

Finding Aid to the John W. Burnham Papers

Burnham, John W., 1829-1912

John W. Burnham Papers, 1818-1911

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 155

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Milton W. Starin, 1953 and 1954 (Acc. 155).

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BIOGRAPHY

Captain John Winthrop Burnham was born November 19, 1829, in Derry, New Hampshire, the son of George and Eliza Burnham. He was the grandson of Major John Burnham who served in the Revolutionary War under Generals Greene, and La Fayette. Mr. Burnham was a teacher in Derry and a lumberman in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 1856 he settled in Plainview, Minnesota to farm and run a store on land later declared to be Sioux half-breed land. By 1862 he owned a 240 acre farm, and also had served as Justice of the Peace and has twice been in the Minnesota Legislature.

In 1862 Mr. Burnham enlisted in Company C, 10th Minnesota Volunteers and took part in Sibley's 1863 Dakota Expedition. He was then sent south where in 1864 he was appointed a Lieutenant of the 121st United States Colored Troops. In October 1867, Captain Burnham left the army.

He returned with his wife and child to his Plainview farm. On January 6, 1866, at Cairo, Illinois, he married Ada Lawrence of Plainfield, Vermont. They had four children; Eliza, Benjamin, Ida, and Ella. In 1877, the Burnham family moved to a homestead at Wheatland, North Dakota. There, Captain Burnham served as Justice of the Peace, Land Officer Lawyer, School Director, Notary Public, and in the Territorial Legislature in 1887 and 1889. Ada Burnham died December 21, 1897. In 1900 Mr. Burnham married Lydia Reed. He died January 6, 1912, at Wheatland.

Captain Burnham was a member of the Society of the Cincinnatus, a Mason, Minnesota Commander of the Loyal Legion, and a member of the Presbyterian Church.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The John W. Burnham Papers have been organized into two series: Correspondence and Manuscripts.

The [Correspondence Series](#) runs from 1818 to 1911. One group concerns Major Burnham's efforts to obtain a pension, and the Treasury Departments responses. There are numerous letters involving a dispute over some property left by Lucy McMurphy in New Hampshire in 1900. Also included are several letters to and from friends and relatives.

The [Manuscript Series](#) contains material both published and unpublished, some incomplete. There are several works covering Captain Burnham's days in the army from 1862-1867, including service with Sibley in North Dakota, and later as an officer with a Colored Troop during and after the Civil War. Also included are a number of short writings on Captain Burnham's youth in New Hampshire, on his days as a Minnesota settler, and in the Minnesota Legislature, 1859-1860. There are writings on such subjects as "lunacy", Women's Work in War, the Cincinnati Society, a farmer's convention in Fargo in 1885, tree planting in North Dakota, the attempted lottery in North Dakota in 1889, equal suffrage, and the growing of wheat. There is a framed 1828 draft by Major Burnham on the United States Treasury. Also included are statements of expenses and various complaints sworn before Mr. Burnham as Justice of the Peace. There is a copy of a marriage certificate, a certificate of Mr. Burnham's appointment as appraiser of school lands in 1862, his muster-out roll in 1865, and papers concerning the will of Lucy McMurphy in 1900.

SEPARATION RECORD

The following non-manuscript items were removed from the John W. Burnham Papers and have been sent to the section indicated.

Maps (Institute map collection, consult its map catalog)

1864 Map of Minnesota and Dakota showing route of Northwestern Indian Expedition.

Broadside (Institute broadside collection)

- Bill of sale from 1855 for the homestead farm of George Burnham, Derry, New Hampshire.

Photographs (Institute photograph collection)

- 5 Benjamin (Ben) Burnham family, Casselton, N.D.
- 9 Captain John Burnham family, Wheatfield, N.D.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Biographical material, and Finding aid
	Correspondence Series
1/2	1818-1828, 1845-1868, 1893-1911
1/3	1898-1910
	Manuscript Series
1/4	Army experiences in the Southwest, 1865-1867
1/5	Army experiences in the Southwest, 1865-1867
1/6	Army life, 1863-1865, pages 1-30
1/7	Army life, 1863-1865, pages 31-61
1/8	Army life, 1864-1867, pages 1-22
1/9	Army life, 1864-1867, pages 23-45
1/10	Mayor John Burnham and the election of President William H. Harrison
1/11	The Cincinnati Society
1/12	Equal suffrage
1/13	Experiences as young man, 1835-1862
1/14	Farmers meeting, Fargo, 1885
1/15	Lottery in North Dakota
1/16	Lunacy
1/17	Minnesota Legislature, 1859-1860
1/18	Miscellaneous articles
1/19	Miscellaneous reminiscences
1/20	Tree planting
1/21	Wheat and flour
1/22	Women's work in war
1/23	Writings on Sibley expedition, 1863
1/24	Financial papers, 1828, 1857-1858

1/25

Legal papers, 1857-1865, 1900-1902