

Guide to the George P. Jennings Family Papers

Collection Overview:

REPOSITORY: Westport Museum for History and Culture, 25 Avery Place, Westport, CT

CALL NUMBER: RG 11

TITLE: George P. Jennings Family Papers

DATES: 1777-1972

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 3 linear feet (7 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY:

This collection primarily documents the life and work of George Penfield Jennings and his immediate family, particularly his father William J. Jennings and his daughter Bessie C. Jennings. Additional records related to Jennings ancestors and relatives can be found in Record Group 8, Miscellaneous Personal Papers.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

The Jennings family in Westport was descended from Joshua Jennings (1620-1675), an early settler of Hartford who came to Fairfield in 1656. Extensive genealogical information is available in Series 5 of this collection. William James Jennings (1820-1894) was the son of Thomas Jennings and Josina Jennings. He married Maria Augusta Hill (1824-1901) in 1845. They lived in Westport and later in Rosendale, Wisconsin. Their son George Penfield Jennings was born in Westport in 1855. They also had a daughter Cornelia Jennings Thompson (1849-1907).

George Penfield Jennings (1855-1933) lived with his parents as a boy and young man on a farm near Rosendale, Wisconsin. He returned to Connecticut in the 1870s and for over 25 years ran a private express messenger/agent service between Green's Farms and New York City. In an advertisement for his services, Jennings noted the following tasks: "the paying and collecting of bills, the purchasing or ordering of any kind of goods, ladies' shopping, procuring samples and attending to any important commission entrusted to me..."

George married Ida Louise Taylor (1864-1901) in 1894 and had three daughters: Bessie Cornelia Jennings (1895-1972), Mary Hill Jennings (1897-1990), and Ida Louise Jennings (1901-1936). After the death of his first wife, George married Mary Ann Stuart (1853-1938) in 1902.

Later in life, George primarily farmed for a living. He was a deacon at the Green's Farms Congregational Church for many years. He also held many other offices in the community, including selectman, member of the Board of Relief, and first president of the Green's Farms Fire Company. During the last four years of his life George was confined to his house by illness but used the time to write a history of his native town, *Green's Farms, Connecticut, The Old*

West Parish of Fairfield, which was published by The Congregational Society of Greens Farms in 1933. His daughter Bessie helped him write the book.

Bessie Cornelia Jennings was born in Green's Farms on June 15, 1895. She attended local schools and graduated from Middlebury College. She worked as an assistant to the president of Yankton College in South Dakota and as financial secretary for the Eastern District of the YMCA in Brooklyn. In 1929 she began teaching history, government, and civics at Roger Ludlowe High School in Fairfield, retiring in 1958. Bessie helped her father in the preparation of his book that was published in 1933 and was instrumental in developing the "Jennings Trail" in Westport. Second-graders were introduced to the history of the town in field trips that included the Beachside Avenue site of the five founding Bankside Farmers; the Machamux boulder; the old Greens Farms Church meeting house; the Compo Cove tide mill; the Minute Man monument, and the Compo cannons, among other sites. Bessie was a member of several civic organizations and a lifelong member of the Green's Farms Congregational Church. She died at her ancestral home on Elmstead Lane on October 4, 1972.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

This collection provides insight into the history of the Jennings family and the town of Westport through correspondence, writings and notes, legal and estate documentation, financial records and collected material.

Correspondence and writings relate both to the daily life of the family and the larger history of the community. Substantial detailed information about Westport is available in the correspondence related to George P. Jennings' published history of the town. Writings of George P. Jennings date from as early as 1871 when he was a 16-year-old high school student. Bessie C. Jennings followed in her father's footsteps, beginning even while at Staples High School to write articles about the community, which were published in the *Bridgeport Morning Telegraph*. Additional material related to Bessie Jennings can be found in RG 12, Named Research Collections in the Adams/Jennings collection of Westport history.

While firmly rooted in Westport, the family also owned a farm in Rosendale, Wisconsin, which was managed by an agent after George returned to Connecticut. Detailed records of transactions related to the farm and to George's business as a messenger/agent provide valuable information about the economy and commerce of the time. In 1897 George advertised that he had spent the past eight years in daily service between Westport and New York City as a "Messenger, Order, Commission and Purchasing Agent."

While the majority of the legal, estate, and financial records in Series 3 and Series 4 relate to George P. Jennings or his father William J. Jennings, there are also documents related to more distant relatives and associates.

Series 5 includes genealogical information about the Jennings of Westport as well as biographical documentation and memorabilia of George P. Jennings and Bessie C. Jennings.

