

Collection #
M 1533
OM 0785
BV 5585-5586

**ROBERT D. WATT FAMILY
COLLECTION, 1838-2002**

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 2 manuscript boxes, 5 oversized folders, 2 bound volumes, 1 box CDV photographs, 2 boxes of photographs, 1 PAA album, 2 PAB albums, 3 cased images, 3 folders of OVA photographs, 2 folders OVB photographs, 1 folder OVB graphics, 2 envelopes acetate negatives, 1 box artifacts, 1 oversized artifact

COLLECTION DATES: 1838-2002

PROVENANCE: Elizabeth A. Schechter, 2015; Tony Watt, 2015

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Robert D. Watt, *The Life and Times of Charles Columbus Watt and Minne Ellen Royster Watt: their descendents, ancestors, & collateral relatives* [CS71 .W33 1981]

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 2015.0262; 2015.0265

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robert D. Watt lived a productive life of varied experiences in education and politics and served in North Africa during World War II. He spent much of his life in Missouri and Montana, but through an interest in genealogy he always maintained a strong connection to his birthplace of Indiana.

Born in the “Venerable Flackville” area of what is now Indianapolis in 1899, Robert was the eighth-born child of Minne E. [Royster] and Charles C. Watt, but the three preceding him had died in infancy. Having no older sibling still in school to take him, his own education had a late start. Finally, he started the first grade at the age of eight.

At the age of ten Robert’s family moved to Missouri, near Charleston, where he completed his primary and secondary education. He then attended the University of Missouri, even though most of his family had returned to Indianapolis. In the summers he joined them there and worked in an automobile garage with his father and eldest brother Roy. He earned his bachelor’s degree from the University of Missouri in late 1924.

Returning to Indiana, Robert worked as a teacher at Sunman High School. In 1928 he earned a master’s degree in education by attending Indiana University in the summers. Shortly after his graduation, Robert experienced what he called a “nervous breakdown” which prevented his return to teaching. Instead, he moved to Montana where he worked on an irrigation project at the Flathead Indian Reservation. But when the local banks failed due to the Wall Street Crash of 1929, he returned to Indianapolis where he weathered much of the Great Depression with his family.

In 1937 Robert returned to Montana and to teaching, working at the Missoula County High School as a history teacher. He would remain there until 1958, with one big exception. At the age of 43 he volunteered for the army. After training, he served in North Africa and Italy during World War II. When he mustered out in 1945, he did so at Camp Atterbury in Indianapolis so that he could visit with family before returning to Montana.

In 1958 Robert became entangled in conflict with the school board and was fired. He decided to run for County Superintendent of Schools, which he won. For many years, Robert “relished the irony” of becoming an ex-officio member of the board that had fired him. As superintendent, Robert appealed to the state legislature to change the law so that school board members were elected rather than appointed. Then, at the age of 63 in 1962, Robert ran for a position in the state legislature himself and won. He served in both the Montana House and Senate as a Democrat until his retirement in 1980. Throughout the 1970s, Robert repeatedly proposed a tax reform that would replace the property tax with an income tax. His tax plan never passed. His school funding plan and long-term building plan fared better in the legislature. A colleague said of him, “[Robert] was gentle and thoughtful, but he was also very thorough, and when he needed to be, he was very tough.”

After retirement, Robert was able to organize and self-publish a lifetime of genealogical research in a book called *The Life and Times of Charles Columbus Watt and Minne Ellen Royster Watt, their descendents, ancestors & collateral relatives*. He and his wife Mabel

Hardy Benson Watt, whom he had married in 1965, enjoyed many trips to visit with family in Indiana, Florida and Washington state until her death in 1991. Robert followed in 1994.

Sources:

Robert D. Watt, *The Life and Times of Charles Columbus Watt and Minne Ellen Royster Watt, their descendents, ancestors & collateral relatives*, 71-73.

“Watt: Gentleman could play tough, too,” *The Missoulian*, 16 March 1994.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of family material collected by Robert D. Watt and others. Many of the people represented in the collection are discussed in Watt's book, *The Life and Times of Charles Columbus Watt and Minne Ellen Royster Watt*, making the book a useful companion to the archival material. The exception is the Robbins family, to whom Watt is related only by marriage.

The expansive collection includes a number of family surnames. It has been arranged into five series, according to surnames. They have been numbered according to the earliest corresponding material in that group.

Series 1 is material about the Slawson family. Watt's maternal grandmother was Elizabeth "Lizzie" Slawson. Elizabeth's father Delanson Slawson had moved to southern Indiana from New York with his family as a boy. In 1838 he came to the Indianapolis area. His son John C. Slawson, Lizzie's brother, served as a musician in the 7th Indiana Infantry during the Civil War.

Series 2 is Robbins family material. Robert Watt's cousin Melinda "Linna" Pugh married Earle Guy Robbins in 1915. Earle's father Irvin was a veteran of the Civil War (123rd Indiana Infantry) and later started a carriage building company in Indianapolis. Later the company manufactured automobile bodies.

Series 3 is the Royster family. Robert's mother was born Minne Ellen Royster, daughter of Peter Royster. Minne's uncle Aaron Roscoe "Rack" Royster also served in the Civil War as a young man and was one of the last living veterans of that conflict. He was very involved in the GAR Indiana Department. Minne was born in 1863 in the area of Marion County that is now Speedway.

Series 4 is the Watt family. Much of this material is Robert D. Watt's own photographs and correspondence. It includes material about his father Charles C. Watt, and siblings William Royster "Roy" Watt, Walter Raleigh Watt, Harry Russell Watt, Geraldine Watt Wells, and others. Highlights include Watt's wartime correspondence and his correspondence in the 1920s with the Eugenics Record Office.

Series 5 includes material about the Raybourn, McCray, Clark, and other "collateral relatives." See Robert D. Watt's book to determine relationships.

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Inventory of the personal estate of Delanson Slawson, 1845

Slawson Civil War correspondence, 1861-1862

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Simeon (1776-1858) and Martha Wood Slawson (1786-1866)

Simeon and Martha Wood Slawson

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Slawson Royster (1843-1876)

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Slawson Royster

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Slawson Royster

Flavius Slawson [daguerreotype], circa 1850

Flavius Slawson [tintype], circa 1859

Series 2: Robbins family material

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123rd Indiana Infantry CDV portraits, c.1864

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Irvin Robbins portrait, n.d.

Loan certificates, Irvin Robbins & Co., 1893-1904

Irvin Robbins & Co., circa 1894-circa 1914

CONTAINER

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Cased Images

Cased Images

Cased Images

CONTAINER

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Leroy K. New memories of Indianapolis jazz in 1930s and 1940s, 1999, 2002, n.d.	Box 2, Folder 23

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Box 1, Folder 4

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1891

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Folder 2 of 5

Charles Royster stock certificates, 1898

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Invoices and receipts, final illness and burial of
Samuel Royster, 1918

Box 1, Folder 15

Royster family research

Box 2, Folder 16

Minne E. [Royster] Watt (1863-1943)

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Box 2, Folder 8

Aaron Roscoe "Rack" Royster (1844-1942)

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Box 3

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Box 3, Folder 1

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Royster, 1882

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PAA

Diploma, Indiana Common Schools, Raleigh Watt,
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