

Collection #
M 0333
BV 1893-1894
OM 0082

**DAWSON FAMILY
COLLECTION, 1888-1925**

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Processed by

Connie McBirney
May 1980
Hilary Adams
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Matt S. Holdzkom
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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: 1 manuscript box, 2 bound volumes, 3 oversize manuscript folders, 2 boxes photographs, 4 OVA photograph folders, 23 artifacts

COLLECTION DATES: 1888-1925

PROVENANCE: Dolores Smith, Rush Williams, 1980; Larry Williams and Marco Medina, 2025

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Baker Brothers Tent Show Collection, 1924 (SC3428)

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 1980.0203; 1988.0159; 2025.0109

NOTES:

SKETCH

Governor Greenup Dawson (1862-1916), known as G. G. or Harry Dawson, was a medicine show owner, manager and performer. Originally from Mayfield, Kentucky, he established himself and family in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the 1890s. Dawson performed as a blackface comedian and banjo player. In his early career he was accompanied on the stage by his first wife, Carrie [Miller] Dawson, a guitarist and fortune teller, and his brother, C.C. "Lum" Dawson, Jr., also a guitarist. Both Carrie and Lum died in 1897.

In 1900 Dawson married recent Indianapolis High School graduate and pianist Alberta Hardin. The pair would have two children, Catharine and Louis. At about the same time, he began to manage his own medicine. Dawson was associated with the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company, the Herbs of Life Medicine Company, and the Williams Vaudeville Company. He later managed the Herbs of Nature Medicine Company and the Dawson Concert Company and was president of the Iceland Medicine Company of Indianapolis. After his death in 1916, the business was taken over by his widow Alberta and his first son, A.L. "Leon" Dawson (1893-1972).

Sources:

Materials in the collection.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers consist of letters to G.G. Dawson from family or performers seeking work, and orders for medicine addressed to the Iceland Medicine Company. Also included are Dawson's notes concerning performances, jokes, songs, medicine and candy recipes, as well as original songs and comedy sketches contained in bound books and loose. Harry Dawson's "record book," BV1893, contains notes concerning various performances, song titles, comedy material, and candy recipes. There is also a pocket diary kept by Leon Dawson listing towns visited in north-central Indiana and monies received for the 1916 summer tour of the Dawson Concert Company. Printed materials concerning the Dawson family include broadsides, newspaper clippings and packaging materials for Dawson's products. Other material includes original handwritten sheet music for banjo and piano, songbooks, advertisements for equipment, and promotional material for various artists.

A large quantity of photographic material has been placed in visual collections. Subjects of these photos include the Dawson family, various medicine show performers (in and out of costume), and tents and other equipment.

Some material from Dawson's first wife, Carrie [Miller] Dawson (1872-1897) was added in 2025. This is chiefly a ledger of Carrie's own poetry, which provides an interesting counterpoint to her husband's composition book. The poems have a wistful tone with themes of missed opportunities and unrequited love. Carrie left the ledger to her son Adolphus Leonzo "Leon" Dawson (1893-1972), only four years old at the time of her death at 25 from consumption (tuberculosis). In the back of the ledger Carrie wrote a touching goodbye to Leon and expressed her hopes for his life. Other manuscript materials added in 2025 include a page of Carrie's genealogy details, additional writings and poems of Carrie's, cures for common ailments, and a letter from her cousin Dora (Adams?).

