

Finding Aid to the Edward P. Wells Papers

Wells, Edward P., 1847-1936

Edward P. Wells Papers, 1882-1941

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 135

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

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

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BIOGRAPHY

Edward Payson Wells was born November 9, 1847 at Troy, Wisconsin, the son of Rev. Milton and Melissa (Smith) Wells. He attended schools in Wisconsin and one year at Leavenworth Institute at Walcott, New York. Mr. Wells taught school for several years in Wisconsin and about 1866 he became associated with the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company and moved to Minneapolis. There he soon founded the insurance and loan firm of Pierce, Stone and Wells, and later Peabody and Wells, a real estate firm. On March 8, 1871 he married Nellie M. Johnson, the daughter of Joseph S. and Ann (Jewett) Johnson of Minneapolis. They had four children.

In 1872 Mr. Wells moved to Milwaukee and engaged in the wholesale produce business, and from 1874 to 1878 he sold insurance with the New York Life Insurance Company. In April 1878 Mr. Wells moved to Jamestown, Dakota Territory and founded the land company, Wells-Dickey Company. The next year he began to publish the *Northwestern Land Journal*. That same year his family moved to Jamestown and he built the first permanent house in Jamestown. In 1881 at its founding, he became president of the James River Valley National Bank which office he retained until 1909. Mr. Wells was involved in many activities including railroad construction, grain, elevators, milling, the James River Navigation Company and political affairs. In 1896 he reorganized and became president of the Russell-Miller Milling Company.

In 1899 Mr. Wells left Jamestown and after several years of traveling returned to Minneapolis to reside. He moved the headquarters of the Wells-Dickey and Russell-Miller Milling companies there and continued an active and expanded business career, retiring in 1922. Mr. Wells died October 7, 1936 in Minneapolis and was buried at Lakewood Cemetery. Mrs. Wells died in 1930.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The **Edward P. Wells Papers** consists of several letters, subject files, two of Mr. Wells' scrapbooks and a file of photocopies documents from the Wells family papers located at Minnesota Historical Society. The papers have been divided into three series: Correspondence, Subject Files, and Scrapbooks.

The [Correspondence Series](#) consists of three letters. The first letter of June 11, 1890 is from Mr. Wells to M. J. Jewell in which he denies any influence on Senator Lyman Casey on the subject of the Louisiana Lottery. The other two letters of 1893 are from Senator Casey to Mr. Wells and Alexander McKenzie-one concerning Senator Casey's appreciation for his work towards his reelection and the other concerning a problem with George Walsh and Grand Forks appointments.

The [Subject Files Series](#) includes various family related materials. Included are a biographical tribute to Mrs. Wells, a two-page sketchy chronology of major events in Mr. Wells' life, historical item on early Jamestown and early telephone service at Fargo and Bismarck, several family related newspaper clippings, cards listing the members of the 1889 and 1893 North Dakota legislatures, and a complimentary frank stamp book issued to Mr. Wells in 1904 by Western Union. Of special note is a nine-page typed reminiscence of Mr. Wells done in 1931 concerning early Jamestown, and a five-page typed reminiscence of daughter Marguerite Wells done in 1941 concerning her childhood and teaching.

In 2005 a number of photocopy pages from the Wells papers located at the Minnesota Historical Society were deposited at the Institute. The person responsible for copying them and presenting them to the Institute is unknown. These photocopies are filed in one file in the order received. It begins with two pages of genealogical data. The major portion is pages 40-111 of a typed reminiscence which covers from 1878 to 1905. It documents family life and his business and political career. In addition there is a two-page copy of 'Thomas Lowry Memorial,' and "A Brief History of the So-called 'Panics' of the Past 100 Years" (five pages).

The [Scrapbook Series](#) represents the major items in the collection. The first scrapbook is exclusively newspaper clippings from the periods 1882 to 1883 and 1890 to 1898. There are extensive clippings on the Louisiana Lottery controversy, seed wheat for farmers through the North Dakota Seed Wheat Commission, and on the early settlement of La Moure, North Dakota. Other topics include Martin N. Johnson, the Wells' silver wedding anniversary, death of a Dr. William Pepper, impeachment of Judge G.L. Glaspell, death of Alfred Dickey, and general Dakota politics (1883). The second scrapbook again is exclusively newspaper clippings covering the years 1883 and 1888 to 1894. Here the topics covered are railroads including the Aberdeen, Bismarck, and Northwestern Railway, the failure of Lloyds National Bank of Jamestown, defeat of Senator Casey in 1893, Judson LaMoure, Jamestown city affairs and the Dakota coal fields (1883).

SEPARATIONS RECORD

The following non-manuscript items were removed from the Edward P. Wells Papers and have been sent to the sections indicated.

Newspapers (Institute newspaper collection)

- *Jamestown Daily Alert*, March 9, 1896

Photographs (Institute photographic collection)

- 100 stereographs of Jamestown and North Dakota, some by F. Jay Haynes, family photos and scenes of Jamestown.

Artifacts (Institute artifact collection)

- Block of wood thought to be from the last tie used in the "Golden Spike" ceremony when Northern Pacific and Union Pacific met.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Finding aid, and Biographical material
	Correspondence Series
1/2	1890-1893
	Subject Files Series
1/3	Biography of Mrs. Wells
1/4	Chronology of events, 1868-1902
1/5	Historical items on Jamestown and North Dakota
1/6	Newspaper clippings
1/7	North Dakota Legislative membership cards, 1889, 1893
1/8	Recollections of Mr. Wells, 1931
1/9	Recollections of Marguerite Wells, 1941
1/10	Western Union Complimentary frank stamp book, 1904

1/11 Minnesota Historical Society document copies

Scrapbook Series

1/12 Scrapbook 1, 1882-1883, 1890-1898

1/13 Scrapbook 2, 1883, 1888-1894