

PENCE FAMILY PAPERS, 1881–1921

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 document case
COLLECTION DATES:	1881–1921
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NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Pence family letters in this collection stretch across three generations and approximately forty years of this Columbus, Indiana, family. The family first moved to Indiana in 1828 when Jacob Pence, who was born in Virginia and then lived in Sullivan County, Tennessee, moved his family to Bartholomew County. His first son, David, married Nancy Hart and started a family in south central Indiana. Despite having a younger sister born in Indiana, David and Nancy began the first Hoosier Pence family shortly after their marriage in 1845.

Nancy Hart was the daughter of a prominent county official in Bartholomew County. Her father, Gideon Blackburn Hart, served terms as sheriff, county school commissioner, and was a representative in the state legislature. Much like Jacob Pence, Gideon Hart had resided in Tennessee until moving his family north to the same part of Indiana. David and Nancy (Hart) Pence, who were twenty-five and twenty respectively, were married on 20 February 1845.

Together, David and Nancy had ten children over a span of twenty-one years. Beginning with the youngest, their names were Emma, Mary, George, Gideon Blackburn, Ella, Lafayette (Lafe), Ada, Charles (Chas), William David, and Edward Hart. David supported his family as a carpenter in the Columbus area. The offspring of David and Nancy wrote many of the letters in this collection to their mother.

Another large segment of letters in this collection was written to George Pence by his second wife Rose Billings Orr Pence. George received many of these letters while living in Indianapolis away from Rose. George worked in many fields during his life including railroad surveyor, bookkeeper, cashier, treasurer, and general accountant. Most of his work was done in the Columbus area, but he also worked in Illinois, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Indianapolis. He was also elected county auditor, serving four years. He was married twice in his life, first to Mary Ella Billings with whom he had four children. His second wife Rose was the widowed sister of his first wife, whom he married approximately two years after Mary's death. In all, George had five children, but only four lived past infancy. His children were Arthur Hart, George Billings, David Dwight, Pliny Jacob, and Rose Ada.

George's younger brother Lafayette (Lafe) was also quite successful; very little of his work occurred in the Columbus area. Lafe attended grammar school in Columbus before going to college at South Hanover, now Hanover College. After passing the bar exam, Lafe practiced law over the next five years in Winfield, Kansas, and in Rico and Denver, Colorado. He was then elected to the Colorado state legislature and served one term before serving two more terms as county attorney. As county attorney, he won a case on behalf of Denver that traveled all the way to the United States Supreme Court. Shortly after, Lafe served two terms in Congress as a representative of Colorado. He then set his eyes on the railroad business in New York for a brief stint before moving back to Denver and then out to San Francisco, California, in approximately 1900 to open another law practice with his brother Charles. Lafe was twice married, to Clara Vawter and Kate Simmons. Clara gave birth to four children, one of which survived infancy, and she passed away herself during child birth.

Charles (Chas) was also educated in the Columbus public schools, but chose to go to the University of Michigan to

earn his law degree. After been admitted to the bar, he traveled to Denver to start a partnership with his brother Lafayette. When Lafe went off to Congress, the partnership dissolved, and Chas moved to Salt Lake City to practice law in 1892. He too fought a case that landed him in the Supreme Court, and Chas was also successful in his case. When Lafe returned to Denver, he and Chas again opened a partnership that eventually led to their move to San Francisco to continue the partnership. Chas had two daughters with his wife Mary Edna (Sorg) Pence, Mary Ada and Edith Ella.

William Pence, with whom his mother Nancy appears to have lived with at some point in the late nineteenth century, also graduated from Columbus public schools. He continued his education at the University of Illinois to become a civil engineer. His work took him into Texas where he worked with the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad Company. After working there for a half decade, he returned to his alma mater to teach before accepting a teaching job at Purdue University. He, his wife Lotta (Gaston) Pence, his daughters Nellie Ada and Hellen Lottie, and at some point his mother all resided in Lafayette, Indiana.

The last of the ten Pence children was Edward Hart Pence, who after his public school education in Columbus attended McCormick Theological Seminary. His work as a minister began in Colorado before bringing him back to the Midwest. He took a job in Wisconsin before being offered a job to preach in Detroit at about the turn of the century. It was here that his mother Nancy appears to have lived with him for some time. Edward married Jessie (Archer) Pence and had three children: David, Jessie (Norma) and Edna.

Sources:

Ancestry World Tree: HART (www.ancestry.com/main.aspx) accessed 24 Feb 2004

Ancestry.com. *Indiana Marriages Records Index 1845-1920*. Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2000
(www.ancestry.com/main.aspx) accessed 24 Feb 2004

Gideon B. Hart (<http://hart.paintrock.net/docs/chap4.htm>) accessed 25 Feb 2004

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains the letters of the Pence family of Columbus, Indiana, and elsewhere, from 1881 to 1921. The collection is arranged into three series and includes approximately one-hundred sixty letters, many with envelopes.

