

Trent University Archives

Finding Aid - Birdsall family fonds (14-002)

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Birdsall family fonds

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Summary information

Repository:	Trent University Archives
Title:	Birdsall family fonds
Reference code:	14-002
Date:	1827-1920 (creation)
Physical description:	1 m of textual documents

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

Richard Birdsall was born in 1799 at Thornton-le-dale, England, and educated at Londesborough, Yorkshire. His family intended a naval career for him upon graduation. Instead, when he graduated in 1817, he emigrated to Canada. Due to his education, he qualified for a position as a fully-accredited land surveyor in Canada West. In May of 1820, he was commissioned to survey the Newcastle District, where he remained for the rest of his life and became a very prominent man. The Newcastle District was comprised of the counties of Northumberland and Durham and included which would later become the counties of Peterborough, Victoria, and Haliburton. In 1821, he married Elizabeth Burnham, daughter of Zaccheus Burnham, who was a prominent early settler in the District. From his father-in-law, Birdsall bought 920 acres of land at the northeast end of Rice Lake (Lot 1, Concession 1, Asphodel Township) and made his home there. His wife died in a tragic fall in 1827 leaving Birdsall with four young daughters. He remarried in 1836 to Charlotte Jane Everett of Belleville and had four more children with his second wife; two of these were Richard Everett Birdsall (1837-1877) and Francis (Frank) Birdsall (1838-1914). Between the years of 1827 and 1836, Birdsall carried out most of his surveying work, including the survey for the town of Peterborough. In 1831, he was commissioned Captain of the fourth Regiment of Northumberland Militia and he led the Asphodel contingent when the militia was called out in the Rebellion of 1837. Later he was an officer in the Peterborough Regiment. Birdsall was also a Commissioner of the Court of Requests and a Justice of the Peace. When the Colborne District was created in 1841, he was the councillor for Asphodel and in 1850, when districts were replaced by counties, he represented Asphodel at the Peterborough County Council as its first Reeve. He continued in this position until his death on January 20, 1852. (taken from Peterborough: Land of Shining Waters. Peterborough: City and County of Peterborough, 1967.)

Custodial history

Fonds was in the custody of Mrs. Barbara Mather before it was donated to Trent University Archives in 2013.

Scope and content

Fonds is comprised of 22 diaries authored by Richard Everett Birdsall (1837-1877), son of surveyor Richard Birdsall (1799-1852); Charlotte ("Lot") Birdsall (1837-1933), [wife of Richard Everett Birdsall]; Francis (Frank) Birdsall (1838-1914), son of surveyor Richard Birdsall (1799-1852); and Richard ("Dick") Everett Birdsall II ([1860]-1945), [only son of Frank Birdsall]. Also included is family correspondence (photocopies, originals, and transcriptions) dated 1819-1856; these items include original correspondence and militia lists related to the 1837-1838 Rebellion. The fonds also includes loose items from the diaries and two copies of attestation forms for the Seventh Provisional Battalion of Militia of Upper Canada.

Notes

Title notes

- **Source of title proper:** Title based on the creator of the fonds.

Physical condition

Many items in this fonds are fragile. Please handle with care.

Immediate source of acquisition

Fonds acquired from Mrs. Barbara Mather in 2013.

Arrangement

Loose documents were organized, labeled, and placed in archival sleeves by Professor Kathryn Campbell, Trent University, prior to the fonds being donated by Mrs. Mather.

Restrictions on access

None

Related material

See also the Richard Birdsall fonds (75-1026 and 91-1020).

Note [General]

Trent University Archives gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Professor Kathryn Campbell, Trent University, who undertook measures to help preserve the Birdsall family fonds while still held by Mrs. Mather. In addition, Professor Campbell provided helpful detailed descriptions of the materials; these details have contributed to the creation of the finding aid.

Note [General]

Box 1

Diaries

Diarists include:

Richard Everett Birdsall (1837-1877);

Charlotte ("Lot") Birdsall (1837-1933) [wife of Richard E.];

Frank Birdsall (1838-1914);

Richard Everett Birdsall II ("Dick", 1860-1945) [only son of Frank].

****Richard Everett Birdsall****

1) Richard Everett Birdsall: 21 January 1852 to 25 March 1855

Transcription only: 2 school notebooks (47 pages) into which Barbara Mather transcribed Richard's original journal; also one typed copy of the handwritten transcription.

