BRANDT AND HELEN MCKAY STEELE COLLECTION
ADDITION, CA. 1792-2000

Collection Information 1
Biographical Sketch 2
Scope and Content Note 6
Series Contents 7

Processed by
Maire Gurevitz
February 2018

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org
COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 7 manuscript boxes, 1 folder OM, 1 bound volume, 12 flat files, 1 half size box photographs, 1 half size box cold storage color photographs, 1 folder OVA photographs, 3 boxes 4x5 lantern slides, 1 folder upright graphics, 1 folder OVA graphics, 2 OVB boxes of photographs, 8 envelopes 8x10 acetate negatives, 1 envelope 4x5 acetate negatives, 8 tintypes, 37 cased images (5 boxes), 16 printed items, 2 artifacts

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1792-2000

PROVENANCE: Thomas Creveling, Indianapolis, IN

RESTRICTIONS: Slides and negatives must be requested in advance and may be viewed by appointment only and with the assistance of library staff.

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Brandt and Helen McKay Steele Collection, M1078; Theodore L. Steele Papers, M0263; Valentine Nicholson Papers, M0641-M0642; T.C. and Mary Lakin Steele Papers, M0464; Indianapolis Woman’s Club Records M0478

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2001.0777; 2016.0234

NOTES:
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

This collection is an addition to the collection M1078, which documents the lives of the Steele, McKay and Nicholson families, who were related to each other by marriage, and all of whom ended up settling in Indianapolis in the last half of the 19th century.

Rembrandt "Brandt" Theodore Steele (1870-1965) was the son of noted Indiana artist Theodore Clement Steele and Mary Elizabeth Lakin Steele. Steele had two younger siblings, Margaret (also called Daisy) and Shirley. The family traveled around when Brandt was a child, as T.C. Steele spent time studying and working in Europe, but their home base was Indianapolis. Brandt followed in his father's footsteps with an interest in fine art. He studied architecture and decorative arts for about four years in France and Germany, and opened Brandt Steele Pottery after his return to Indianapolis. However, much of Brandt Steele's career was spent with H. Lieber Company, drafting and designing furniture, frames, mirrors, as well as some stone carving. Brandt Steele is responsible for the design of Lieber's monument at Crown Hill Cemetery. In 1902, Brandt Steele married Helen McKay, a fellow artist who also was very interested in the decorative arts. The couple had three sons, Horace McKay, Theodore Lakin and Brandt Ferguson Steele, and settled in a home that Brandt designed at 811 Woodruff Place. In addition to his work with the Lieber company, Brandt served as an instructor at the John Herron Art Institute. He was actively involved with the Indianapolis Camera Club, the Portfolio Club and was interested in genealogy.

Helen Elizabeth McKay Steele (1875-1947) was the daughter of M. Horace McKay and Martha Nicholson McKay. She was the youngest of three daughters and grew up in what is now the Old Northside neighborhood of Indianapolis at 1241 Broadway in a multigenerational household, as her grandparents and aunts lived just down the street. Helen attended Shortridge High School and then went on to study at the Art Institute of Chicago and the John Herron Art Institute. Helen was most interested in decorative arts and crafts, and she made designs for stained glass, leather and wood, as well as woodcuts and prints. Beginning in 1911, she was responsible for writing an illustrating a children's page in the Indianapolis Star that was based off Mother Goose and the Grimm Brothers tales. Following in her mother and aunts' footsteps, Helen was very active in the Indianapolis Woman's Club. She also joined her husband as a member of the Portfolio Club, and when she was a young woman belonged to the Sketching Club.

Theodore Lakin Steele (1905-2003) was the middle son of Brandt and Helen McKay Steele. Theodore attended Arsenal Technical High School and graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in architecture. Upon his graduation, he returned to Indianapolis and worked as an architect, designing homes and office buildings around the city. Theodore married Beatrice Tucker and they had one child, Helen Elizabeth, named after her grandmother. Theodore was a member of the Sigma Nu fraternity and was a member of the Free and Accepted Masons. He was involved with Portfolio Club along with his parents, and also was active in the Unitarian church. Additionally, Theodore was the steward of his grandfather T.C. Steele's paintings and home in Brown County and helped to transition the estate to the State of Indiana. Theodore, like his father Brandt, was
interested in genealogy and also wrote *The House of the Singing Winds*, a biography of his grandfather.

Horace McKay Steele (1903-1962) was the oldest son of Brandt and Helen McKay Steele. He attended Arsenal Technical High School and Purdue University, where he studied engineering. McKay spent most of his career with the company that he founded, Model Engineering and Manufacturing Corporation. The company contracted with the Department of Defense during World War II and was most notable for designing and developing a bomb release mechanism for Navy bombers. McKay settled in Huntington, Indiana with his wife Germaine Leclerc, with whom he had a son, Robert. McKay also had a daughter, Ruthann Steele Deuber, from a previous marriage.

