 60 cents per bushel. Scrapbook includes correspondence on price reforms to Illinois Governor Henry Horner (who never replied) and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace; an address from Secretary Wallace regarding corn and hog prices; further telegrams, letters, and news articles detailing the negotiation of loans from 45 cents per bushel up to 60 cents; Helm's talk at Gridley, November 7, 1933; report of the U.S. Special Committee on Agriculture Policy; Helm talk at LeRoy, November 24, 1933; and letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 27, 1933.

#### **Scrapbook:**

#### **Banking 1934-35**

This scrapbook includes "Statement of Condition" and news articles regarding the opening of The National Bank of Bloomington (NBoB). There are reports of condition from 1934-1935 for The National Bank, Peoples Bank, American State Bank, The Corn Belt Bank, McLean County Bank (all of Bloomington), and The First National Bank of Chicago. News articles include

coverage of Helm's cooperation with the National Bank. There are letters of gratitude and recognition for his reorganization of the bank, and his elevation to bank president. A "Report of Code Committee" of the Illinois Bankers Association covers scheduling, interest, and compensation policies for the NBoB. Other items include reports on the financial strength of NBoB; loan solicitation from farmers and businessmen; and letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Scrapbook includes more advertisements of NBoB's stable policies on loans, deposits, and bonds. Helm quoted in article supporting rural electrification.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1935-36**

Scrapbook includes a one year financial report; letter to Helm from local business Berenz & Son; news on 10 percent dividends to depositors of bank; news of Helm's nephew's admittance to West Point; news briefs reporting success of bank, loan and general bank policies; and reports of conditions for affiliated banks of NBoB. A short news story reports on Helm's close friendship with Mickey Cochrane, famed baseball catcher for the Detroit Tigers. News articles on bank prosperity and Helm's reelection as president of NBoB, and newspaper photos of the construction of Helm's home and cattle on his farmland. Scrapbook also includes *Chicago Tribune* editorial criticizing the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1936-37**

Scrapbook includes the second year financial report; advertisements of general bank policies on loans for farmers, veterans, and businesses; dividend distribution; reports of condition of NBoB and affiliated banks; letter to Helm from friend; Helm's letter praising residential air conditioning unit showcased in American Foundry advertisement; newspaper photograph of Helm with his hunting group on a trip to South Dakota. The scrapbook also includes letter signed by employees of Grover C. Helm & Co. expressing appreciation for "shouldering the burden" for the Federal Security Act's tax assessment; news reports on death of Bloomington local John J. Thomassen; NBoB's fifth dividend distribution to depositors; a 60'' by 30'' hand-drawn holiday greeting card from anonymous depositor; invitation from "The President's Birthday Ball Committee;" telegram from Helm to Senator Carter Glass expressing respect and praise; news pictures of Helm and spouse before summer sailing trip; news article on NBoB's intent to purchase old post office at East and Jefferson in downtown Bloomington.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1937-38**

News on Helm's purchase of old post office for \$36,000 and plans to erect a four-story "auto hotel." Scrapbook also includes reports of conditions for NBoB and affiliated banks; advertisements and bank policies; articles on agricultural policies of AAA; various memorabilia; *Bankers Magazine* article on Helm's banking success; and letter to Helm from VP of The Chase National Bank in New York praising his advertising and public relations policies. Also included are personal letters, birthday cards, and valentines from friends and relatives. Other pages of interest include news article describing unusual weather conditions surrounding the Helm family's annual winter trips; a small booklet of birthday verses; Helm's objections to the AAA; and a short story regarding Helm and acquaintances on a boating trip, author unknown.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1938-39**

Includes news on opening of Auto Hotel, Thursday, June 16; several pages of Father's Day cards addressed to Helm; financial figures and reports of condition; advertisements for crop conditions, farmers' loans, message urging international isolationism; picture of Helm with local businessmen after a game of golf; Christmas greetings from president of the American Baseball Club of Philadelphia; letter concerning a radio talk given by Helm on December 31 from member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System in Washington; and a birthday card.

**BOX 2**

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1939-40**

Scrapbook includes reports of condition for NBoB and affiliated banks; advertisements for farm loans and policies, brief official bank statements supporting neutrality in European war; and copy of Helm's talk before the Kiwanis Club on business ethics and cooperation. Included are a couple birthday cards and a personal letter addressed to Helm; more advertisements on the state of the farm economy; information on Christmas savings checks; and news article on increasing NBoB's capital stock from \$150,000 to \$250,000.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1940-41**

Includes copy of an employee song sheet with verses about Helm and other Bloomington businessmen; news on Wendell Willkie,

Republican presidential nominee—his resemblance to Helm and his political platform; financial reports; reports of condition; advertisements; letter addressed to Helm penned in the name of “Scrappy,” one of Helm’s dogs, expressing Scrappy’s allegiance to Willkie and the Republican Party; news article by Helm defending McLean County Board of Supervisors rejection of food stamp plan; news photographs of meeting between Helm and Willkie; two short letters of appreciation addressed to Helm; letter from Willkie to Helm; news on the prevailing belief of inevitability of war including Helm’s opinion; and official statement by Helm to trust the American government despite his own contrary political beliefs. This scrapbook also hold a five-year comparative balance of the NBoB and growth of bank since 1934; program for annual mid-winter conference and dinner of the Illinois Bankers Association in Chicago (Helm delivered minor address); and letters from officials in Chicago and Washington praising Helm’s NBoB advertisements.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1941-1942**

