

Collection #
SC 3207

**REV. WILLIAM M. PRATT
DIARY EXTRACTS, CA. 1839–1891**

[Collection Information](#)

[Biographical Sketch](#)

[Scope and Content Note](#)

[Contents](#)

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 folder (90 pages typed transcripts)

COLLECTION DATES: 1839–1891

PROVENANCE: W. Dudley Pratt and Julian K. Dale

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1948.0317

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Moody Pratt (1817–1897) was the son of Dr. Daniel Pratt (1780–1864) and Sarah (Sallie) Rogers Hill Moody Pratt (1774–1849). They married in 1808 in Palermo, Maine, after the death of Sallie's first husband and Dr. Pratt's friend and colleague, Dr. William Drummer Moody (1775–1807). Sallie had two daughters from her first marriage, and together she and Daniel had four more children: Sarah (Sally) Pratt (1809–1855), Harriet C. Pratt (1811–1852), the Honorable Daniel Darwin Pratt (1813–1877), and Reverend William Moody Pratt (1817–1897). William Pratt, named for his mother's first husband, was the only child born in the family's new home in Madison County, New York.

Pratt became a Baptist after attending a revival in Fenner, Madison County, New York in 1831. He officially converted to Baptism during the height of the Second Great Awakening (ca. 1790–1840) in 1832, and attended both the Cazenovid and Hamilton Seminaries (dates unknown). Later, in 1856, he received a Doctor of Divinity from Madison University, (previously Hamilton Seminary, currently Colgate University).

In 1838, he left New York to become a missionary, and he spent the next year traveling through Indiana, preaching in many small towns but establishing himself in Crawfordsville, Montgomery County. There, he helped found the First Baptist Church and the Crawfordsville Seminary, a school for young ladies. In 1839, he returned to New York to marry Julia Ann Maria Peck (1816–1839) on 22 August. She died of "ague" only two months later, after they had returned to Crawfordsville.

Rev. Pratt continued his work as a traveling preacher in Indiana for the next six years. Though he was appointed General Missionary for Indiana by the Baptist Home Missionary Board in 1843, he left for Lexington, Kentucky in 1845 and established a new church there. He remarried in 1846 to Mary Ellis Dillard (1825–1907) and had five children with her while they lived in Lexington: Laura Pratt (1849–1907), William Dudley Pratt (1851–1919), Mary Baldwin Pratt (1854–1939), Elizabeth (Lizzie) Pratt (1856–1889), and Ryland Dillard Pratt (1860–1909).

While living in Kentucky, Pratt frequently returned to Indiana to visit his brother, Daniel Pratt (a lawyer, landowner, and, by 1869, U.S. Senator for Indiana), or to help establish new Baptist congregations. In 1868, Pratt left Kentucky and returned to Indiana with his family, preaching in both New Albany and Shelbyville. He retired from preaching in 1888 on December 4th, the fiftieth anniversary of his pastorate. After his daughter Lizzie's death from complications due to childbirth in 1889, he moved to Louisville to be closer to his children Laura and William and their families. He died there in 1897.

Sources:

Information in collection.

Ancestry, Library Edition, Accessed 25 January 2017.

Gronert, Theodore Gregory. *Sugar Creek Saga: The History and Development of Montgomery County, Indiana*. Wabash College: 1958, pp. 114, 351.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains ninety pages of typed extracts from the five-volume diary of Rev. William Moody Pratt. Rev. Pratt wrote in his diary once a week from the time he was twenty-one until a short time before his death. The extracts were compiled from the original diaries by Pratt's daughter, Mary Baldwin Pratt, in 1932–1933. The original diaries were rebound by Arthur and Ryland Pratt, grandsons of Rev. Pratt and the founders of the Pratt Poster Company of Indianapolis, and then loaned to the Indiana Historical Society for copying in 1948. The original diaries reside in the library of the University of Kentucky.

Though condensed, the diary provides excellent insight into the life of an itinerant Baptist pastor from roughly the 1830s to the 1880s. Rev. Pratt was often based in one small town in Indiana but frequently traveled to others to preach or provide various religious services, such as baptisms, marriage ceremonies, and funerals. Pratt traveled to Fort Wayne, Logansport, Lafayette, Indianapolis, Crawfordsville, Newtown, Middletown, Wabash, Delphi, Laporte, Covington, New Albany, and Shelbyville at various times throughout his career.

Pratt was involved in several popular social causes of the mid-nineteenth century. While in Lexington, he was a vocal advocate of both the temperance and abolitionist movements. Pratt was also instrumental in founding the first African Church in Lexington in 1860 and tried often to purchase slaves at auction with the intention of setting them free. He usually did not succeed; in one instance, he attempted to save two free women who were being sold into slavery through trickery, but he gave up after someone else outbid him. However, Pratt also participated in and profited from the sale of his father-in-law's slaves after his death in 1852. It is also possible he owned at least one slave himself: Pratt often makes references to "his boy Joe" throughout the diary.

During the Civil War, Rev. Pratt did not enlist but rather tended to his congregation and the many sick and wounded soldiers that were housed in Lexington. Pratt experienced so many difficulties due to his pro-Union and anti-slavery politics that he left Kentucky for Indiana because he could not reconcile the opposing ideologies within his congregation, though he spent several years trying.

Throughout the diary, Pratt makes references to both national and local events as well as marriages, births, and deaths within his close and extended family. He also makes note of particular business transactions as well as his progress in spreading Baptism through Indiana and Kentucky.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

Diary extracts, 1839–1891

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1