Dr. Brandt Ferguson Steele (1907-2005) was the youngest son of Brandt and Helen McKay Steele. He attended Indiana University, where he received a degree in medicine. After medical school, Dr. Steele served in the Army, where he took part in Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. After the war, Dr. Steele worked in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania for a few years before ending up at the University of Colorado, where he taught and did research in the field of psychiatry for four decades. Dr. Steele is perhaps best known for his work studying child abuse and abusers and working to develop treatments. His 1961 panel session with C. Henry Kempe at the American Academy of Pediatrics brought the term "battered-child syndrome" into public consciousness, which ultimately brought national legislation on reporting child abuse. Dr. Steele continued to study and write about abused children, abusive parents and infanticide for the rest of his career. Dr. Steele was married twice, first to Margaret and later to Eleanor and had two sons, Brandt and Thomas.

Moses Horace McKay (1841-1914) was born to Jonas Tildeu and Matilda Ferguson McKay in Waynesville, Ohio. Horace McKay studied at Wittenberg College before enlisting in the Ohio 79th Infantry, Company H in 1862. Horace was given the rank of Captain in 1863 and he took an assignment with the 15th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops Infantry. While at home on leave in 1864, he was married to Martha Nicholson of Harveysburg Ohio. Horace was mustered out in February of 1865, and shortly after his first child, Mary Louise, was born. After the war, the McKay family moved briefly to Georgia, where McKay invested in a gold mining operation that eventually failed. The family then moved to Indianapolis, where Horace opened up a dry goods store. In Indianapolis, daughters Cornelia and Helen were born, and Horace built a house at 1241 Broadway. In 1882, Horace was appointed as Collector of Internal Revenue for the Indiana 6th district, and was later involved in local politics, as he ran for mayor and served as a city councilman. In his later years, Horace and his wife spent time at their second home in St. Petersburg, Florida and also traveled extensively in California, in efforts to improve/preserve his health, which had been tenuous since he served in the Civil War. Horace was a founder of the All Souls Unitarian Church and the College Corners Club, and enjoyed bicycling and writing poetry.

Martha Nicholson McKay (1843-1934) was born to Valentine and Jane Wales Nicholson in Harveysburg, Ohio. Martha grew up in a Hicksite Quaker and abolitionist household attended Ohio Female College from 1859-61. In 1864, she married Horace McKay, and
soon after she travelled to Tennessee in order to care for her husband, who was ill, and assist him in his administrative duties while he was Captain of the 15th U.S. Colored Troops. Martha had three children, Mary Louise, Cornelia and Helen. She was a liberal and progressive thinker, and when the family moved to Indianapolis, Martha joined the Association for the Advancement of Women and also was a founding member of the Indianapolis Woman's Club. Martha was also a prolific writer and had essays published for the Social Science Association and wrote two small books, *Literary Clubs of Indiana* and *When the Tide Turned in the Civil War*. Martha and her husband Horace also owned a variety of rental properties around the city of Indianapolis.

Valentine Nicholson (1809-1904) was born to David and Elizabeth Nicholson in Clinton County, Ohio. Valentine was a farmer and was brought up as a Hicksite Quaker, but later left because of his fervent abolitionist views. Valentine married Jane Wales on November 3, 1830 and the couple settled on a farm in Harveysburg, Ohio. Valentine and Jane had seven daughters, but only three survived to adulthood. After the Civil War, when his children were grown, Valentine became somewhat of an itinerant. He became very interested in Spiritualism and travelled through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin to visit with mediums and attend séances. At this time, he also trained as a healer and took on patients in new cities in order to continue to fund his travels. Eventually, he returned to his family, who at that time had moved to Indianapolis. He remained there in a house shared with his wife and daughters Mary and Elizabeth until his death.

Jane Finley Wales Nicholson (1806-1906) was born to Isaac and Ruth (Welch) Wales in North Carolina, but moved to Harveysburg, Ohio as a small child. She grew up in a Quaker household and also had abolitionist beliefs. She married a farmer, Valentine Nicholson in 1830 and had seven daughters—Ruth, Elizabeth, Edna, Mary, Martha, Louisa and Caroline, however only Elizabeth, Mary and Martha survived to adulthood. Later in life, unable to continue managing the family farm alone, Jane moved to Indianapolis to be with her three daughters. She, along with them, was a member of the Indianapolis Woman’s Club. Jane lived in a home at 1233 Broadway with her husband, Elizabeth and Mary, and she lived to celebrate her 100th birthday and meet her first great-grandson.

Elizabeth Nicholson (1833-1926) was born to Valentine and Jane Wales Nicholson in Harveysburg, Ohio. Elizabeth grew up in a Quaker and abolitionist household and attended Ohio Female College in the 1850s, where she worked on her skills as an artist. Elizabeth specialized in sketches and watercolors, especially of flowers, but also produced sketches of homes and other scenery. Elizabeth went back to her alma mater for a while as an art instructor, but later joined her sisters Mary and Martha in Indianapolis, where she had a studio and continued to give private art lessons. She was a founder of the Indiana Union of Literary Clubs and the Indianapolis Woman’s Club and a member of the College Corner Club.

