

Finding Aid to the John Monson Papers

Monson, John, 1853-1945

John Monson Papers, 1897-1976

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 304

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

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

Provenance: Donated by Jean Monson Prentice, 2003 (Acc. 2711); Transmutation Publishing, 2016 (2016-010irs).

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Citation: [Identification of item]. John Monson Papers (MS 304), Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

John Monson was born near Neenah, Wisconsin on February 4, 1853, and as a young man worked in Wisconsin logging camps in the white pine forests along the Wolf and Wisconsin rivers. Later he rafted logs down the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers to the city ports and sawmill cities downstream. In 1873 he went to Portland, Oregon, making the trip by steamer from San Francisco.

In March 1882, he came to Fargo and opened a men's furnishings store on Broadway. In 1900 he established the Monson Trunk Factory. The Monson Trunk Factory changed names to the Monson

Luggage Company when his son took over operations, and later changed the name again to Monson's Luggage in the late 1930s. The business continued operations until 1977, remaining in the family the entire time. The company achieved international fame around 1910 by constructing the "largest trunk in the world," a trunk eighteen feet in length, ten and a half feet in height, and ten feet long. The trunk was displayed at the Fair Grounds in Fargo.

In 1886 Monson married Mattie A. Judd, of Wisconsin. Mrs. Monson was a public school teacher prior to her marriage. They raised three sons, James Lloyd, Leigh J. and Fern B. Monson. In 1919, John Monson turned over his business to his son and for the next few years he and his wife traveled about the country in their car. They eventually returned to Fargo in 1924, having logged over 42,000 miles. They remained in Fargo only a very short time, as Monson had opened an elaborate tourist camp in the grapefruit area of Lake Alfred, Florida. He worked almost to the day of his death at his home at Lake Alfred in May 1945. Mrs. Monson died January 6, 1943 at Lake Alfred.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The **John Monson Papers** includes financial and advertising information relating to the Monson Trunk Company, as well as the reminiscences of Mr. and Mrs. Monson. There are four series in the collection: Memoirs, Finances, Advertising, and Subject Files.

The [Memoirs Series](#) includes the reminiscences of John and Mattie Monson and son, James Lloyd Monson. John's is a typed document (18 leaves) discussing his leaving his Wisconsin home at age fifteen circa 1868, working around the United States and coming to Fargo in 1882. It was compiled by Beatrice Fuller Buxton in 1987. Mattie's is a photocopy of a handwritten letter regarding her side of the family, coming to Fargo and the establishment of the local Christian Church, part of the Disciples of Christ church body. The James Lloyd Monson reminiscence (13 leaves) was compiled by his daughter Jean Prentiss in 2006 based upon comments he provided over his lifetime. The typed document discusses his education including graduating from Fargo College, teaching, military service in World War I, and home life.

The [Finances Series](#) includes ledgers and receipts concerning the business. The ledgers run from 1906-1976, while the receipts are from 1897 and 1904.

The [Advertising Series](#) includes primarily catalogues. Two of the catalogues are not dated, but appear to be circa 1905. One was issued by Monson Trunk Factory. The other catalog is not identified but consists of photographic prints of various styles of trunks that are mounted on canvass sheets. The others are from the 1970s, issued by Monson's Luggage. There are also a small number of advertisements, most of which appeared in schedules, including for Northern Pacific Railroad and Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway (1886). Another is for the L-C Trunk Co. of Fargo that features a shoe trunk.

The [Subject Files Series](#) consists of a leather-bound Boy Scout Manual from 1928. Mr. Monson, or someone at his business, did the leather work of the binding. The front cover has an etching of a boy scout, while the back says "Troop 17 Fargo." The Leigh J. Monson file contains two items that belonged

to him. A World War II letter he received from a Captain Arthur Salway, and a 1907 copy of *The Theatre*, a publication of the Fargo Opera House, with ticket stubs affixed to it.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Finding aid, and Historical information
	Memoirs Series
1/2	John Monson Reminiscences
1/3	Mattie (Judd) Monson Reminiscences
1/13	James Lloyd Monson Reminiscences
	Finances Series
1/4	Financial Ledger, 1906-1924
1/5	Financial Ledger, 1922-1925
1/6	Financial Records, 1919-1976
1/7	Receipts
	Advertising Series
1/8	Catalog, circa 1905
1/9	Catalog
1/10	Catalogs, 1970s
1/11	Advertisements
	Subject Files Series
1/12	Leather-Bound Boy Scout Manual
1/14	Leigh J. Monson items