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Manuscript material

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Carrie Dawson poetry ledger, 1888-1897	Box 1, Folder 1
Letters, Carrie Dawson to G.G. Dawson, 1895-1897	Box 1, Folder 2
Legal documents, 1896-1922	Box 1, Folder 3
Herbs of Life Medicine Co. songster, 1896; <i>The Billboard</i> , 21 Feb. 1914	OM 0082, Folder 1
G.G. Dawson "record book," n.d.	BV 1893
G.G. Dawson music composition notebook, n.d.	Box 1, Folder 4
G.G. Dawson music composition book, 1896-1912	BV 1894
Gags, notes, songs, n.d.	Box 1, Folder 5
Additional Carrie Dawson materials, circa 1897	Box 1, Folder 6
Page of Dawson family genealogy dates, n.d.	Box 1, Folder 7
Newspaper clippings, 1898-1917	Box 1, Folder 8
Leon Dawson life insurance policy, 1899	Box 1, Folder 9
Alberta Hardin graduation announcement, 1900	Box 1, Folder 10
Letters, Alberta [Hardin] Dawson to G.G. Dawson, 1900; 1902	Box 1, Folder 11
General correspondence, G.G. Dawson, 1901-1916	Box 1, Folder 12
Copyright certificate, "Sleeping on the Hill," 1905	Box 1, Folder 13
Original sheet music, "Buffalo Bill's Wild Horse Gallop (banjo solo)," "Only One Life to Live," "Got the Wrong One After All," "No I Could Not Stay at Home," "Now They Wonder Where I Am," "She Can Pack Her Clothes in My Trunk"	OM 0082, Folder 2
Patent medicine recipes, n.d.	Box 1, Folder 14
Equipment catalogs, 1906; 1910	Box 1, Folder 15

Original music and scripts, 1910; circa 1916	Box 1, Folder 16
General correspondence, Leon Dawson, 1911-1925; n.d.	Box 1, Folder 17
Leon Dawson pocket tour diary, 1916	Box 1, Folder 18
Letters, Catharine and Rush Williams to Alberta Dawson, 1924	Box 1, Folder 19
Broadsides, "Kinsey Komedey Ko.," and "Look! The Dawson Comedy Co., A Laugh Every Minute!"	OM 0082, Folder 3
Broadsides and circulars, n.d.	Box 1, Folder 20
Miscellaneous ephemera and envelopes, n.d.	Box 1, Folder 21
Performers' letterheads, handbills, circulars, etc., circa 1890s-1910s	Box 1, Folder 22

Series 2: Visual material

CONTENTS

Portraits of G.G. Dawson

Tent show company (7 folders)

Group photos (2 folders)

Dawson family members

G.G. Dawson and child, tintypes, circa 1890s

Performers (3 folders)

"Ping-pong" photo strips, G.G. Dawson and woman

Leon Dawson Rube character

CONTAINER

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 1

Photographs,
Box 1, Folders 2-8

Photographs,
Box 1, Folders 9-10

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 11

Box 2, Folder 1

Box 2, Folders 2-4

Box 2, Folder 5

Box 2, Folder 6

Jamie Bratton minstrel character	Box 2, Folder 7
Kit Carson, circa 1861	Box 2, Folder 8
“Tom Thumb” and Lavinia Warren, circa 1894	Box 2, Folder 9
Views of Colorado	Box 2, Folder 10
Native Americans, cabinet cards	Box 2, Folder 11
Herbs of Life Medicine Co. group portrait, 1897	OVA Photographs, Folder 1 of 4
Herbs of Life Medicine Co. group on open-air stage with scenery, n.d.	OVA Photographs, Folder 2 of 4
Four adults and three kids, unidentified, sitting on stairs, n.d.	OVA Photographs, Folder 3 of 4
Company standing on lot with tent in background, Montpelier, Ind., 1906	OVA Photographs, Folder 4 of 4

Series 3: Artifacts

CONTENTS

Photogravure printing block

Pince-nez spectacles

Stickpin

Suspender clip

Gold studs

Black button

Cloth button

Garter clip

Wooden spool

CONTAINER

Photographs,
Box 2, Folder 12

R 119

R 120

R 121

R 123-124; R 127

R 128

R 129

R 131

R 132

Brass container with sifter top, Colgate's Dactylis Talc Powder	R 134
Token, Comstock's Cigar Store	R 135
Token, Pierson's Store	R 136
Cowhide vest	R 138
Linen collars	R 139-140
Cylindrical leather case presented to Carrie Dawson	R 142
Leather case	R 143
Metal fob belonging to G.G. Dawson	R 1014
Paper packaging, Dawson's vegetable oil soap	R 1015
Paper packaging, Dawson's compound	R 1016-1017