ARRANGEMENT:

Series 1: Correspondence

Series 2: Writings and Notes

Series 3: Legal and Estate Documentation

Series 4: Financial Records

Series 5: Biographical Documentation and Memorabilia

Series 1: Correspondence

Box	Folder	.	Date
		William James Jennings	
1	1	From cousin T. Cooper Hill, Rosendale, WI – list of personal property taken	1883 Mar 29
1	1	From daughter Cornelia Jennings Thompson	1887 Jan 18, 20
		George Penfield Jennings	
		Personal and family correspondence	
1	2	From L. S. Griswold in Spencertown, NY	1883
1	2	From mother Augusta in Rosendale, WI	1896
1	2	From sister Cornelia in Rosendale, WI - Cornelia and her husband George had a farm in Rosendale.	[1896]
1	3	From Edwin Hoyt	1901 Jan 24
1	3	From sister Cornelia in Ripon, WI	1902 Aug 7
1	3	From cousin Ethel Wakeman - letter describes college girls working in Christian Settlement houses, including in Poughkeepsie	1904 Mar 4
1	3	From Edward C. Birge	1904 Apr 7
1	3	From Ebenezer Hill	1904 Sep 24
1	3	Wedding invitation from Gen. and Mrs. William Mason	1904Dec
1	4	From uncle George Hill in Rosendale, WI	1905 Jan 24
1	4	From [Judge] Joseph Adams in Pasadena, CA - letterhead is Southland Nurseries, F. H. Disbrow Proprietor; Mary and Frank Disbrow were sister and brother-in-law of Joseph Adams	1909
1	4	From cousin Louis Wakeman in Portland, OR - comments on Nashua, a manufacturing town of which "inhabitants are largely foreign element"; talks of devastating flu epidemic in Greens Farms, including isolation to reduce contact and new cases.	1918 Dec 20
1	4	From cousin Paul J. Thompson in Rome - Thompson was on active duty with the American Expeditionary Force; discusses American servicemen, entertainment, Rome	1918 Dec 27
1	5	From Paul J. Thompson	1932 Aug 15
1	5	To Mary Hill	1933
		Correspondence related to GPJ's book - gathering of information and with publishers – requests for information, photos, maps incl. re. Gallop Gap Creek, boats, mills, and other Greens Farms history	
1	6	Related to book - includes letter from GPJ with 17 questions about Greens Farms history and reply of Mr. Parsell	1931
1	7	Related to book	1932 Jan-Aug
1	8	Related to book	1932 Sep
1	9	Related to book – including from F.T. Bedford who underwrote cost of book	1932 Oct-Dec
1	10	Related to book	1933 Jan-Apr
1	11	Related to book - includes letter from Harriet re. seafaring uncle Henry P. Burr and son Alfred – his was first trading vessel to enter a Japanese port after Japan opened for trade	1933 May, undated

1	12	Correspondence with Edward C. Birge regarding book	1931-1933
		Business correspondence	
1	13	From agent of Northern Pacific Railroad- regarding land in Minnesota	1873
1	13	From Grummond's Mackinac Line	1895 Mar 6
1	13	From John Smith, manager of farm in Rosendale, WI – incl. re. sending poultry and butter packed in snow to GPJ	1895 Oct 5
1	13	From A. Wakeman regarding shipping	1897 Nov 22
1	14	From Embalmer's Supply Co. re. shipping	1898 May 5, Jun 8
1	14	From John Smith, manager of farm in Rosendale, WI	1900 Nov 7, Dec 22; 1901 Apr 2
1	15	Correspondence and attached accounts related to Jennings farm in Rosendale, WI – from Carl Zetow, manager, and cousin T. Cooper Hill	1904
1	16	Correspondence and attached accounts related to Jennings farm in Rosendale, WI – from Carl Zetow, manager, and cousin T. Cooper Hill	1905
1	17	Correspondence and attached accounts related to Jennings farm in Rosendale, WI – from Carl Zetow, manager, and cousin T. Cooper Hill – reports and inventories re. farm; insurance and bank correspondence	1906
		Postcards, greeting cards, envelopes	
1	18-19	Business-related postcards Primarily from C.H. Kemper to GPJ reporting shipments of bales of leather (See C.H. Kemper tanning company records in RG 5), cards addressed to GJP, Nodell & Howard, 156 Greene St., NYC	1902-1909
2	1	Miscellaneous postcards, including to E.B. Adams at Friendly Aid House (children's aid association founded 1892 – now Goddard Riverside Community Center)	
2	2	Empty envelopes and greeting cards - some from Dorothy R. Adams (see also Adams Family Papers)	
		Ida Louise Taylor Jennings	
2	3	From Mrs. Fred T. Bedford re. trip in England	1878 Aug 27
		Bessie C. Jennings	
2	4	Invitation to marriage of Earle Chetwood Adams / postcard from Mary Adams Disbrow	1940
2	5	Letters re. Westport history and GPJ book	1934-1946, undated

