Collection #
M 0263
BV 2471–2474

THEODORE L. STEELE PAPERS, 1863–1946 (BULK 1875–1910)

Collection Information

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Cataloging Information

Processed by

Betty Alberty
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24 October 2002

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	2 boxes, 4 bound volumes, 3 folders of photographs
COLLECTION	1863–1946 (bulk 1875–1910)

DATES:	
PROVENANCE:	Theodore L. Steele, 1001 West 58th Street, Indianapolis, IN 46208, 1974, 1986
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	Valentine Nicholson Papers (M 0642 and M 0643)
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1974.0013, 1986.0305
NOTES:	Originally processed by Charles Latham, May 1991

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

This collection, given by Theodore L. Steele, centers on several of his ancestors and relatives.

Valentine Nicholson came from Waynesville, Ohio, and moved to Indianapolis by the mid-1860s. He had two daughters, Elizabeth and Martha.

Elizabeth Nicholson (1833–1926) taught during the early 1860s at College Hill Seminary in Cincinnati. She came to Indianapolis in 1869, established an art studio, and gave lessons. She specialized in painting watercolors of Indiana flowers. She helped form the Indianapolis Woman's Club, and also the Indiana Union of Literary Clubs which later became the Indiana Federation of Clubs. A Hicksite Friend, she was an ardent advocate of higher education and of the woman's suffrage movement. She was also interested in the history of the Underground Railroad.

Martha Nicholson McKay (1843–1934) married Horace McKay in 1866 and came to Indianapolis. She too helped found the Indianapolis Woman's Club; she was a member of the Audubon Society, and worked for women's suffrage. In 1894 she wrote *Literary Clubs of Indiana*, and three years later a book about the 24th Massachusetts (Black) Regiment at Fort Wagner, *When the Tide Turned in the Civil War* (published in 1929). She also helped found the Unity Church of Indianapolis, which later developed into All Souls Unitarian Church.

Horace McKay (1841–1914), also born in Waynesville, commanded Black troops during the Civil War. He was a member of the Loyal Legion. Coming to Indianapolis in 1866, he served as a member of City Council and also as Collector of Internal Revenue. In the 1880s he was an organizer of the Consumers Gas Trust Co. He was active in the founding of All Souls Unitarian Church. He and his wife owned considerable amounts of real estate in Indianapolis.

Helen McKay, the daughter of Horace and Martha McKay, married Brandt Steele, the son of Indiana painter T. C. Steele. They had three sons: Brandt F. Steele; Theodore L. Steele, the donor of this collection; and Horace McKay Steele.

Theodore L. Steele (1905–95), Indianapolis architect, graduated from the University of Illinois in 1931. He worked with several Indianapolis firms, specializing in institutional and industrial design. He then worked in the Engineering

Division of Eli Lilly and Co., retiring in 1970. He was a member of The Portfolio, and served several years on the board of the Art Association of Indianapolis. He was one of the three authors of *The House of the Singing Winds* (Indianapolis, 1966), a book about the life and work of his grandfather, artist T. C. Steele.

Selma Neubacher Steele (ca. 1875–1945) was born in Indianapolis, and studied art there and at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. She then taught art. In 1907 she became the second wife of T. C. Steele. They bought a studio in Brown County, where he worked until his death in 1926. She wrote an account of Steele's later life and work; this, together with accounts by Theodore L. Steele and Wilbur D. Peat, was published in 1966 as *The House of the Singing Winds* (reprinted 1990).

Lucy Stone (1818–93), a correspondent of Martha N. McKay in the late 1870s, was a leader in the movement for women's suffrage. Born in Boston, she graduated from Oberlin College in 1847. She taught for some years, and married Henry B. Blackwell in 1855. In 1848 she was a lecturer for the Anti-Slavery Society. In 1850 she headed the first convention for women's rights in Worcester, Mass. She was active in several regional organizations for women's rights, then founded the American Woman Suffrage Association. In 1870 she founded and gave financial support to *The Woman's Journal*, of which she and her husband were joint editors until her death in 1893.

Sources:

Materials in collection.

Indiana Scrapbook Collection, Indiana State Library, vol. 5 pp. 7-8.

Indiana Biographical Series, Indiana State Library, vol. 1 p 216, vol. 2 pp. 56, 59, 60.

Indiana Historical Society News, Vol. 5 No. 5, p. 3.

Indiana Authors and their Books, 1917–1966. Crawfordsville, Ind.: Wabash College, 1974. Z1281 .B31 1974. (p. 583)

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains correspondence, ledgers and notebooks, written accounts, reports, and clippings. The materials concern a number of different ancestors and relatives of the donor, and are arranged by principal correspondent.

The collection centers on the papers of Horace and Martha Nicholson McKay and their families. Among the items is a scrapbook, apparently belonging to Valentine Nicholson, Mrs. McKay's father, with some poems and some references to spiritualism. Also included in the collection are the papers of Horace McKay and his connections with the Consumers Gas Trust Company. There also is an account written by McKay of "The Beginnings of Unitarianism in Indianapolis." Among the correspondence of Martha N. McKay are items concerning her work in the women's suffrage movement, 1878–81. The most frequent correspondent is Lucy Stone. The subject matter is mainly a dispute between Mrs. McKay and May Wright Thompson (later May Wright Sewall of the Girls' Classical School) about which local suffrage organization should sponsor appearances in Indianapolis by Lucy Stone and M. A. Livermore. There also is some correspondence about the formation of All Souls Unitarian Church, along with some newspaper clippings.

Other items in the collection include four family expense books for the McKay family for years between 1871 and 1881. In addition, there are ledgers detailing the McKays' extensive real estate holdings, 1868–1913 (BV 2471–2473.)

The collection also contains papers of Elizabeth Nicholson including a 1920 letter from Josiah Morrow and material about the Women's Peace Society. There also are four accounts by former slaves about the Underground Railroad and other aspects of black life, as well as a paper by Helen McKay Steele for the Indianapolis Woman's Club in 1946 entitled "My Indianapolis." Among the subjects discussed are old street names and the original campus of Butler University on College Avenue. The papers also contain a 1917 letter to McKay Steele from Jane W. Bass telling a story about rifles being shipped with a load of Bibles to the Knights of the Golden Circle in 1864.

Other items found in the papers are four folders of writings by Selma N. Steele, which appear to be early drafts of her part of *The House of the Singing Winds*. There are also, author unknown, an account of the West Richmond Friends Meeting, and the report of the Indiana Historical Commission in 1916 at the centennial of Indiana's statehood.

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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://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 0263).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.