

Collection #
P 0905
OM 0792

**BEST – WHEELER FAMILY COLLECTION,
CA. 1905-1952, 1998**

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8 May 2025

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 7 photograph folders; 1 OVA photograph folder, 1 OM folder

COLLECTION
DATES: Ca. 1905–1952, 1998

PROVENANCE: Gift from William M. and Dorothy Jane (Best) Bailey of
Valparaiso, Indiana, 28 May 1998

RESTRICTIONS: None

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RELATED
HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION
NUMBER: 1998.0605

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

F.A. Best owned and operated a general store in Floyds Knobs, Floyd County, Indiana, at the beginning of the twentieth century. His son, J. Odell Best, served as postmaster for the town for thirty years and ran a hardware store as well. Odell's wife, Jennie Wheeler Best, was a school teacher in her early adult years. Her cousin, Raymond Hessing, was a streetcar conductor in nearby New Albany, Indiana.

Frank A. Best was born in November 1868 in Floyd County to immigrants Jacob Best (1831–1914) from Alsace-Lorraine, and Margaretha Weisenberger Best (1849–1888) from Germany. Jacob worked as a blacksmith and later, as a farmer. It appears that Frank was the eldest of ten children.

In January 1893, Frank A. Best married Mary Margaret Weber (1866–1950). They had seven children:

- John Odell (1893–1975)
- Clarence Anthony (1895–1977)
- Wilhelmina “Minnie” (Batliner) (1896–1978)
- Gertrude Irene (Peay) (1899–1981)
- Blanche Mary (1901–1903)
- Barbara Mae (Dunbar) (1903–1985)
- Frank Albert (1906–1994)

By 1900, Frank A. Best's occupation was grocer and feed merchant. He opened F.A. Best's general store on Paoli Pike near the Little Indian Creek in Floyds Knobs by 1903, with attached living quarters for his family. The building also included a bar and a feed mill and warehouse. Frank A. Best died in 1938.

By 1910, John Odell Best (sometimes called “Odell”) was working as a grocery clerk. He graduated from New Albany Business College in December 1912. On 24 May 1917, he married Jennie Eva Wheeler. They had two children, Frank Andrew, who went by his middle name (1921–2012), and Dorothy Jane (1923–2014).

John Odell Best served as Postmaster at Floyds Knobs from 1925 to 1955. During the first year or so of his service, the post office was located in the F.A. Best Store. In 1926, J.O. built a hardware store across Paoli Pike from his father's store and moved the post office into his new store. After J.O. retired as postmaster, the new postmaster moved the post office to a new location. J.O. Best died on 13 June 1975. The hardware store continued to operate until about 1978.

Jennie Eva Wheeler was born on 15 May 1892 to Andrew and Mary Bigwood Wheeler. In June 1907 Jennie graduated from Floyd County Public School. She graduated from New Albany High School in 1911. She then attended Central Normal College in Danville in Hendricks County, Indiana. After that, she taught at the Floyds Knobs school on Scottsville Road. She also taught at Chapel Hill School and in New Albany. Later, Jennie helped her husband run the post office. She died on 13 November 1973.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

Ancestrylibrary.com (Accessed 8 May 2025):

Find a Grave
Indiana, U.S., Marriage Index, 1800–1941
Indiana, U.S., Marriages, 1810–2001
United States Federal Census, 1870–1950

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of photographs, postcards, manuscript pages, and two diplomas pertaining to the F.A. Best and the J. Odell and Jennie Wheeler Best families of Floyds Knobs, Floyd County, Indiana.

The photographs show F.A. Best's general store, the school house, the bridge that carries Paoli Pike over Little Indian Creek, and the post office inside J. Odell Best's hardware store – all in Floyds Knobs. There are also photographs of Jennie Wheeler with fellow students at Central Normal College in Danville in Hendricks County, Indiana, and of her cousin, Raymond Hessing, with streetcars in New Albany, Indiana. The dates listed in this collection guide reflect the dates of the original photographs and not necessarily the dates the prints in this collection were made.