Mary Ellen Nicholson (1839-1928) was born to Valentine and Jane Wales Nicholson in Harveysburg, Ohio. Mary grew up in a Quaker and abolitionist household and attended the local academy in Harveysburg before becoming a teacher herself. She began her career, after being hired by Horace Mann, at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio in 1855, and later continued her education at Ohio Female College. Mary joined her sister and
brother-in-law in Indianapolis in 1868 and was hired to teach at Indianapolis High School. She remained there as a teacher until 1884, before serving as principal of the Indianapolis Normal school until 1906, and finally serving on the Indianapolis School Board (the first female member elected) until 1914. In addition to her career, Mary was able to make two extensive trips to Europe, and also belonged to the National Education Association, College Corner Club and the Browning Club.

Sources:
Ancestry.com
Materials in the collection
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection addition is made up mostly of items that pertain to the genealogical research undertaken by Brandt T. Steele, Theodore L. Steele and later on by Elizabeth Creveling (Steele). The first three series of the collection reflect this research and are separated out first by correspondence regarding the genealogical research with distant relatives, second by notes and documents obtained relating to different family groups, and third by supplemental resources such as maps and notebooks kept while researching. The fourth series contains photographs, cased images, papers, and books that belonged to members of the McKay, Steele, Nicholson, and Creveling families. Series five through seven is mostly made up of lantern slides taken by Brandt T. Steele. The majority of the slides were taken while Brandt and Helen were touring Charleston and New Orleans in 1932, but there are also some that seem to be from Brandt’s time studying in France as a young man, as well as a few images of the Steele family. In addition, this series contains a large number of oversize prints taken by Brandt on a road trip he took to the West Coast with Theodore L. Steele in 1928. The prints feature shots of distinctive Southwestern architecture and scenery. Series eight of the collection is a miscellaneous series, which mostly contains a variety of unidentified cased images of individuals who are most likely relatives or friends of the Nicholson and McKay families.
SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Genealogy Correspondence

CONTENTS

Correspondence, Family History, and Lore-Wales/Welch/Butterworth/Nicholson families, 1830-1962
Box 1, Folder 1

Correspondence, Steele Family, Eleanor Alice Steele, 1940-1954
Box 1, Folder 2

Correspondence, Richards Family, 1947-1970
Box 1, Folder 3

Correspondence, Steele Family, Walter Shriner and Joy Hendrickson, 1956-1988
Box 1, Folder 4

Correspondence, Evans and Fain Families, Helen P. Fulk, ca. 1960-1962
Box 1, Folder 5

Correspondence, Matson and Gatch Families, ca. 1961
Box 1, Folder 6

Correspondence, Johnson Family, 1961-1965
Box 1, Folder 7

Correspondence, Society of Indiana Pioneers, 1963; 1995
Box 1, Folder 8

Correspondence, Steele Family, Mary Belle Wells, 1977-1985
Box 1, Folder 9

Correspondence, Evans and Steele Families, 1978
Box 1, Folder 10

Correspondence, Steele Family, Ruth and Malcolm Steele, 1980-1983
Box 1, Folder 11

Correspondence, Steele Family, Lewis Neubacher, 1982-1986
Box 1, Folder 12

Correspondence, Steele and Armstrong Families, 1981-1985
Box 1, Folder 13

Correspondence, Welch Family, Elizabeth Creveling and Edith Irwin, 1992-1995
Box 1, Folder 14
Series 2: Genealogy Notes, Charts, and Records

CONTENTS

Charts Compiled by Horace McKay Steele, n.d. Box 1, Folder 15

Notes, Armstrong Family (1 of 2) Box 1, Folder 16

Notes, Armstrong Family (2 of 2) Box 1, Folder 17

Charts, Butterworth Family, 1962-1968 Box 2, Folder 1

Portrait, [Butterworth relatives], ca. 1850s Cased Images, Box 4

Portrait, Nancy Irwin Wales Butterworth, ca. 1860s Tintypes

Portrait, Isaac Butterworth, ca. 1870s Photographs, Box 1, Folder 1

Notes, Doughty Family Box 2, Folder 2

Records, Ferguson and Garrison Family Box 2, Folder 3

Notes, Hendrick and Echols Families Box 2, Folder 4

Notes, Kelly Family Box 2, Folder 5

Notes, Lakin, Gatch, and Simmons Families Box 2, Folder 6

Photograph, Headstones of Rev. Philip and Elizabeth Gatch, n.d. Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2

Notes, Matson and Bailey Families Box 2, Folder 7

The McKay Family: A Short Biographical Sketch of Moses McKay and His Descendants, n.d. OM 0661 Folder 1 of 1

Notes, McKay Family, ca. 1940-1989 Box 2, Folder 8

Photograph, Colonial Terrace, McKay Family, n.d. Photographs, Box 1, Folder 3

Portrait, Clark McKay, ca. 1890s Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4

