



ArchivesSpace

Finding aid for the Wright L. Coffinberry and Coffinberry Family papers Collection 061

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

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator:	Coffinberry, Wright L
Title:	Wright L. Coffinberry and Coffinberry family papers
ID:	Collection 061
Date [inclusive]:	1808-1889
Physical Description:	0.63 Linear Feet Two boxes plus flat files
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	Wright L. Coffinberry (1807-1889) was an early settler in Grand Rapids (Mich.) and a self-taught civil engineer and archaeologist. Moving to Grand Rapids from Ohio circa 1848, he was responsible for a large number of additions platted for the city as well as several state road projects, principally the road from Kent County to Northport. The collection includes his autobiography, maps from his work as a civil engineer and various documents on the excavations of the Norton Mounds. Also included are items from two of his children: an 1855 document by daughter Rebecca describing the city of Grand Rapids and programs and school orations collected by Andrew from 1858 to 1872. The documents describe pioneer life in Michigan, the life of a civil engineer in blazing roads through the wilderness, spiritualism and document intellectual thought in a frontier community.

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Biographical / Historical

Wright Lewis Coffinberry (4/5/1807-3/26/1889) was a self taught civil engineer, watchmaker and archaeologist. Born in Ohio, he received a rudimentary primary education in a frontier school taught by his older brother. He learned civil engineering while working on several canal projects in Ohio. In 1831 he married Jane Beech (1805-1895) and for a time settled in Mt. Vernon, Ohio. During the mid-1840s he moved his family to Michigan, following two of his brothers who had moved to Michigan earlier. By 1848, Coffinberry resolved to move to Grand Rapids.

In Grand Rapids, Coffinberry worked as a watchmaker and civil engineer. He was responsible for a large number of additions platted for the city as well as several state road projects, principally the road from

Kent County to Northport. During the Civil War he helped organize and was an officer of Co. C., 1st Regiment, Michigan Engineers.

Following the war Coffinberry was able to devote more attention to archaeology, a field in which he had been interested from childhood onward. He became a recognized expert in archaeology in West Michigan and was part of a three person team that first excavated the Indian mounds on Captain Norton's farm (commonly called the Norton Mounds). He also examined many mounds throughout the region and presented results of his findings to the Kent Scientific Institute.

Coffinberry and his wife had four children: Eunice (1836-1844); Andrew Beech (1837-1907); Rebecca Jane (1840-1930); and Julia Frances (1842-1926).

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Scope and Contents

The collection contains several plat maps drawn by Coffinberry, correspondence and working papers as a civil engineer, diary entries, an autobiography by Coffinberry, and a copy of some of his scientific papers. The autobiography describes the vicissitudes of pioneer life in both Ohio and Michigan, 1840s spiritualism, the Civil War and the pioneer village of Grand Rapids. Also included are a few programs collected by Andrew Coffinberry and a description of Grand Rapids in 1855 by Rebecca Coffinberry.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Charles M. Burbach (Burback?), accession number 00.000

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Collection 040: The Thomas W. Porter Archaeological, Architectural & Geological Graphics. Porter worked with Wright Coffinberry on archaeological digs, and drew images of items found, as well as site sketches.

The Public Museum of Grand Rapids has the papers of the Kent Scientific Institute, which contain many of Coffinberry's original scientific reports of his findings from various archaeological investigations.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Indians of North America -- Michigan -- Kent County
- Real property -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids -- Maps
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History -- 19th Century
- Mounds -- Michigan -- Kent County
- Coffinberry, Andrew
- Coffinberry, Wright L
- Coffinberry, Rebecca

Collection Inventory

Series I. Wright L. Coffinberry, 1805-1889, n.d.;

Scope and Contents

Scientific papers, diaries, plat maps and autobiography. Arranged alphabetically.

