

Nichols Powers (1817-1897)
Collection, 1879-1931
MSA 923, Size B, C & Elephant Plans

Introduction

This small collection contains trade catalogs and a few cheese factory records accumulated by Nichols Power (1817-1897), bridge-builder and farmer of Clarendon, Vermont, during the last half of the nineteenth century. The collection was donated to the Vermont Historical Society by Alf R. Strom-Olsen of Clarendon, Vermont, great-great-grandson of Nichols Powers, through Devon A. Colman, State Architectural Historian at the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation. The collection is stored in one flip top archival box and three oversized folders; it consumes .5 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Notes (prepared by Devin Colman)

Nichols Montgomery Powers (1817-1897) is renowned for his work as a builder and bridgewright in New England, New York, and the Atlantic seaboard. Born in Pittsford, Vermont, on August 30, 1817, Powers was the son of Richard Montgomery and Mary “Polly” (Carpenter) Powers. He married Lorette Fish in 1844, and they settled in Ira, Vermont. They moved to Clarendon Flats, Vermont, in 1859, where Nichols would live and work until his death on January 17, 1897. He is buried in Riverside Cemetery in Ira.

The spelling of Powers’ first name – “Nichols” or “Nicholas” – has been a matter of debate, and the historic record includes examples of each. Recent research has led to the conclusion that “Nichols” is the proper spelling, for two reasons: all known documents that were signed by Powers himself, in his own hand, use “Nichols.” In addition, his maternal grandmother’s maiden name was Nichols, a family name that was passed on to her grandson.

Powers undertook his first bridge project in 1837, when he was only 19 years old. The successful completion of this project, known as the Pittsford Mill Bridge, started his long career as a bridgewright. He designed and built many train and vehicular bridges, including the Blenheim Bridge (1857) in New York; the Susquehanna River Bridge (1866) in Maryland; and the Brown Bridge (1880) in Shrewsbury, Vermont. The Brown Bridge was declared a National Historic Landmark in 2014 as one of the country’s finest examples of a covered bridge utilizing a Town lattice truss. Powers is also known to have designed and built mills, barns, and church steeples throughout the Rutland County area. One such project, the Kingsley Grist Mill in Clarendon (c. 1882) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007.

In addition to his building projects, Powers ran a cheese factory and 375-acre farm on his property in Clarendon Flats.

Scope and Content

Despite the acclaim gained by Nichols Powers as a bridgewright, very few items in the collection represent his bridge work. There are few examples of his bridge design work. Only

two truss drawings are included; one, done with ink on linen, has dimensional information to estimate the scale (Elephant Plans); the other is pencil on paper with no dimensions (MSA 923:14). Neither drawing has any bridge name, location, other pertinent information, nor the name of the designer/draftsman. There are two drawings of the front of a house done in pencil, but again, no name is attached (Size B).

Powers owned a cheese factory in Clarendon, Vermont. The collection has a limited number of business documents but there are two ledger books that track the amount of cheese made versus the amount of milk used. There are several names across the top of each page labeled "Patrons." One ledger covers a 30-month period, the other, seven months within 1888 and 1889. There are also a few catalogs for the purchase of generic dairy industry tools and equipment. There are a few letters and invoices concerning the business and many empty envelopes, perhaps kept in lieu of an address book. (Folders 1-4 and Size C)

Powers may have been interested in financial investments. Folder 5 contains several prospectuses from financial companies, bank financial statements, and correspondence regarding mortgages. It also contains two check registers.

Education was also an interest of the family. Folder 6 contains a pamphlet on how to obtain a practical education, a catalog on school supplies, a penmanship instructional book, a catalog of instructional books, and more. Miss Laura Powers (daughter of Gratz Powers, the son of Russell Powers, the son of Nichols Powers and Lorette Fish), applied for admittance to Middlebury College in 1923 and gained acceptance. College officials sent her a course catalog and college bulletin along with her student card and acknowledgement of her room deposit.

The remainder (and bulk) of the collection is sales catalogs (many in poor condition) that were sent to Powers. As an engineer Powers had an interest in mechanical systems; as an architect he had interest in the workings of a home. The collection includes seven folders of printed materials on topics ranging from iron fences (Folder 8) to power transmission systems (Folder 9) to steam heating systems (Folder 10) to home goods (Folder 12). Mr. Powers may have had an interest in health matters, there are flyers and pamphlets describing conditions and cures, and advice on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle (Folder 11). Mr. Powers must have had a sense of humor as there are a few catalogs for novelty items (Folder 13).

Related Collections

The Vermont Historical Society's Leahy Library holds a rare daguerreotype of Nichols Powers holding a carpenter's square (FB-23). The library also holds a collection of articles, photos, and letters about Powers and several of his bridge projects (MS-62).