Scrapbook includes report of seventh year NBoB assets; advertisements; reports of conditions; news on sale of bonds at bank; tribute to Clarence Darrow by Helm; 1907 report of marriage between Helm and his wife; news of bank dividend payment; news article “War Comes to Bloomington,” December 8, 1941, with Helm comments; December 9, 1941, news reports on Helm to head Red Cross war relief drive with office in Bloomington; talk by Helm at State Farm auditorium asking for Red Cross support; NBoB advertisement for Red Cross war bonds; Tribute to Helm, “unknown hero” of the war; news reports of county goal to support one B-17 bomber per month through purchase of bonds and stamps; brief news article covering Helm’s reelection as NBoB’s president; more articles on the bond sale drive, using slogan “Use your dough to bomb Tokyo;” letter commenting on Helm’s fundraising for the Red Cross far exceeding expectations by chapter chairman; birthday card to Helm penned by his three dogs, Scrappy, Sox, and Frank; envelope filled with more letters from “Scrappy;” correspondence between members of the Twig Branch of the Farmer’s Club, with Helm as secretary.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1942-43**

Scrapbook includes advertisements; a large number of war bond quota campaigning; and reports of condition. News article topics include McLean County bond quotas and expectations; Helm as regional chairman of the United States Treasury Department’s victory fund committee; Helm as head of regional committee to organize drive to sell \$3 billion of treasury securities; Helm’s

prediction Hitler will be defeated by “next Christmas day;” and photographs of regional victory fund committee meeting. Scrapbook also includes pamphlet giving warning on uncontrolled inflation; news article rebuking several hundred McLean County residents buying and cashing bonds immediately, labeling them “phony patriots;” McLean County bond quota achievements and goals; individual accounts of support of war effort at home, such as “Ten Percent Club” member Lyle Erdman donating 10 percent of income from ten-hour, seven-days-a-week job; Alton Railroad car dedicated to bond buying; Helm’s belief that national wealth can support government debt; Helm’s work with county women’s war bond drive; letter to U.S. Treasury Victory Fund Committee praising Helm’s devotion to the bond sales campaign from advertising manager of *The Pantagraph*; McLean County’s 1942 complete monthly bond quota output; Helm’s annual report to stockholders; news on the unanimous reelection of Helm as NBoB president; early corn planting on Helm farm; telegram to Helm from C.S. Young. Magazines include June 29, 1942 issue of *Finance*, featuring Helm on cover; October 1942 issue of *The Burroughs Clearing House*; and September 21, 1942 issue of *Finance*.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1943-44**

Scrapbook includes advertisements, news on war bond campaigns, reports of condition; and State Farm Insurance magazine *Reflector* covering “A Million or More by ‘44 in Spite of the War” campaign, with photo of Helm holding up Treasury flag. News articles report on women replacing husbands’ position at bank; joint drive between Bloomington and Normal for war loans; Helm named to new rural war loan committee; Helm appointed as a member of the research council of the American Bankers Association; reports of impoverished citizens determined to purchase bonds; letter of confirmation to the research council of American Bankers Association and list of current members; and reports on county war bond expectations being met, unmet, or various plans for new loan drives. Scrapbook also includes letter sent by Helm to *The Pantagraph* praising recent Thanksgiving article; an anonymous letter to Helm praising and admiring his character; large NBoB advertisement on post war planning; news reports on a Sgt. Falkingham, Bloomington resident, and his experience in the Fiji islands; news report on Bloomington resident Maj. Landon Witt charged with commanding unit to protect Churchill during the prime minister’s stint of pneumonia; and contract signed between NBoB and Williams Oil-O-Matic Heating corporation for post war \$2,500,000 loan fund.

**Scrapbook:**

**Banking 1944-45**

Scrapbook includes tenth anniversary advertisement giving condensed statement of the NBoB; news on war bond drives, quotas, and goals in Bloomington; reports of condition; plans for Helm's Sixth War Loan Drive; and Helm protestations over OPA cattle ceiling. In a multi-issue eyewitness account, *Pantagraph* publisher Lt. Loring C. Merwin reports on the invasion of Normandy, France, beginning with the preparation of D-Day, invasion, aftermath, and story of a wounded paratrooper; letter of praise to Helm from Campbell Holton & Co. wholesale grocers; letter of appreciation from Edith Willkie to Helm for his editorial about Wendell Willkie; picture of a bond auction at the NBoB, with women reaching for eligible prize of nylon stockings locked in bank vault; Lt. Col. Witt's story of protecting Churchill; Helm's opinions on problems facing farmers, including the \$17.50 price ceiling on cattle; and news on the 7th war loan drive and its poor start. Scrapbook also contains the June 10, 1944 issue of *Finance* magazine.

**Scrapbook:**

**Tributes to Grover C. Helm**

Two copies of *Pantagraph* article reporting death of Helm, October 27, 1955.