

A Guide to the Wissler Letters Collection, 1805-1881

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A Collection in Shenandoah County Library, 2019-0018
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History

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Title Statement

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

2019-0018

Language

Materials in this collection are in English.

Physical Characteristics

1 linear foot (1 box, 63 folders)

Repository

Shenandoah County Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

This collection is open to researchers without restrictions. Researchers must register and agree to all copyright laws and archives policies before using the collection. Please contact the Shenandoah County Library before visiting to use this collection.

Acquisition Information

The items in this collection were donated by Dorothy Sullenberger, Caroline Emswiler, Rosemary Wallinger, Elizabeth Tillson, who are daughters of Dorothy Page Wissler Hynes.

Processing Information

Items were sorted and then processed chronologically. Each item was sorted with a copy of its transcript.

Preferred Citation

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Biographical/Historical Note

The items in this collection reflect the thoughts and business dealings among members of the Wissler family (John Wissler, Levi Erb, Ezra Wissler, Franklin Wissler, Christian Wissler, and Samuel B. Myers). The letters in this collection pertain to the purchase of Columbia Furnace. Samuel B. Myers (the husband of Elizabeth Wissler, the niece of John Wissler) sold the property to John Wissler. John and his family moved from Canada to Virginia. Columbia Furnace soon became a successful iron production business.

At the start of the Civil War, John Wissler and his family fled the area for Canada, due to their Republican political views. They returned after the war ended. John Wissler died in 1880, but his family continued running Columbia Furnace.

Under the Wissler family's direction both Columbia and Liberty Furnace (which the family also owned and operated) grew until over 300 persons were employed there. They were responsible for mining ore, refining it, transporting it to rail centers, harvesting lumber to feed the furnaces, and maintaining a wide array of company structures. From this time onward the operations at the furnaces would be economic center of this area of Shenandoah County.

Unfortunately, it also led to some problems as locals clashed with individuals brought in to fill vacancies, especially when the company began to hire African Americans. In January of 1880 a race riot broke out and the owners and black workers were attacked. This two day event ended when the Wisslers agreed to hire only white workers. This eliminated a major employment source for local African Americans and forced many to emigrate or settle for lower paying service jobs.

In 1884 a group of Philadelphia businessmen purchased the furnaces and named it Columbia Liberty Iron Company. They continued both operations until 1891 when the company was sold again to H.H. Yard of Philadelphia. He closed the Columbia Furnace and built a narrow gauge railroad, nicknamed the "Dinky" to haul the ore produced and goods to the furnaces and surrounding communities.

However, making a profit proved to be difficult. Legal battles between Yard and the previous owners compounded the sites problems. In 1905 the company was again sold and reorganized as the Shenandoah Iron and Coal Company who hoped to turn a profit by modernizing operations. Their efforts proved to be unsuccessful and the furnace the closed in 1907 and the land sold to Joseph T. Jackson who used the railroad to transport lumber from the area. It closed in 1917 after the area hills had been stripped.

Scope and Content

The Wissler Letters Collection consists of 1 box of letters produced by members of the Wissler family and other Wissler family materials. The letters span the dates 1856-1881 and primarily deal with operations of the family's iron furnaces, including several in Shenandoah County Va.

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Letter, Ezra Wissler to John Wissler, June 5 1856

Folder 1.3

Letter, Samuel Myers to John Wissler, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, June 15 1856

Folder 1.4

Letter, Christian Wissler to John Wissler, June 16 1856, Lancaster County Pennsylvania

Folder 1.5

Letter, Samuel B. Myers to John Wissler, June 25 1856, Philadelphia Pennsylvania

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Letter, Samuel B. Myers to John Wissler, July 1 1856, Columbia Furnace Virginia

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Letter, Samuel B. Myers to John Wissler, July 1856, Columbia Furnace Virginia

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Letter, Samuel B. Myers to John Wissler, September 15 1856, Columbia Furnace Virginia

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Letter, Eli Phlegar to John Wissler, September 27 1856, Christiansburg Virginia

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Financial Bond, Debt of Samuel Myers and others to Mark Bird, Trustee for George F. Hupp, 1857-1861

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Letter, Samuel B. Myers to John Wissler, June 8 1859, Henrietta Furnace Virginia

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Letter, Samuel B. Myers to John Wissler, March 19 1860, Henrietta Furnace Virginia

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Letter, R.W. Stone to Levi Erb, June 27 1881, Columbia Furnace Virginia

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