Series 1: In this series of correspondence to Nancy Pence there are twenty-four letters from Charles Pence to his mother Nancy from 1895–1908. These letters contain birthday wishes, congratulations, and Christmas greetings and thanks for gifts received such as a piano and a neck tie. Charles wishes Nancy “congratulations” on thirty years of widowhood as he reports home his progress in his law career. The topics range from politics in the late 1800s to vacations in Alaska. Social issues are included as Charles wrote about giving up “boozing” and feeling better about his health while the temperance movement was gaining strength. There is even a description of life after the great earthquake in San Francisco in 1906 and how the people were coping with their losses. These letters cover a broad range of historical topics, but also include the messages about how the family is feeling.

There are twenty-six letters from Lafayette to Nancy, dating from 1883–1907. Many of these letters are personal and family-related or are about politics. He wrote of his wife being ill and needing surgeries and of his son Lafe Jr., who seemed to be building an engine that he intended to produce for Detroit auto manufacturers. Much of Lafe’s time was spent in politics and that is reflected in the letters. He endorsed Grover Cleveland while still working in the state government, and he promoted war during the crisis in Cuba in 1898. The lifestyle Lafe led at this time had him traveling around the country, as indicated by his letters being postmarked from Chicago, New York, and Denver.

One letter from George to his mother asks for any news from Columbus she can gather. His letter updates Nancy on his daily activities.

There are also five letters to Nancy from her grandchildren. Lafe Jr. sent her letters letting her know how his family was and describing to her the surgeries performed on his mother while she was ill. There is also a letter from Pliny, George’s youngest son, telling Nancy that he has sent her money and will send more if she requests it.

The collection also contains letters from Nancy's siblings. Some of these people may not be siblings, and they may just call her "sis." There are letters from her brother William Hart describing his family to Nancy. There are also letters from someone claiming to be Nancy's sister named Amanda Kate Pence Van Meter (there is no record of an Amanda or a Kate). These four letters primarily deal with how everyone in Kate's family is feeling and their health. An apparent sister named Ida Thomson sent letters pondering the health of Nancy and her kin. Ida also describes a little about her life in Missouri and her family.

There are also letters to Nancy are from her friends. There are two letters from A.H. Graham, each praising her for being a good person and thanking her for letters. She also received a letter each from Lollie Comstock, Kitty Pence (Lafe's wife), and one other whose name is not legible. These letters contain thank yous and updates about the families. The final letter in this series is from Nancy to Ada describing her enjoyment of Colorado.

Series 2: Nancy's son George also received a number of letters. Several of them are from his second wife Rose, many with updates about their family in Columbus while he was in Indianapolis. Their daughter Rose Ada, Rose, and her mother were all sick at different points throughout the letters. Other topics discussed were Negro rights to vote, an accident with coal thrown from a train that hit George's brother Will, medicines to make the family feel well, and the curriculum in Rose Ada's school. There was also some local news of the cider mill and testing a gas stove for a local merchant.

George received letters from other family members as well. George Jr. wrote home about his work in a church. Lafe and Chas wrote about George becoming postmaster of Columbus. Nancy wrote him about her ninetieth birthday, and Pliny wrote about his ability to speak new languages.

There are also letters from several businesses and agencies to George. The State Examiner sent a letter explaining who can administer graduation exams and the uses of the dog fund. The First National Bank of Columbus sent George a bank statement, State Life Insurance invited him to speak at a program, and the Elks invited him and a guest to a party. Frank Davis sent a letter and advertisement in hopes that George would buy mackerel from Massachusetts. There is also an envelope from the Indianapolis, Columbus, and Southern Traction Company with a map on the back.

The remaining letters to George are from his friends and associates. Clinton Zimmerman sent him a series of letters describing payments, debts, and building a fence for George. Harriet Beaty wrote to thank George for a favor he gave her. A.E. Johnson wrote to accept an invitation for a luncheon with George and his wife, and Ernest Shockley wrote a letter and sent a map of Scott and Wilkinson's routes through Indiana.

There are three letters Jessie Archer Pence sent home to her children from New York City, one to each of them. In these letters she describes New York as a city that is easy to maneuver around because of their straight roads, but a dirtier city than Detroit. Jessie blames the blasts of cement to build tall buildings as a bother and writes that the streets are not well kept.

Series 3: The remaining letters are in this miscellaneous series. Ruth wrote to Edna from Hong Kong to let her know of the trip. Flora Pitts wrote Sister Crilley from India to describe their position as missionaries in a mission house. Edward thanked Mr. Lucas for celebrating Nancy's seventy-fifth birthday. Lafe sent a birthday greeting home to Ada. M. I. Garrison wrote to Charlie and Ada about how great it is to be Christian. Cora described the state fair and teaching in school in her letter to Emeline Hunt. The final item is an advertisement to J.L. Pence from the Oliver Typewriting Company and Montgomery Ward.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Nancy Pence Correspondence

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Charles Pence to Nancy Pence, 1895–99

CONTAINER

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Charles Pence to Nancy Pence, 1901–06	Box 1, Folder 2
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George Pence to Nancy Pence	Box 1, Folder 7
Grandchildren to Nancy Pence	Box 1, Folder 8
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Series 2: George Pence Correspondence

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Series 3: Miscellaneous

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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://157.91.92.2/>
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 0812).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.