

Collection #
P 0332

STREIGHT FAMILY COLLECTION, CA. 1850–CA. 1945

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 folder of photographs, 1 folder of printed materials, 8 5x7 acetate negatives
COLLECTION DATES:	Ca. 1850–ca. 1945
PROVENANCE:	Mrs. R.M. Cotton, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 1943;

unknown, December 1945; Sheila Ernst-Bifano, Houston, Texas, December 2006.

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: None

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1943.1102, 1945.1210, 2006.0522

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Abel D. Streight, born 17 June 1828 or 1829 in Steuben County, New York, arrived in Indianapolis from Cincinnati in 1859. He was a book and map publisher, and joined the Union army in September 1861 as a colonel in the Fifty-first Indiana Infantry. Streight was a prisoner of war at Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, for ten months in 1863 and early 1864. He and 107 other soldiers escaped from their barracks by digging a tunnel under the prison grounds.

Streight retired from the army in 1865 as a brigadier general, and was a member of the Indiana State Senate in 1876–77, and 1888–89. He ran unsuccessfully for the Republican Party nomination for governor in 1880, and died at his home at 4121 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, in 1892.

Lovina Streight, Abel Streight's wife of forty-three years, arranged to have her husband buried on the front lawn of their home. Mrs. Streight reportedly stated on the day of the funeral that "I never knew where my husband was when he lived, so I buried him here. Now I know where he is."

Lovina McCarthy Streight, born 1830 in Steuben County, New York, accompanied her husband and 75,000 Union army troops on a march from Stevenson, Alabama to Nashville, Tennessee. She witnessed several battles, and nursed the sick and dying on the battlefield and in field hospitals. Her compassion and bravery earned her the title "Mother of the Fifty-first." Confederate troops apparently captured Mrs. Streight three times, twice exchanging her for prisoners. She reportedly escaped imprisonment a third time by brandishing a gun hidden in her skirts.

Abel and Lovina Streight built their home on East Washington Street, ca. 1866. After her husband's death, Lovina organized a yearly reunion of the Fifty-first regiment. Soldiers gathered at her home and encamped on her lawn annually during the State Fair.

Lovina Streight died 5 June 1910, and was buried at Crown Hill Cemetery with full military honors. Five thousand people attended her funeral, including sixty-four survivors of the Fifty-first Indiana Volunteers. Abel Streight's body was exhumed from the front lawn of the family home, and buried beside his wife. Lovina had purchased the plot in 1902, and commissioned Ralph Schway to sculpt a bronze bust of her husband for the memorial. The memorial is in the vicinity of Governor Oliver P. Morton's gravesite.

Abel and Lovina's only child, John, died at about age fifty in 1905. Lovina Streight's will, filed in 1902, stipulated that her property and possessions be managed by public trustees for the purpose of establishing a home for elderly women.

Five relatives contested the will, stating that Lovina was not of sound mind and body when she signed the document. Friends of Lovina disagreed, and the case went to court in 1912. "Evidence" of Lovina's eccentricities cited by her relatives included her practice of picnicking at her husband's gravesite, wearing bright clothes, and dancing with the neighborhood children. Lovina had also embraced spiritualism, and would hold lengthy conversations with Abel at his gravesite. The jury agreed that Lovina was not of sound mind, and a judge declared the will invalid. Lovina's heirs sold the home on 30 December 1915. Subsequent owners razed the building ca. 1917.

Sources:

Items in the collection.

Meeker, Mary Jane. "The Mother of the 51st Regiment." Paper presented to the Indianapolis Woman's Club, Indianapolis, Indiana, 3 December 1982.

Polk's Indianapolis Directory. Vol. 53. 1907. Indianapolis: R. M. Polk and Co., n.d.

Polk's Indianapolis Directory. Vol. 63. 1917. Indianapolis: R. M. Polk and Co., 1917.

Shepherd, Rebecca A., et al., eds. *A Biographical Dictionary of the Indiana General Assembly*. Vol. 1. 1816–1899. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1980.

Terrell, W. H. H. *Report of the Adjutant General, Indiana*. Vol. II. Indianapolis: W. R. Holloway, State Printer, 1865.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection contains nine different copy-prints with eight corresponding negatives, one cabinet card, and one newspaper clipping. These materials have been arranged into three series because of the nature of the materials.

The photographs include portraits of Abel D. Streight as a young man and as a soldier, Lovina Streight as an elderly woman, John Streight as an adult, and views of the Streight home. The copy photograph of Libby Prison is from a print published by J. L. Barlow, Richmond, Va. in 1882. The newspaper clipping discusses the discovery of Lovina Streight's portrait in the basement of the State House in 1943.

The cabinet card shows Lovina in a full-length studio portrait from 1891 and is signed and dated by her on the verso.

Mrs. R. M. Cotton, great grand-niece of Lovina Streight, loaned the photographs so that they could be copied in 1943. Mrs. Cotton may also have donated the photograph portrait of John Streight in 1945. The titles and captions written on the back of each photograph were likely assigned by the donor. The numbers on each photograph were assigned by the processor and are written in [] brackets.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Photographs

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
[1] Libby Prison, as it appeared August 23, 1863	Folder 1
[2] A.D. Streight monument at Crown Hill Cemetery	Folder 1
[3] Abel D. Streight portrait from a daguerreotype	Folder 1
[4] Abel Streight portrait in uniform from a daguerreotype	Folder 1
[5] Lovina Streight (Mrs. Abel D. Streight)	Folder 1
st	Folder 1

[6] Reunion of 51 Volunteers on lawn of Streight home [2 copies]

[7] "Streight home," 4121 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Indiana Folder 1

[8] "Streight home," showing gravestone on front lawn Folder 1

[9] John Streight portrait, son of A.D. Streight Folder 1

[10] Cabinet card portrait of Lovina Streight signed and dated on verso "Compliments of Mrs. 'Gen. Streight 'Mother of the 51st Regt. Ind. 'Vols., Sept. 23, 1891" Folder 1

Series 2: Negatives

CONTENTS

Eight 5x7 acetate negatives of images in collection

CONTAINER

Visual Collections: 5x7 acetate negative storage

Series 3: Printed materials

CONTENTS

Paul M. Ross, "Statehouse Basement Strange Gallery For Portrait of Famous General's Wife," *The Sunday Star*, 31 October 1943.

CONTAINER

Manuscript Collections, Folder 1

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, P 0332).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.