Notes, Newell and Evans Families (1 of 2) Box 2, Folder 9

Notes, Newell and Evans Families (2 of 2) Box 2, Folder 10
Notes, Nicholson Family (1 of 2)  
Box 2, Folder 11

Notes, Nicholson Family (2 of 2)  
Box 2, Folder 12

Quaker Records, Nicholson Family  
Box 2, Folder 13

Notes, Nicholson and Stockton Families  
Box 2, Folder 14

History of the Peggs in Columbus, Ohio  
Box 3, Folder 1

Notes, Pegg Family  
Box 3, Folder 2

Notes, Shinn and Ridgeway Families  
Box 3, Folder 3

Notes, Simmons Family  
Box 3, Folder 4

Charts, Steele Family (1 of 2)  
Box 3, Folder 5

Charts, Steele Family (2 of 2)  
Box 3, Folder 6

Notes, Steele Family (1 of 2)  
Box 3, Folder 7

Notes, Steele Family (2 of 2)  
Box 3, Folder 8

Portrait, James Armstrong Steele, n.d.  
Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 5

Steele and Related Family Ancestry by Lewis Neubacher, 1988  
Box 3, Folder 9

Portrait, Ruth Wales, [mourning portrait], 1856  
Cased Images,  
Box 4

Portrait, Thomas M. Wales and Harriet Fallis Wales, ca. 1850s  
Cased Images,  
Box 4

Thomas M. Wales Freemason Certificate, 1875  
Box 3, Folder 10

Notes, Wales and Butterworth Families  
Box 3, Folder 11

Wills and Accounts of Kindred, Wales and Ervin Family, ca. 1814-1903 [some original documents]  
Box 3, Folder 12

Notes and Copies of Wills and Indentures, Wales, Welch and Nicholson Families  
Box 3, Folder 13

Maps and Deeds for North Carolina Ancestors, Wales and Welch Families  
Box 3, Folder 14
Records and Accounts, Welch Family, 1877-1963
[some original documents] Box 3, Folder 15

Pictures of Samuel Welch’s Home, Iredel Co., North Carolina, 1991 Cold Storage Photographs, Box 1, Folder 1

**Series 3: Supplemental Genealogy Resources**

**CONTENTS**

Elizabeth Nicholson Writings on Nicholson Family History, n.d. Box 4, Folder 1

Genealogy Research Guides, n.d. Box 4, Folder 2

Notes on Passenger Lists to find British ancestors, n.d. Box 4, Folder 3

Maps and Brochures for Virginia Historic Sites, n.d. Box 4, Folder 4

Notes on Census Records, n.d. Box 4, Folder 5

Owen County Indiana Records and Maps, n.d. Box 4, Folder 6

*Gazette of the United States*, 24 Oct. 1792 [Daggett Family] OM 0661

*The Miami Gazette*, Dec. 1905 OM 0661

Commemorative Programs, History of Bethany Presbyterian Church, 1920; 1990 Box 4, Folder 7

*The Steele Family in America, a genealogical history of John and George Steele* by Steele Barnett, 1935 Box 4, Folder 8

General Laws, By-laws, Rules and Regulations, Miami Cemetery Association, 1936 Box 4, Folder 9

*The McKays of Virginia* by John W. Rust, 1957 Box 4, Folder 10

Travel Guides and Maps, Warren County Ohio, 1958-1963 Box 4, Folder 11

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research, Loose Notes, ca. 1960s (1 of 2) Box 4, Folder 12
Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research, Loose Notes, ca. 1960s (2 of 2)  Box 4, Folder 13

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (1 of 8)  Box 4, Folder 14

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (2 of 8)  Box 4, Folder 15

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (3 of 8)  Box 4, Folder 16

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (4 of 8)  Box 4, Folder 17

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (5 of 8)  Box 4, Folder 18

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (6 of 8)  Box 5, Folder 1

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (7 of 8)  Box 5, Folder 2

Theodore L. Steele Genealogy Research Notebooks, ca. 1960s (8 of 8)  Box 5, Folder 3

The Butterworth Family of Maryland and Virginia by Walter V. Ball, 1960  Box 5, Folder 4

Topographic Mapping Indexes, 1960  Box 5, Folder 5

Photographs of a Steele property, 1961  Cold Storage Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2

Maps for Genealogy Research- Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky, ca. 1961  Box 5, Folder 6