Begins with the death of his father, Richard Birdsall.

Excerpts from other journals at the end of the notebooks: Frank and Emma's wedding, 11 October 1859; birth of his son Richard 27 June 1860.

2) Richard Everett Birdsall: 26 March 1885 to 5 August 1856

Brown leather, 280 pages hand-numbered.

Begins with Richard's arrival in Montreal to "apprentice" at the Montreal Water Works when he was 18 years of age.

3) Richard Everett Birdsall: 6 August 1856 to 21 May 1858

Burgundy leather, originally had 276 hand-numbered pages but 22 full pages and 6 partial pages were cut out many years ago by a family member.

Richard left Montreal in February 1857 and went to work at the Hamilton Water Works.

On 1 February 1858, Richard achieved the status of "Man's Estate" (i.e. 21 years old).

4) Richard Everett Birdsall: 21 May 1858 to 2 September 1859

Buff leather, 260 pages, of which 206 pages contain diary entries. Some pages were removed.

Richard worked on the Hamilton Water Works & then was sent, 19 July 1858, to the Port Dover Railway construction and worked there until it ceased operation.

5) Richard Everett Birdsall: 2 September 1859 to 26 November 1860

Black leather, 196 unnumbered pages of which 187 pages contain diary entries.

The start of Richard's farming life on Rice Lake 13 October 1859.

Brother Frank married their cousin Emma 27 June 1860; Emma gave birth to Richard Everett II ("Dickey").

6) Richard Everett Birdsall: 26 November 1860 to 9 July 1861

Burgundy leather, front portion contains 88 pages of data from railway work; 85 pages of diary entries.

On 21 March 1861 Richard married his cousin Charlotte ("Lot"); Lot and Emma were sisters.

7) Richard Everett Birdsall: 11 July 1861 to 10 January 1863

Burgundy leather, 176 pages.

Farming and political life in Asphodel; Frank & Em, Richard & Lot were all living together in the original family home (Lot 1, Con 1, Asphodel).

8) Richard Everett Birdsall: 11 January 1863 to 1 March 1864

Black, pressed paper cover, originally the diary had a total of 190 pages.

Farming and political life in Asphodel.

In August 1862, Richard began construction of a home for himself and his wife; they moved into their new house on 20 July 1863.

9) Extracts from Richard Everett Birdsall's diaries, written by Mrs. Helen Marryat: 20 February 1858 to 27 October 1863

Two ring binder, loose leaf pages and "High School" loose leaf filler booklets.

Mrs. Marryat borrowed various diaries from Ruth (nee Birdsall) Elmhurst and transcribed the material that interested her into these notebooks. Entries were abridged and sometimes edited when compared to extant material written by Richard. Notebooks include useful annotations by Mrs. Marryat, a long-time local historian.

10) Extracts from Richard Everett Birdsall's diaries, written by Mrs. Helen Marryat: 1 November 1863 to 9 September 1872

Two ring binder, loose leaf pages and "High School" loose leaf filler booklets.

Entries are abridged and sometimes edited.

Includes annotations by Mrs. Marryat.

Lot delivered a son Francis ("Weary") 1 June 1864; he died 1 September 1865.

11) Richard Everett Birdsall: 7 June 1866 to 22 June 1866

Burgundy leather, this time period was also included in the Marryat abstracts (#9), 98 pages.

Most of the volume contains data from Richard Everett Birdsall's survey/construction work but the 15 days of entries are the most intimate and heart-breaking of all of his outstanding diaries. On 21 June 1866 he wrote at great length about an infant son who died during delivery.

Box 2

Diaries (cont'd)

12) Richard Everett Birdsall: 8 June 1867 to 7 June 1868

Black leather, gold embossed, total 153 pages; odd-numbered page numbers penciled in.

Lot delivered a son, Richard Everett ("Retty"), 9 August 1867; the baby died 16 months later on 2 January 1869.

Richard was an unusually attentive father and he documents "Retty's" every illness.

13) Richard Everett Birdsall: 3 May 1870 to 8 December 1870

Burgundy leather

Multipurpose journal: Montreal survey data, Asphodel lumbering data, and diary entries.

14) (NOTE: Diary stored loose on shelf)

Richard Everett Birdsall: 2 March 1876 to 20 September 1877.