The library also holds other materials on cheese making such as Gleason's Cheese Factory statements, 1900-1915 (MSA 273:2) and Stoddard Manufacturing Company's "Illustrated catalog of creamery, cheese factory, and sanitary milk plant equipment" (Pam. Stoddard).

Nichols Powers appears in many books on New England covered bridges, especially in *Covered Bridges of New England* by Clara E. Wagemann (917.4 W122c) which includes a portrait of Powers and several references to him.

Inventory

MSA 923:01 Dairy Tools and Equipment Catalogs

Generic catalogs for dairy tools and equipment such as milking pails, cream separators, and creamery pumps. Circa 1885 – 1890.

:02 Powers Cheese Factory Records

Sales documents for selling cheese, no indication as to the seller, in the account of the Powers Cheese Factory of Clarendon, VT.

:03 Miscellaneous Business Letters

:04 Envelopes and Business Cards

Many of the envelopes are non-descript although some can be identified as a financial institution or agricultural supply company. A few business cards are included.

Size C Cheese factory journals

April 1881 – October 1883. Tracks patrons, the amount of cheese produced, and the amount of milk used, tracked by the day, a month per sheet.

June 1889 – September 1889. The name inside cover is Edwin D. Witt

Leonard of Tinmouth, Rutland County, Vermont. The same kind of daily

journal to track patrons, the amount of cheese produced, and the amount of milk used, tracked by the day, a month per sheet.

:05 Banking Records and Investment Accounts

Contains real estate investment and stock information plus two check registers.

:06 Education and Middlebury College

Miss Laura G. Powers of Clarendon applied for and received acceptance at Middlebury College in 1923 for the academic year beginning in 1924. Also, college and educational book catalogs.

Size B *The Eastman Journal of Practical Education*, Eastman College,

Poughkeepsie, NY, December, '90 and January and February '91.

:07 Tools for Steel Construction

The booklets in this file deal mostly with heavy construction with metal.

:08 Iron Fence Catalogs

A few catalogs for wrought iron fences and also the many other uses for the material such as furniture, bridges, business cages, screens, lights, gratings, and fountains.

Size B Broadside from the S. C. Johnson and Company of New Haven, CT, dealers in wrought iron bridges, fences, stairs, screens, areal lights, fountains, and gratings; no indication of the date.

- :09 Power and Transmission Mechanics
A few paper journals concerning power and transmission as well as "Monthly Mechanics."
- :10 Steam Systems and Components
Catalogs for steam systems for heating or industrial applications and a safety booklet to accompany the installation of a safety valve in the system.
- :11 Medical – Prevention and Cures
Flyers and booklets concerning causes and cures for many common ailments including rheumatism, gout, lumbago, and asthma; also lifestyle guides for staying healthy.
- :12 Goods for the Home
Miscellaneous ads for such items as clothing or pump organs, and a catalog for McCall's clothing patterns, 1895.
 Size B *Universal Fashion Monthly, Jul-Aug 1893, Rutland Dept Store, VT*
- :13 Miscellaneous Catalogs
For novelty items; tools and building materials; and seeds.
 Size B Four page flyer announcing the March 3rd appearance of Professor D. M. Bristol's Equescriculum, a troupe of 20 horses at the opera house in Rutland, VT. "They are the only horses in America educated exclusively to appear in opera houses." No year is given on the flyer.
 Size B Broadside dated 1886 selling subscriptions to the *Farm Journal*.
- :14 Miscellaneous Items
Pamphlets, outline for a play, a speech, a Long Trail booklet, unidentified letters, and otherwise miscellaneous items.
- Size B Architecture & Bridges
 Elevation view drawings of a house.
 Pen and ink drawing showing several of the architectural details of the inside of a home, copyright date is 1886 by W. T. Comstock.
Building, vol. V, no. 1, July 3, 1886, lithograph copy. (1 sheet)
Building, vol. V, no. 1, July 3, 1886. Lithograph copy, a house and a detail view of the inside of an unidentified library, Richard M. Upjohn, architect. (1 sheet)
Building, A Journal of Architecture, Trade Supplement, Vol. V, July 3, 1886, No. 1. The copyright is by William T. Comstock, 6 Astor Place, New York.
The Model Home, sample copy, Vol. 1, Model Home Publishing Co., Rutland, VT, December 1890.
 Photocopy, "Famous North Blenheim Covered Bridge Raises Question Again of Eventual Disposition as New Span is Erected," *Albany Evening News*, Albany, NY, 2 April 1931, page 6.

- Elephant Plan and elevation view of an unknown bridge truss, apparently ink on linen, about 1/4" = 1'-0. (about 52" long by 16" wide)
- Elephant Plan and elevation view of an unknown bridge truss, apparently pencil on paper, no dimension to estimate scale. (about 52" long by 16" wide)

Harry Harrington
December 2021
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