Newsletter, Warren County Historicalog, 1962-1967  Box 5, Folder 7

Sewall Furniture and New Jersey Cemetery Records, ca. 1970s  Box 5, Folder 8

North Carolina Map Index, 1988  Box 5, Folder 9

Elizabeth Steele Creveling Genealogy Research Notebook, ca. 1990  Box 5, Folder 10
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Guides, Warren County Ohio, ca. 1990s</th>
<th>Box 5, Folder 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exteriors and Scenery at Hunting Creek Friends Meeting, 1991</td>
<td>Cold Storage Photographs, Box 1, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenes around Nicholson Cemetery, 1991</td>
<td>Cold Storage Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loose Notes Removed from Elizabeth Steele Creveling’s Research Notebook, ca. 1997-1998</td>
<td>Box 5, Folder 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAA Illinois, Indiana, Ohio Tour Book, 1998</td>
<td>Box 5, Folder 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Series 4: Nicholson, McKay, and Steele Family Papers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>CONTAINER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helen McKay Steele Notes on family daguerreotypes, n.d.</td>
<td>Box 5, Folder 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrated <em>A Toccata of Galuppis</em> by Robert Browning, n.d.</td>
<td>Box 5, Folder 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary E. Nicholson Cookbook, n.d.</td>
<td>Box 5, Folder 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prints of T.C. Steele Paintings, n.d.</td>
<td>OVB Photographs, Box 2, Folder 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sketch of Childhood Memories by Jane Wales Nicholson, n.d.</td>
<td>Graphics, Folder 1 of 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records, <em>Our Quaker Friends in Ye Olden Times</em>, ca. 1800s</td>
<td>Box 6, Folder 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Portraiture of Quakerism</em> by Thomas Clarkson, 1808</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Certificate, Valentine Nicholson and Jane Wales, 1830</td>
<td>OM 0661 Folder 1 of 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Select Anecdotes and Instructive Incidents, Taken from Publications of Several Members of the Society of Friends</em> by John Barclay, 1833</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wesley’s Thoughts on Slavery, Rev. John Wesley, 1839

Portrait, [Caroline or Martha Nicholson?], ca. 1840s

Portrait, [Caroline or Martha Nicholson?], ca. 1840s

Portraits, Caroline Nicholson, ca. 1850s

Portrait, Caroline Nicholson, ca. 1850s (1 of 3)

Portrait, Caroline Nicholson, ca. 1850s (2 of 3)

Portrait, Caroline Nicholson, ca. 1850s (3 of 3)

Portrait, Elizabeth, Jane, and Mary Nicholson, ca. 1850s

Portrait, Elizabeth and Mary Nicholson, ca. 1850s

Portrait, Jane and Valentine Nicholson, ca. 1850s

Portrait, Martha Nicholson McKay, ca. 1850s

Portrait, Mary, Valentine and Martha Nicholson, ca. 1850s

The Complete Kitchen and Fruit Gardener, 1851

Portrait, Elizabeth Nicholson and unidentified friend wearing riding habits in Concord, New Hampshire, 1854

Correspondence, Elizabeth Nicholson, ca. 1856-1910s

Portrait, Elizabeth Nicholson, ca. 1860s

Portrait, Elizabeth Nicholson, ca. 1860s

Indiana Historical Society   Brandt and Helen McKay Steele Collection Addition  Page 13
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Collection Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portrait, Elizabeth Nicholson and Unidentified Friend, ca. 1860s</td>
<td>Cased Images, Box 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait, Horace McKay, ca. 1860s</td>
<td>Cased Images, Box 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait, Jane Wales Nicholson, ca. 1860s</td>
<td>Cased Images, Box 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait, Unidentified Sister of Horace McKay, ca. 1860s</td>
<td>Cased Images, Box 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKay Family Original Documents, 1862-1920</td>
<td>Box 6, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poems in Memory of Mary H. Harvey, 1863</td>
<td>Box 6, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Certificate, M. Horace McKay and Martha Nicholson, 1864</td>
<td>OM 0661 Folder 1 of 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh Annual Report of the Indiana State Board of Agriculture, 1869</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Summer in the Kitchen by Hetty A. Morrison, 1878</td>
<td>Box 6, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just How: A Key to the Cook-books by Mrs. ADT Whitney, 1879</td>
<td>Box 6, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portraits, Helen McKay Steele and friends, ca. 1880s</td>
<td>Tintypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, 1880</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs of Three Centuries, ed. John Greenleaf Whittier, 1880</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memories of Old Friends. Being extracts from the journals and letters of Caroline Fox, ed. Horace N. Pym, 1882</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymns of Faith and Hope by Oscar C. McCulloch, 1886</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence, Horace and Martha McKay, 1886-1922</td>
<td>Box 6, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Housekeeping, a Careful Compilation of Tried and Approved Recipes, 1888</td>
<td>General Collection:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Croquet Game, ca. 1890s

Artifacts:
2001.0777

Portrait, The McKay Sisters, Eusebia, Harriet, Emma, Katherine, Letitia, ca. 1890s

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 8

Printed Handouts from Plymouth Church, ca. 1890s

Box 6, Folder 9

Journal of Maurice de Guerin ed. G.S. Trebutien, 1891

General Collection:

Pictorial and Biographical Memoirs of Indianapolis and Marion County, 1893

General Collection:

The History of the State of Indiana from the Earliest Explorations by the French to the Present Time, by William Henry Smith, 1897

General Collection:

