

Collection #
M 0093
OM 0022
BV 0257-0259a

JOHN ELDER COLLECTION, 1820-1908

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Processed by

Paul Brockman and Betty Alberty
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	3 manuscript boxes; 4 bound volumes; 1 oversized folder
COLLECTION DATES:	1820-1908
PROVENANCE:	Bowman Elder Estate, Indianapolis, 1957; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 1967; Mrs. Wilbur Peat, Indianapolis, 1974

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1954.0001; 1967.0403; 1974.1005
NOTES:	Originally processed by Charles Latham, 1989

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Elder (1785-1851) was born in Harrisburg, Pa., the son of a Presbyterian minister of the same name. He early became involved with the planning and construction of houses, public buildings, and bridges. He worked on the Juniata division of the Pennsylvania Canal. After a brief period in Florence, Alabama, he moved to Indianapolis in the early 1830s.

He married Margaret Ritchey of Harrisburg. Her mother, Margaret Ritchey, later lived with the Elders and moved West with them.

In the period 1833-1836 Elder was proprietor of the Union Inn in Indianapolis. He designed several important public buildings, including the headquarters and Indianapolis branch of the State Bank; the courthouses at Lebanon, Columbus, Connersville, and Rushville; and the First Presbyterian Church (second building, 1843) on Monument Circle in Indianapolis. He was also interested in the construction of the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad, and built a lock on the Wabash Canal at Covington.

Never a good financial manager, he got into difficulties on the building of the Rushville courthouse. In an effort to recoup his fortunes, he went to California in 1850, but fell sick and died there.

John Elder had several sons. Two appear a number of times in the correspondence: Samuel, who moved repeatedly from town to town and job to job in 1845-1849; and Alex, who also went to California in 1850 and who described his own and his father's fortunes there.

Material in this collection, however, principally concerns a third son, John Ritchey Elder (1820-1908). Born in Harrisburg, he moved to Indianapolis with his parents, was apprenticed to a printer in 1840, and attended Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa., in 1841-1842. He next worked in New York with the publishing firm of Robert Craighead until he returned to Indianapolis in 1848. He then pursued a career as a publisher, first (1848-1860) of *The Locomotive*, then (1860-1864) of the Indianapolis *Sentinel*, organ of the Indiana Democratic party, where he was one of three partners.

Later on, John R. Elder was active in various businesses. These included a trusteeship for the Indiana and Illinois Central Railroad, and the treasurership of the Indianapolis, Decatur and Springfield Railroad. He also served as member and president of the Indianapolis Board of School Trustees (1869-1876) and as a member of the Board of State Charities (1860-1864 and 1889-1902). In 1848 he married Julia Ann Orr, who died in 1853, as did an infant

child. In 1854 he married Amelia Line, of Carlisle. Three children from this marriage survived.

Sources:

Original Collection Guide

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains family and business correspondence, documents and agreements, and notebooks, covering the period 1820-1908.

Among the materials are letters from the Elder and Ritchey relatives in Harrisburg and Carlisle, and correspondence of John Elder and his wife with their son John R. Elder while he was a student at Dickinson College and an apprentice printer in New York City, 1820–1844.

There also are letters from John Elder seeking a job in the Indianapolis post office; comments on the progress of the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad; and correspondence in connection with Elder's building business, particularly his problems with the courthouse at Rushville. Samuel Elder appears in his peripatetic pursuit of a job he can stay with. John R. Elder is followed as he arranges to go into the printing business in Indianapolis, and also as he carries on a protracted dispute with J. R. Bracken, 1845–1849.

Also included are letters from 1850–1908 concerning the trips to California of John Elder and his son Alex, and of John Elder's demise there. Particularly interesting are letters of 9 March 1850 and 1 May 1850 in which John Elder leaves Indianapolis more or less stealthily and in order to avoid his creditors; those of June-July 1850 describing the passage across Panama; and that of 16 November 1851 in which Alex Elder describes his father's death. Family correspondence includes John R. Elder's courtship of Amelia Line in 1854, as well as a description, two days after Gettysburg, of the Confederate occupation of Carlisle. A cousin, John Sailer, who has gone into the ministry and whose correspondence has appeared through the years, asks for help in retaining the chaplaincy of Michigan City prison (1862). The dated material concludes with a letter informing Bowman Elder of his grandfather's death in 1908. There are several folders of undated material, arranged by correspondent.

Another series contains material given separately by Mrs. Wilbur D. Peat, illustrates John Elder's career as architect and builder. Commencing with an 1829 agreement to build a bridge in Pennsylvania, it concerns various buildings worked on by Elder, as well as a recommendation [1843?] apparently for work on the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad. Several pages in the middle of the notebook for 1845 list buildings for which Elder drafted plans in 1845-1846.

The four bound volumes (BV 257-259a) provide records (accounts and registers) of the Union Inn when it was under Elder's management from 1833 to 1836.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Elder Family Correspondence, 1820–1908

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Biographical Sketch by Kenneth Loucks, n.d.

CONTAINER

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Correspondence, 1830–1835	Box 1, Folder 3
Correspondence, 1836–1837	Box 1, Folder 4
Correspondence, 1838–1839	Box 1, Folder 5
Correspondence, 1840	Box 1, Folder 6
Correspondence, 1841	Box 1, Folder 7
Correspondence, 1842	Box 1, Folder 8
Correspondence, Jan.–June 1843	Box 1, Folder 9
Correspondence, July–Dec. 1843	Box 1, Folder 10
Correspondence, Jan.–March 1844	Box 1, Folder 11
Correspondence, April–Sept. 1844	Box 1, Folder 12
Correspondence, Oct.–Dec. 1844	Box 1, Folder 13
Correspondence, Jan.–June 1845	Box 1, Folder 14
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Correspondence, Jan.–June 1848	Box 2, Folder 5
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Correspondence, Jan.–March 1850 (Non California)	Box 2, Folder 9

Correspondence, April–Dec. 1850 (Non California)	Box 2, Folder 10
Correspondence, May–Dec. 1850 (California)	Box 2, Folder 11
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John Elder Correspondence, n.d.	Box 2, Folder 23
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Margaret Ritchey Correspondence, n.d.	Box 2, Folder 26
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Envelopes, n.d.	Box 2, Folder 28

Series 2: Architectural Related Records, 1830–1847

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John Elder House Plan, n.d.	OM 0022
Notebooks (2)—1830–1831; 1836–1838	Box 3, Folder 1
Notebooks (2)—1837–1839; 1838	Box 3, Folder 2
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Series 3: Union Inn Records, 1833–1837

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Accounts, 1833–1837

Daybook, 1833–1834

Register, 1833–1836

Register, 1836

CONTAINER

BV 0257

BV 0258

BV 0259

BV 0259a

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0093).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.