Series 2: Writings and Notes

		By William J. Jennings	
2	6	Essay on onion culture in "The Onion Book: A Practical Guide to the Profitable Culture of the Crop"	1887
		By George Penfield Jennings	
2	7-10	Writings for the <i>Green's Farms Recorder</i> - articles and letters to the editor written when GPJ was in his teens for an informal publication he helped to found and edit, on topics such as "Accomplishments", "Alex the Great",	1871-1873

		"Humbugs", "Public Libraries", "Croquet" (critical of girls playing croquet); "Philip of Macedon", etc.	
2	11	Opening talk at Farmer's Convention (12 pp, essay attributed to GPJ)	1883 February 22
2	12	Essay: "Seeds"	1893
2	13	Paper read before Green's Farms Farmers Club, on transportation	1894
2	14	"25 Years and More" (attributed to GPJ)	1912
2	15	Miscellaneous essays (possibly by GPJ) including "Writer's Life and Work on the Farm"; "Wheat Growing in Connecticut"	Undated
2	16	Miscellaneous essays primarily related to agriculture (possibly by GPJ)	Undated
2	17	Miscellaneous essays, including regarding Methodist Church of Westport, Road Making, steamboats on Saugatuck River, fire on steamboat <i>Lexington</i>	1840, Undated
3	1	Notes by GPJ	Undated
3	2-4	Miscellaneous essays primarily related to GPJ's history of Green's Farms: Notes and typescripts, including "Indian Legend of Macamux"; "The Five Farmers Follow the Cattle ot Bankside"; "Topograph of the Old West Parish of Fairfield"; "Gallup's Gap Creek"; "The Great Swamp Fight with the Pequots"; "Some Personal Doings of Over Seventy Years"; "Man of the Sea", etc.	1931-1932, undated
3	5	Drafts of dedication of book	Undated
3	6	Galley print format of book; photos and map, index	Undated
3	7	Book publicity and orders	
		By Louise Jennings (daughter of GPJ)	
3	8	History thesis: "The Settlement of Connecticut and its Growth..."	circa 1922-1926
		By Bessie C. Jennings (daughter of GPJ)	
3	9	Memory books: Volume 1: Written while at Staples High School, Senior year – includes lists of faculty, detailed description of wedding of Julia S. Adams to Dr. Carroll David; account of scene of trainwreck at Saugatuck, etc. Volume 2: School rules, lists of students, daily details, souvenir programs enclosed	1912-1913
3	10	2 composition books containing printed articles written by BCJ when she was a senior at Staples High School: "Green's Farms Notes" – daily column in <i>Bridgeport Morning Telegraph</i> . Bessie began college in September and her sisters Mary and Louise continued the column. Columns cover local church, school, and community events, social occasions and conventions, births and deaths, etc.; useful for providing a detailed day by day picture of life in Green's Farms. See notes in folder for details	1913 May – November
3	11	2 composition books containing printed articles written by BCJ during the summers of 1914 and 1915	1914, 1915

		See notes in folder for details	
		Writings of others	
3	12	Related to the schooner <i>Ella Jane</i> , captained by C. T. Allen; history of the schooner and 4 letters to GPJ from Captain Charles Thorpe Allen that provide detail about ships and packet boats sailing out of Westport. Allen's great-grandfather owned most of the land at Compo; includes story re. Battle of Compo Beach.	Undated
3	13	Historical address delivered at the 40 th anniversary of the Green's Farms Farmers Club by Hon. John Henry Jennings	1901
3	14	Article in <i>The Fairfield News</i> – "Vivid Scenes of Years Ago Recalled by Hezekiah R. Elwood" – addresses at the Luncheon Club	circa 1935
3	15	Article in <i>The Fairfield News</i> – "Fairfield Home of Onions and Shipping"	1936
3	15	Article in <i>Bridgeport Daily Standard</i> – address delivered by Rev. Frank S. Child re. Congregational Church of Greenwich	Undated