Lists of Officers, Delegates, and Clubs, ca. 1900s

Box 6, Folder 10

Steele Brothers Baby Photos, ca. 1900s

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 9

Our Beliefs: And Some of the Reasons for Them, by Rev. James T. Bixby, ca. 1901

Box 6, Folder 11

Small cards belonging to the Steele boys, ca. 1900-1910s

Box 6, Folder 12

List of wedding presents received by Brandt and Helen Steele, 1902

Box 6, Folder 13

Note and gift tags from Brandt and Helen Steele’s wedding, 1902

Box 6, Folder 14

The Thomas Jefferson Bible: Being the Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth, 1904

General Collection:

Abe Martin of Brown County Indiana, Kin Hubbard, 1906

General Collection:

Hyman’s Handbook of Indianapolis, 1909

General Collection:

Order List of Seeds, The School Garden Association, ca. 1910s

Box 6, Folder 15

Helen McKay Steele portfolio of Indianapolis Star children’s page, 1911-1912

Flat Files 6-K
The Indiana Weed Book by W.S. Blatchley, 1912
Program, Woodruff Place “Safe and Sane” Fourth of July Celebration, 1914
Governor James P. Goodrich Proclamation, 1919
Clippings, Brandt Steele and the Camera Club, ca. 1920s
Clippings, Hoosier Group Artists, ca. 1920s
Cookbook compiled by School #33 PTA, ca. 1920s
Martha Nicholson McKay and her three Steele grandsons, ca. 1920s
Brandt T. Steele Scrapbook, ca. 1920s
Minutes, Saturday Afternoon Social and Literary Club, 1921-1930
Indianapolis Woman’s Club, A Gift, 50th Anniversary, 1925
Interior, Hallway at 1233 Broadway house, 1926
Interior, Living Room at 1233 Broadway house, 1926
Interior, Parlor at 1233 Broadway house, 1926
Library at 1233 Broadway house, 1926
Living Room at 1233 Broadway house, 1926
Mary E. Nicholson inside the 1233 Broadway house, 1926
Mary E. Nicholson in the library at the 1233 Broadway house, 1926

Box 6, Folder 16
Box 6, Folder 17
OM 0661
Folder 1 of 1
Box 6, Folder 18
Box 6, Folder 19
Box 6, Folder 20
Box 6, Folder 20
BV 5333
Box 7, Folder 1
Box 7, Folder 2
8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 1 of 8
8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 2 of 8
8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 3 of 8
8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 4 of 8
8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 5 of 8
8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 6 of 8
8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 7 of 8
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary E. Nicholson and Martha Nicholson McKay in the library at 1233 Broadway house, 1926</td>
<td>8 x 10 Acetate Negatives, Envelope 8 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program, T.C. Steele Memorial Exhibition, 1926</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of <em>When The Tide Turned in the Civil War</em> by George S. Cottman, 1929</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandt T. Steele Portrait Photography, ca. 1930s</td>
<td>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandt T. Steele Slide Description List for Charleston and New Orleans, 1932</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait, Helen McKay Steele, ca. 1940s</td>
<td>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis Woman’s Club, 65th Anniversary “Looking Backward” Essays, 1940</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creveling Family Snapshots, 1950</td>
<td>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence, Horace McKay Steele Estate, ca. 1961-1965 (1 of 2)</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence, Horace McKay Steele Estate, ca. 1961-1965 (2 of 2)</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creveling Family, ca. 1970s-2000s</td>
<td>Cold Storage Photographs, Box 1, Folder 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding Invitation, Carolyn Reid and Jay Creveling, 1976</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs of Martha Nicholson McKay’s headstone at Crown Hill, ca. 1990s</td>
<td>Cold Storage Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore L. Steele and Brandt F. Steele Childhood Reminiscences, 1 May 1995</td>
<td>Box 7, Folder 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Series 5: Brandt T. Steele Photography, Charleston**

**CONTENTS**

- Exterior, Garden front house, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 1

- Alley Scene, Longitude Lane, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 2

- Legare House, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 3

- Tradd St. wall and coach house, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 4

- One of two early brick houses, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 5

- Another Longitude house, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 6

- Church Street looking toward St. Phillips, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 7

- Horse and cart on Church Street, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 8

- View of William W. house where George Washington was a guest of the city, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 9

- Huguenot Church, Church St., 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 10

- Church St., looking north to St. Phillips Church, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 11

- Pirates houses, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 12

- Miles Bruster or Pringle house, 1932
  - Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 13
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach house, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powder house, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston Orphan Home Exterior, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington’s birthday parade, Boy Scouts and Citadel, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remodeled row of old homes next to graveyard, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another very nice remodeling job, home of an architect, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitarian church foreground, St. John’s Lutheran in background, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either Unitarian or St. Phillip’s graveyard, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very tall dark wood carved doorway, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful walls are many in Charleston, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graceful steps of the old St. Phillip’s rectory, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Blakelock House wooden gates, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Square, Pitt monument, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave quarters beyond the wall, Washington Square, 1932</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 1, Slide 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Portico of South Carolina Society Building, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 28

