

Finding Aid to the John J. Shely Family Papers

Shely, John J., 1847-1898

John J. Shely Family Papers, 1872-1956

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 188

[Biography](#)

[Scope and Content](#)

[Box and Folder List](#)

OVERVIEW

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

Provenance: Donated by Walter Shelly, 1954, and Mrs. E.C. Putnam, 1954 (Acc. 188).

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

Copyrights: Copyrights to this collection are not held by the Institute for Regional Studies.

Citation: [Identification of item]. John J. Shely Family Papers, MS 188, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

John J. Shely was born June 27, 1847 in Vermont to Irish immigrants. The family moved in 1854 to Minnesota settling at Reids Landing in Wabasha County. At the age of fourteen Mr. Shely ran away from home and worked as a cabin-boy in a Mississippi steamboat. He then worked at a lumber mill at Eau Claire, Wisconsin. In 1866 hearing of an expedition leaving Fort Snelling for the Idaho gold fields he left for Fort Snelling. But arriving too late he hired out as an assistant wagon master in a government wagon train, making trips to Fort Abercrombie, Fort Totten, Fort Wadsworth and Pembina. In 1869 he left this job and spent the winter trapping. The spring of 1870 he sailed down the Red River and landing near the present village of Shelly, Minnesota where he staked a claim. In 1872 he worked in a store at Crookston,

owned by W. D. Bailey. Later 1875 he was employed by Barnes and Tenney as a grain buyer of Ada, Minnesota.

On February 2, 1878 John Shely married Anna M. Davis of Wabasha County, Minnesota and whom he had known since boyhood. She was the daughter of L. Davis and born December 1, 1855 in New Hampshire. Mr. Davis later settled at Crookston, Minnesota. In 1884 Mr. Shely was elected Norman County auditor and served for six months. He resigned that position to become State Chief Deputy Grain Inspector at Duluth, Minnesota. After serving there four years he was appointed Chief Deputy for Minneapolis where he served for four years. He was then appointed Chief Weigh Master there which he held for two years. He resigned that position to accept a position at Duluth with G.S. Barnes, head of the Northern Pacific elevator line. In 1896 he returned in ill health to Minneapolis where he died May 31, 1898, He was buried at Crookston, Minnesota. Mrs. Shely died September 17, 1935 at Seattle, Washington. Mr. and Mrs. Shely had five children.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The John J. Shely Family Papers have been organized into two series: Correspondence and Subject files.

The [Correspondence Series](#) is arranged chronologically and consists of letters of Mr. Shely to his wife Anna from 1872 to 1890. There is only one letter from Anna to Mr. Shely. The letters related incidents in his life in the Red River Valley and his home at Reids Landing. The 1954 to 1956 correspondence is with John Shely's son Walter concerning the family and the family papers.

The [Subject Files Series](#) contain various family material and mementos. The title agreement on the Rainy Lake Island is between David A. Melrose, and George S. Barnes and Mr. Shely. The autobiographical letter of Mr. Shely is a nine page typed copy which was originally written on May 15, 1898 in Minneapolis. It is a very good account of his life especially after leaving home. The newspaper clippings are few in number with the later clippings on the Walter Shellys in Florida. The scrapbook of Mrs. Shely dates from the 1800's and includes mainly poetry and general articles with only several articles on the Davis family and the Red River Valley area. Of note is the cover of the album. (Copyright, 1876) showing Santa Claus at various tasks. The wedding announcements are evidently of various family friends.

SEPARATIONS RECORD

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

Photographs (Institute Photograph Mss 188)

- 13 items Mr. and Mrs. Shely, children and several grandchildren, bridge over the Red River at Shelly, Minnesota, and Shely farm.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Biographical material, and Finding aid
	Correspondence Series
1/2	1872-1873
1/3	1874-1876
1/4	1877
1/5	1878, 1885, 1888-1890
1/6	Undated, 1800s
1/7	1954-1956
	Subject Files
1/8	Agreement on title to island in Rainy Lake, Ontario, 1895
1/9	Autobiographical letter of Mr. Shely, 1898
1/10	Funeral memorial book of Mrs. Shely, 1935
1/11	Newspaper clipping - Ada, Minnesota
1/12	Newspaper clippings - Fort Snelling, 1902, 1965
1/13	Newspaper clippings - Shely Family, 1953-1956
1/14	Programs, 1875, 1888
1/15	Scrapbook of Mrs. Shely, ca. 1800's
1/16	Scrapbook - loose items
1/17	Wedding invitation and announcements, 1882-1899