The manuscripts are descriptions of the photographs and reminiscences written by one of the donors of this collection, Dorothy Jane Best Bailey, daughter of J. Odell and Jennie Wheeler Best. They also include a sketch of the floor plan of F.A. Best's store and living quarters. Some of the manuscript pages were originally written ca. 1975 and updated in 1998.

The diplomas are Jennie Wheeler's 1907 certificate from Floyd County Public School and J. Odell Best's 1912 diploma from New Albany Business College.

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CONTENTS

Four photographs: one shows F.A. Best's store and home in Floyds Knobs, with John Breen on the porch of his tavern/inn next door and a two-lane covered bridge over Little Indian Creek on Paoli Pike in the distance [ca. 1905–1910]; two photos show the south (back?) side of Best's store and home; one photo taken at a later date shows the iron bridge that replaced the covered bridge.

Enlargement of photograph of F.A. Best's store and home in Floyds Knobs, with John Breen on the porch of his tavern/inn next door and a two-lane covered bridge carrying Paoli Pike over Little Indian Creek in the distance [ca. 1905–1910].

Manuscript pages: three-page typed description of the F.A. Best Store and living quarters and reminiscences written by Dorothy Jane Bailey; sketch of the floor plan of the store and living quarters with a key on a separate page identifying the rooms; typed page identifying the photographs in this folder.

Three photographs: one shows the school house at Floyds Knobs; another shows students and teachers posing outside the brick building [ca. 1905]; another is an enlargement of the students and teachers photo with a key to lay over it that identifies some of the people with surnames Best, Wheeler, Parsons, Moore, and Smith.

One page of typed notes about the school house at Floyds Knobs and the photos in this folder.

Typed manuscript page regarding the education of Jennie Eva Wheeler (later known as Jennie Best) and a reduced-size photocopy of her diploma from Floyd County Public Schools.

Typed manuscript page regarding the diploma of John Odell Best from the New Albany Business College, a reduced-size photocopy of the diploma, and a photocopy of a page from an unidentified book that shows a picture of the college.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Folder 1

OVA Photographs,
Folder 1 of 1

Photographs, Folder 1

Photographs, Folder 2

Photographs, Folder 2

Photographs, Folder 3

Photographs, Folder 3

Two diplomas: 1907 Floyd County Public School diploma for Jennie Eva Wheeler; 1912 New Albany Business College diploma for (John) Odell Best.

OM 0792, Folder 1 of 1

Photocopied page from unknown source, titled “This Page Is A Memorial To J.O. Best And Jennie From Their Children, Andrew and Jane.” It includes a photo of Jennie and Odell Best with some biographical information.

Photographs, Folder 3

Postcard of covered bridge that carries Paoli Pike over the Little Indian Creek in Floyds Knobs [ca. 1910]. The printed postcard is misidentified as “Old Wagon Bridge, Poole Pike, New Albany, Ind.” There is also a typed manuscript page about the postcard.

Photographs, Folder 4

Three photographs of Jennie Eva Wheeler with other unidentified young women students at Central Normal College in Danville, Hendricks County, Ind., ca. 1911–1912. There is also a typed manuscript page about the photographs.

Photographs, Folder 5

Two black-and-white real photo postcards of streetcars in New Albany, ca. 1910–1915. Both show conductor Raymond J. Hessing (1889–1970). One of the postcards is addressed to Mr. Leslie Wheeler [brother of Jennie Wheeler Best] in Floyds Knobs and has “Uncle Raymond Hessing” written on it. [Raymond’s mother was Sarah Elizabeth Bigwood Hessing, sister of Jennie Wheeler Best’s mother, Mary Bigwood Wheeler.] There is also a typed manuscript page about the postcards that also includes some information about Raymond Hessing.

Photographs, Folder 6

Photograph of the interior of J.O. Best’s hardware store on Paoli Pike in Floyds Knobs with Post Office window inside the store. John Odell Best is seen standing in the store, 1927. There is also a typed manuscript page telling about the items in this folder.

Photographs, Folder 7

Three-page typed letter written by John O. Best, Postmaster of Floyds Knobs, to Mr. L. E. Ernst in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 20 June 1952. It provides some history of the town and its post office and lists the town’s postmasters beginning in 1852 along with the dates they began service.

Photographs, Folder 7