On Meeting Street, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 29

Marion Square, John Calhoun monument, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 30

Doorway to courtyard of the Citadel, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 31

Courtyard of the Citadel, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 32

Ruin and waste where there was a former garden, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 33

Middleton Place house, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 34

Old Rice Mill, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 35

Old Rice Mill, walk through entrance grounds, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 36

Azalea pool, misty day, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 37

One of the largest live oaks in the United States, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 38

Waiting for the crab boat, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 39

Boats and the landing pier, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 40

Locking up to start their rounds, 1932  
Lantern Slides,  
Box 1, Slide 41
Two women at the market, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 42

Woman carrying packages on her head, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 43

Craps game, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 44

Trad Street scenery, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 45

Rundown area, result of an earthquake, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 46

Another badly blighted area, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 47

Colored Orphan’s Home, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 48

Carnival boat, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 49

Very neat, new or restored house, Longitude Lane, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 50

Down by the waterfront, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 51

Slave quarters, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 52

Blighted area, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 53

Exterior of Ashley Hall, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 54

William Steele’s house, white marble doorway, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 55
Gate house of Manigault Mansion, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 56

Porch and curved stairs, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 57

Unidentified Charleston architecture, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 58

Row houses, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 1, Slide 59

**Series 6: Brandt T. Steele Photography, New Orleans**

CONTENTS

[Bayou Swamp], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 59

[Boats parked at docks], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 60

[City view from the water], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 61

[Empty road scene], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 62

[Man standing in a boat at the docks], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 63

[Men sitting on the dock], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 1

[The sea in the fog], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 2

[Steamships at dock], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 3

[Helen on the beach], 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 4
View from the 15th Floor of the Monteleon Hotel, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 5

General Jackson Statue, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 6

Looking across Jackson Square to the Cathedral, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 7

Part of Cabildo and the Cathedral, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 8

Archways and window of the Cabildo, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 9

Looking down Chartres Street from the corner of St. Peters Street with the Cabildo and Cathedral, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 10

Lower Pontalba Building, corner of Ann and Chartres Streets, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 11

St. Peters Street, Right to Left: Rear of Cabildo, Old Spanish Arsenal, General Jackson’s Headquarters 1815, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 12

Exchange Alley, door to Steele apartment is second on the left, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 13

Petite Salon and Little Theatre, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 14

Pirates Alley looking toward Royal St. from Cabildo Corner, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 15

Pirates Alley looking toward Jackson Park, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 16

St. Anthony’s Alley looking toward Royal Street, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 17

Old Frenchman selling pencils, 1932
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 18
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Slide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antoine’s Restaurant, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion Head House, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Shutter Tea Room, Helen in the Gate, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Shutter Tea Room Nook, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Shutter Tea Room Fountain, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice courtyard interior, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantation House on St. John’s Bayou, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Oak, City Park, Duelling Oaks, 1932 (1 of 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Oak, City Park, Duelling Oaks, 1932 (2 of 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake City Park and bird house, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vista from step of Del Gardo Art Museum City Park, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel where Lafcardeo Hearn lived for many years, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A “Whistler” at Pass Christian, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madam Jean’s Legacy, Dumaine Street, 1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>Box 2, Slide 32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indiana Historical Society        Brandt and Helen McKay Steele Collection Addition      Page 24
Exchange Bank- with over elaborate cast iron, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 33

Bank with dome, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 34

Entrance to an artist’s studio, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 35

Courtyard on Royal Street, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 36

Courtyard on Burgundy St.- old lady with a bird cage, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 37

Messy courtyard, Old French Quarter, St. Phillip Street, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 38

Maffia courtyard, sides worn out by wheel hubs, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 39

Courtyard with a goat and cart, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 40

Better view of Maffia courtyard, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 41

Jean La Fitte’s Blacksmith Shop, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 42

Row of shed-like homes with dormer windows, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 43

General Beauregard’s home, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 44

Rear of Beauregard’s home, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 45

Corner of St. Peter and Royal Streets, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 46
Madame Poree’s courtyard, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 47

Jackson Barracks, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 48

Old Ironsides arriving for Mardi Gras, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 49

Prow of the *Constitution*, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 50

Morning mist, The Ancient Mariner, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 51

Spanish Fort steps, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 52

Short stretch of pavement on Exchange Alley (paved with black basalt blocks brought over in ships as ballast), 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 53

Audubon Park with Audubon statue in the distance, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 54

Street Scene, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 55

Miss Grace King’s Home, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 56

O’Donough Statue, benefactor of public schools, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 57

“Margaret” Statue, bakery woman left money for Orphan’s Home, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 58

Two small street performing boys, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 59

Mardi Gras dancing on the streets, 1932  
Lantern Slides, Box 2, Slide 60
Dr. Girod’s home on Chartres Street, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 61

