

Finding aid for the Reubey S.T. Ferris recollections of William Haldane Collection 012

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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1986
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Summary Information

Repository Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

Creator - Author Ferris, Reubey S.Tomlinson, 1858-1945

Title Reubey S.T. Ferris recollections of William Haldane

Date [inclusive] 1837-1898

Extent 0.2 Linear feet One box

Language English

Abstract This collection primarily contains the 1937 reminiscences of the donor, Reubey S. Tomlinson Ferris of Baldwinsville, New York. Reubey was said to be the adopted daughter of William Haldane (1807-1898), a Grand Rapids, Michigan pioneer. In actuality she was Haldane's niece by marriage. Deacon William Haldane is known as the father of the Grand Rapids furniture industry. In her remembrance, Mrs. Ferris describes living conditions in the Village and then Town of Grand Rapids circa 1837 to 1898. Included are details of the life of William Haldane, commonly viewed as the first commercial furniture maker in Grand Rapids. Haldane's origins, training, travels to Grand Rapids and the step-by-step developments of his furniture-making business are described, along with his church work, and the development of the community. Supplemental references are included.

Reubey S. Tomlinson Ferris

Reubey S. Tomlinson Ferris, from Baldwinsville, New York, was the niece of Mrs. William Haldane and came to live with the Haldanes. The Haldanes had no living children of their own; Reubey was taken into the family as a daughter. She married J.W. Ferris, and later moved to Wisconsin to live with a daughter in 1936. In that year she wrote these recollections of life with the Haldanes, for the Grand Rapids Centennial (1937). The version in this collection was edited by W.J. Etten.

William Haldane

William Haldane (1807-1898) was born in Delhi, Delaware County, New York, the eldest of four children born to James and Elizabeth (nee Preston) Haldane, both native of Edinburgh, Scotland. At age 14 William Haldane became an apprentice carpenter and joiner, becoming a journeyman six years later. In 1832 he opened a furniture making shop, having married Sarah Tomlinson the previous year.

In 1836 the Haldanes moved to Grand Rapids, where Haldane opened a cabinet-making shop in his house at the southeast corner of Pearl Street and Ottawa Avenue. [See Baxter illustration, included in collection.] Initially he made furniture by hand and a foot-powered lathe. In 1847 he added water-power machinery in a new shop along the East Canal at Bridge Street. He converted to steam power in 1853.

A skilled furniture maker, generally viewed as the first in Grand Rapids, Haldane also made excellent cutters whose quality was such that customers bid to make purchases. Haldane also made coffins and for a brief time added undertaking to his endeavors.

A long time member of the Congregational Church, Haldane was active in First (Park) Congregational Church in Grand Rapids for 50 continuous years, during which time he came to be known as "Deacon" Haldane. The Haldanes had two children, both died in infancy. At his death, Haldane left his estate to Reubey Tomlinson.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department 1986

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Accession Number: 1986.171; Donor: Reubey S.T. Ferris, 1936

Controlled Access Headings

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History -- 19th Century

Personal Name(s)

- Haldane, William, 1807-1898

Subject(s)

- Furniture industry and trade -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids -- History

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Reminiscences of Mrs. Reubey Statira Tomlinson Ferris of Baldwinsville, N.Y. / edited by W.J. Etten. Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 10, 1936	1	1
Images: William Haldane (2)	1	2
Haldane chair, said to have been made in Grand Rapids in 1836 (Photocopy of photo).	1	3
Newspaper clippings	1	4
Haldane House and other early Grand Rapids buildings, illustrations from Baxter, p. 762-763	1	5
Notes on Ferris family	1	6
Listing of Ferris / Haldane descendants	1	6