Title/Description	Instances	
City Surveyor Charges, 1849, 1863, 1865	Box 1	folder 1
Civil Engineer Papers, 1870s	Box 1	folder 2
Grand River Locks proposal, 1848	Box 1	folder 3

Plat Descriptions

Title/Description	Instances	
Baar's Addition to Grand Rapids, 1872	Box 1	folder 4
Hersey, Michigan, n.d.	Box 1	folder 4
Long's Addition to Grand Rapids, 1872	Box 1	folder 4
Merrill's Addition to Grand Rapids, n.d.	Box 1	folder 4
Power's Addition to Grand Rapids, 1872	Box 1	folder 4

Oversized Maps

Title/Description	Instances	
1. Tanner Taylor's Addition, [1889] [Gift of Charles M. Burbach. 7/21/1928.	Box FF.XV.B	
2. Ellsworth Addition, n.d. / drawn by W.L. Coffinbery, C. Eng. [M1715 July 1912 accession]	Box FF.XV.B	
3. Dexter Tract / Kendall's Addition, n.d. Includes Bostwick, Ransom, Barclay, Lafayette and Prospect perpendicular to Bronson St.	Box FF.XV.B	
4. Plat showing Lansingburgh Company land marked "L" in Blendon Township,[Ottawa County], n.d. F.6 N.B. 14W	Box FF.XV.B	
5. [Sheldon at Wealthy and Blakeley Avenues, with property own names,n.d.]	Box FF.XV.B	
6. Waterloo Street / platted by W.L. Coffinberry, Oct. 1880, [showing John Ball lot no. 2 and A. Wood lot no. 1 near Ferry St.]	Box FF.XV.B	
7. [BROADSIDE, copy] Union House at Richland City / by J.W. Coffinberry. Rules ... Printed at the Observer Office, Richland Center, Wis.	Box FF.XV.B	
State Road to North port diary, 1859 (note: map of this project is in the State Archives at Lansing) - second copy has an introduction by Edmond P. Gibson.	Box 1	folder 5
Correspondence, 1856, 1877, 1882	Box 1	folder 6

Inventions:

Title/Description	Instances	
Cheese Cutter, 1865	Box 1	folder 7
Archimedean Pump, n.d.	Box 1	folder 7

Scientific Papers:

Title/Description	Instances	
Slate, n.d.	Box 1	folder 8
Specimens to Marietta, Ohio, 1888	Box 1	folder 8
Mound Excavations, 1877	Box 1	folder 8
Magnetism, n.d.	Box 1	folder 8
Smithsonian Circular on Archaeology, 1878	Box 1	folder 8
Vol 2 Typescript of various scientific papers, 1870s-80s, n.d. (typescript done in 1923)	Box 1	folder 8

Miscellaneous:

Title/Description	Instances	
Sweet's Hotel Grand Opening program, 1869	Box 1	folder 9
Muster Roll, Co. 2, 2nd Reg., 1st Brig., 11th Div., Ohio Military, 1840	Box 1	folder 9
[Added May 1999. Photocopies, with copyright limitation statement] Letter or report to F.W. Putnam(?), Peabody Museum, [October(?), 1885] For the Ann Arbor Meeting of the A.A.A.S. August 1885 Archaeology:]	Box 1	folder 16
Autobiography:		
Vol. 1 manuscript, n.d. (2 copies).	Box 1	folder 10
Vols. 1 and 2 manuscript, 1887.	Box 1	folder 11
Vols. 3 and 4 manuscript, 1876	Box 1	folder 12
Vol 1 Typescript, done in 1929	Box 2	
Miscellaneous, 1889, n.d. Obituary	Box 1	folder 13

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Series II. Andrew Beech Coffinberry, 1858-72, n.d.

Scope and Contents

School orations and programs from social events.

Title/Description	Instances	
School orations, Odretta programs, 1858-72, n.d.	Box 1	folder 14

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Series III. Rebecca Julia Coffinberry, 1855

Scope and Contents

"The City of Grand Rapids"

Title/Description	Instances	
The City of Grand Rapids, 1855	Box 1	folder 15

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