Napoleon House exterior, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 62

Home interior, 1932
Lantern Slides,
Box 2, Slide 63

**Series 7: Brandt T. Steele Photography, Miscellaneous**

**CONTENTS**

**CONTAINER**

Avenue at Middelharnis, Hobbema, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 1

“Brandt Steele, Pictorialist”, n.d.
OVB Photographs,
Box 2, Folder 9

Building Exterior, France, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 2

Buoys at Lynmouth, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 3

*The Caberet, L’Hermitte*, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 4

Children at the Tuileries fountains, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 5

Cows in the field, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 6

Dinah and Pic- Steven H. Tying, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 7

A dock on the river, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 8

Dutch Interior, n.d.
Lantern Slides,
Box 3, Slide 9
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Slide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Interior- Janssens, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Scenery, n.d. (1 of 3)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Scenery, n.d. (2 of 3)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Scenery, n.d. (3 of 3)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Game of Chess”, n.d.</td>
<td>OVB Photographs,</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Folder 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hercules and Antaeus, Tintoretto, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse drawn cart, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Just Garlic”, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes, n.d. (1 of 15)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes, n.d. (2 of 15)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes, n.d. (3 of 15)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes, n.d. (4 of 15)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes, n.d. (5 of 15)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes, n.d. (6 of 15)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Landscapes, n.d. (7 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 23
Landscapes, n.d. (8 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 24
Landscapes, n.d. (9 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 25
Landscapes, n.d. (10 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 26
Landscapes, n.d. (11 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 27
Landscapes, n.d. (12 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 28
Landscapes, n.d. (13 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 29
Landscapes, n.d. (14 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 30
Landscapes, n.d. (15 of 15)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 31
Landscapes/Church Exterior, n.d.  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 32
Landscapes/Japanese Gardens, n.d. (1 of 4)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 33
Landscapes/Japanese Gardens, n.d. (2 of 4)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 34
Landscapes/Japanese Gardens, n.d. (3 of 4)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 35
Landscapes/Japanese Gardens, n.d. (4 of 4)  Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 36
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscapes/Seagulls on the rocks, n.d. (1 of 2)</th>
<th>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes/Seagulls on the rocks, n.d. (2 of 2)</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes/Street Scene, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Etty- O.D. Hill</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Maes, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Nightwatch</em>, Rembrant, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rembrant, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Steichen, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silos and Smokestacks, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Simeon in the Temple</em>, Rembrant, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terbosch, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Duncan- O.D. Hill, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two men standing at the side of a road, France, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniformed men walking down the street, France, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides, Box 3, Slide 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Willows”, n.d.</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen McKay Steele and three Steele boys with a group of unidentified women, ca. 1910s</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandt T. Steele and Brandt F. Steele, ca. 1920s</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandt T. Steele and unidentified relatives, ca. 1920s</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandt T. Steele and two unidentified men, ca. 1920s</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified Steele relatives, ca. 1920s</td>
<td>Lantern Slides,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (1 of 15)</td>
<td>OVB Photographs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (2 of 15)</td>
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Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (8 of 15)

Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (9 of 15)

Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (10 of 15)

Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (11 of 15)

Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (12 of 15)

Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (13 of 15)

Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (14 of 15)

Architectural Photography from BTS and TLS road trip west through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, 1928 (15 of 15)

Brandt T. Steele at his easel, ca. 1930s

Brandt and Helen McKay Steele Family Group Photo, ca. 1930s (1 of 2)

Brandt and Helen McKay Steele Family Group Photo, ca. 1930s (2 of 2)

Group Photograph, [Indianapolis Camera Club], ca. 1930s

Portraits exhibited at Camera Club Events, F. Schanz’s Studio, 1932 (1 of 2)
Portraits exhibited at Camera Club Events, F. Schanz’s Studio, 1932 (2 of 2)

Brandt T. Steele conversing on a bench, ca. 1940s

**Series 8: Miscellaneous**

**CONTENTS**

Portrait, Orson S. Murray, n.d.

Portrait, Adelaide Germaine, [music teacher and friend to the Nicholson family, ca. 1850s]

Portrait, Jerry Hendricks, [cousin to the Nicholsons who visited and fell in love with Martha], ca. 1850s

Portrait, Maria French, [member of a New England family that was friends with the Nicholsons], ca. 1850s

Two unidentified seated men, ca. 1850s

Unidentified boy in military uniform, ca. 1850s

Unidentified man #1, ca. 1850s

Unidentified man #2, ca. 1850s

Unidentified man #3, ca. 1850s

Unidentified man #4, ca. 1850s

Unidentified man #5, ca. 1850s

Unidentified man #6, ca. 1850s

Unidentified woman #1, ca. 1850s

OVB Photographs, Box 2, Folder 11

OVB Photographs, Box 2, Folder 7

OVA Graphics, Folder 1 of 1

Cased Images, Box 2

Cased Images, Box 2

Cased Images, Box 2

Cased Images, Box 5

Cased Images, Box 3

Cased Images, Box 3

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Cased Images, Box 4
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