Series 3: Legal and Estate Documentation

4	1	Deeds, including: Henry B. Wakeman from William J. Jennings Andrew W. Jennings from Henry B. Jennings Celestia J. Jennings from Franklin Whitehead Franklin Whitehead from Edwin B. Jennings Andrus B. Godfrey from Grace E. Jennings Thomas Shaughnessy from Walter Jennings Charles E. Bulkley from John (H.?) Jennings Charles Benetz from Annie M. Jennings George S. Jennings from Valtine and Emma Ballard George S. Jennings from estate of Sarah L. Jennings	1864-1917
4	2	John B. Jennings documents, including: 1834: Lawsuit files by Anna B. Davis against JBJ re. stolen and killed rooster 1861: Application for hearing to appoint JBJ conservator for his brother Talcott Jennings 1863: re. estate of JBJ	1834-1863
4	3	William J. Jennings documents: 1856: Insurance policy 1886 Cemetery plot deed	1856, 1886
4	4	Regarding estate of Henry B. Wakeman	n.d.
4	5	Notice of town meeting and ballots – George P. Jennings a Republican candidate for Grand Juror	1909
4	6	George P. Jennings insurance policy – Standard Fire Insurance Co.	1913
4	7-20	Correspondence and documents related to the estate of George P. Jennings, including: Correspondence of Bessie C. Jennings and Louise J. Penny to Probate Court	1935-1937

		Accounts, reports, canceled checks, shares of stock, insurance, property taxes, estate income and expenses, mortgage payments to estate, etc.	
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Series 4: Financial Records

		Loose records	
		William J. Jennings	
4	21	Receipts – including 3 receipts from Ripon College for Cornelia Jennings	1865-1869
4	22	Receipts	1870-1877
4	23	Receipts and accounts	1882-1901
		Various Jennings	
4	24	Receipts, including of Rutha Jennings, Henry B. Jennings	1841-1898
		George P. Jennings	
4	25	Receipts	1876-1896
4	26	Canceled checks signed by GPJ	1897-1911
4	27	Records related to GPJ's role as Treasurer, Green's Farms Church Society, Consociated Presbyterian Society and Hill Fund	1891-1913
		Bound volumes	
5	1	Large ledger with accounts for woodworking business – George P. Jennings taking over business of Hill and Jennings	1883-1884
5	2	Cash book – GPJ - including lists of customers and costs	1883-1886
5	3	8 small account books – see notes in box Primarily belonging to William J. Jennings, the volumes include accounts, notes, lists of rainfall	1847-1893
6	1	12 small account books – see notes in box Including of Ida L. Jennings, George P. Jennings, and unidentified, accounts and notes, including re. estate of Samuel Sherwood	1777-1891

Series 5: Biographical Documentation and Memorabilia

		General	
6	2	"The Jennings Family of Green's Farms and Southport – a Genealogical Study by E.C. Birge and Joseph Adams" - published in the <i>Fairfield News</i>	1936 Jul
6	3	List of descendants of John Jennings	n.d.
6	4	Handwritten genealogy notes and supporting documents – mentioning Peter Jennings, Isaac Jennings, Penny and Taylor families, Jennings obituaries (Sereno G., Austin, Erwin)	n.d.
6	5	Handwritten genealogy notes, beginning with Josiah and Mercy Chandler – records of death dates	n.d.
6	6	Miscellaneous genealogical notes and articles, including Jennings genealogy as found in family Bible belonging to	n.d.

		William J. Jennings, notes compiled by Bessie C. Jennings, "The Jennings Family and Its Name"	
6	7	Booklet: "The Descendants of Grandfather Hill"	n.d.
		George P. Jennings	
6	8	Business cards for GPJ "Messenger, Order, Commission, Purchasing Agent"; advertisement for GPJ "Daily NY Messenger"; obituary published in <i>The Congregationalist</i> , article re. GPJ portrait presented to Green's Farms Engine Co. No. 5	1897, 1933, 1939, n.d.
6	9	Various memorabilia, including related to his civic activities	1895-1897
		Bessie C. Jennings	
6	10	Newspaper articles about BCJ and her town history tours	1933, 1963-1965
6	11	Obituary and eulogy, information about her death and funeral	1972
6	12	Various memorabilia including ABCFM certificate, study hall student seating chart, Patriots Day Memorial service program	1932, 1958, n.d.
7	1	Loose newspaper articles collected by BCJ	
7	2	Scrapbook compiled by BCJ – see notes in box Includes newspaper articles, programs, correspondence, including re. Jennings genealogy and celebration of Westport Centenary	
7	3	Ledger repurposed as a scrapbook – in possession of BCJ but with early entries – see notes in box	1898-1933
		Photographs	
7	4	Of George P. Jennings (undated); of Bessie C. Jennings (1970)	
7	5	Miscellaneous photographs, including of clearing snow after blizzard of 1888, sailing boat race (1932)	