

Collection #
M 1461

**CHENEY LIVELY
RESEARCH COLLECTION, 1790–2019**

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

**VOLUME OF
COLLECTION:** 1 half size manuscript box

**COLLECTION
DATES:** 1790–2019

PROVENANCE: Kate Scott, Indiana Historical Society

RESTRICTIONS: None

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**ACCESSION
NUMBER:** 2019.0225

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cheney Lively (c. 1795–1857 or 1858) was born sometime around 1795 in Kentucky. She was likely enslaved by the Lively family of Fayette and Jefferson Counties, Kentucky. Prior to 1814, surveyor Alexander Ralston (1771–1827) bought or hired her as a housekeeper, and she accompanied him when he moved to Washington County, Indiana around 1814. There Ralston set up a home, store, and distillery. In 1820, the state hired Ralston to survey and plan its new capitol, Indianapolis.

In 1822, Lively moved with Ralston to Indianapolis, where she continued to serve as his housekeeper. During his life, Ralston gave Lively a plot of land on Maryland Street, which she sold shortly before her marriage to William Smith in January 1826. Ralston died in 1827, having never been married or had children. It has been said that Ralston left property to Lively, but it is unclear whether or not this is the case, particularly since the city declared his estate insolvent.

George Lockerbie's 1830 survey of Indianapolis property owners lists "Lively, Chinney" as her own head of household, with \$1450 in real estate and personal property. In 1836, Lively married John G. Britton (c. 1808–1885), a local barber and community leader with a four-year-old daughter, Eliza Jane Britton. John G. Britton was involved in the Negro Convention movement, and in 1856, fellow black Masons elected him the first Grand Master of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge in Indianapolis. The Brittons do not appear to have had any children together. Cheney Lively died in 1857 or 1858 of unknown causes. John G. Britton married twice more, and died in 1885 of complications from gangrene.

Eliza Britton married Reuben Gibbs in 1851, and their descendants include individuals with the following surnames: Gibbs, Johnston, Temple, Turner, and Colbert. George Isaac Temple, a jazz musician who later worked as an advertising account manager for the *Indianapolis Recorder*, was likely Eliza Britton Gibbs' last living descendent in the Indianapolis area. Temple married Fredonia Stewart, daughter of *Recorder* founder George P. Stewart and later co-owner of the paper. George I. Temple died in 1996.

Sources:

Collection materials

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains genealogical and biographical materials related to Cheney Lively, Alexander Ralston, John G. Britton, and Britton's descendants. Indiana Historical Society librarian Kate Scott collected the materials between 2017 and 2019. All are photocopies, printed scans, or printed email correspondence; the collection does not include any original documents from the 18th, 19th, or 20th centuries.

Folders 1–3 comprise copies of census documents, county histories, and news articles. They also include 21st century correspondence with historians and genealogists regarding Cheney Lively, John G. Britton, and Britton's descendants. Folders 4 and 5 contain documents related to land and other property owned by Alexander Ralston and/or Cheney Lively. Folders 6-8 hold copies of articles related to Ralston, Lively, and Britton. In folder 9 is Kate Scott's article manuscript of "Cheney Lively: A Black Woman on the Indiana Frontier," as well as the version printed in the winter 2020 issue of *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*.

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Ralston Probate Documents	Box 1, Folder 5
Articles: Alexander Ralston	Box 1, Folder 6
Articles: Cheney Lively and John G. Britton	Box 1, Folder 7
Coy D. Robbins, <i>Reclaiming African Heritage at Salem, Indiana</i> (excerpt), 1995	Box 1, Folder 8
Kate Scott, "Cheney Lively: A Black Woman on the Indiana Frontier," 2019	Box 1, Folder 9