Black cloth with leather spine and corners, binding broken; oversized volume.

Pages 1 to 101 written by Richard, until a week before his death.

Charlotte ("Lot") Birdsall

14) (cont'd)

Charlotte (Lot) Birdsall: 27 September 1877 to 5 October 1887

Black cloth with leather spine and corners, binding broken.

Lot took up journal writing after Richard died and wrote pages 103 to 480.

Frank Birdsall

Richard Everett Birdsall's brother, Frank, was also a diarist. Jean Lancaster Graham (Asphodel, 1978, p.167) quoted at length from "Francis Birdsall's diary" for 1869-1871 but none of Frank's diaries before June 1887 are known to be in existence. In 1956 family records were lost in a house fire; the total volume of diaries written by Frank is not known.

15) Frank Birdsall: 27 June 1877 to 31 August 1883

Medium brown pressed paper with leather bindings and corners, ruled as an accounts book, 588 numbered pages.

16) Frank Birdsall: 1 September 1883 to 15 May 1888

Light brown pressed paper, binding repaired with cloth, 400 numbered pages.

17) Frank Birdsall: 9 November 1891 to 24 January 1896

Burgundy, embossed paper cover with 'red' leather bindings and corners, 294 numbered pages.

18) Frank Birdsall: 25 January 1896 to 30 November 1899

Mid-brown cloth cover with leather corners, 296 numbered pages.

19) Frank Birdsall: 1 December 1899 to 31 December 1905

Dark-brown cloth cover with leather bindings and corners; "Day Book" on spine, 502 numbered pages.

20) Frank Birdsall: 1 January 1906 to 20 January 1911

Dark-brown cloth cover with leather bindings and corners; "Day Book" on spine, 401 numbered pages.

21) Frank Birdsall: 20 January 1911 to 5 October 1915

Dark blue-green cloth cover with leather bindings and corners; "Day Book" on spine, 392 numbered pages.

Frank Birdsall died 24 December 1914 and his son "Dickey" took over the diary.

****Richard (Dickey) Everett Birdsall II****

22) Richard ("Dickey") Everett Birdsall II: 1 January 1917 to 22 September 1920

Dark brown embossed paper cover with leather bindings, 200 numbered pages

Box 3

****Scrapbook**:**

Frank Birdsall's scrapbook of newspaper clippings glued into a volume of the 13th Parliamentary proceedings, ca. 1838-1839; several clippings appear to be dated primarily in the 1880s. Many are related to military matters in the Peterborough area and elsewhere in Canada; some include references to the Northwest Rebellion. Also included are undated birth announcements pertaining to the Fowlds and Birdsall families, and poems including one by Frances Browne titled "We are growing old." Almost all newspaper articles are unattributed and undated.

****Black Binder**:**

Documents enclosed in this binder include photocopies, originals, and transcriptions of letters and militia lists dated 1819 to 1865; each item is individually housed inside an archival sleeve. These documents are comprised of the following:

- Handwritten notes about the letters in the binder (author of notes unknown);
- "Mathers Corners"; typewritten history of Mathers Corners, Ontario (author unknown);
- Map titled "Asphodel Twp. About A.D. 1860. Compiled by G. Marryat, Hastings." (includes names of people on each lot);
- Map titled "Township of Otonabee" (photocopy only; source unknown); [original ca. 1820]; includes names of people on each lot;
- Correspondence 1819-1836: photocopies of letters written primarily by or to Birdsall family members;
- Correspondence 1838-1839: original letters and documents: these include letters sent and received by Captain Richard Birdsall (b.1799-d.1852); most relate to the Rebellion of 1837-1838; also included are militia lists/musters for this period (Note: some of these documents may duplicate photocopies received in 1975 [via Martha Kidd] and accessioned as 75-1026; see possible "Martha Kidd" source note for 75-1026 in front section of binder);
- Correspondence 1849-1865: transcriptions and photocopies of letters written primarily by or to Birdsall family members;
- Account book, 1827-1829: it is assumed that this account book was created by Richard Birdsall (b.1799-d.1852): transactions include surveying fees for work conducted in the District of Newcastle, and fees for provisions. Names include David McCarthy, Richard Walsh, Denis Mackmahon, Robert Redpath, James Foley, James Keefe, John Fitzpatrick, John Crow, "John Culverson an Indian", "Capt. Potash an Indian", and others. The following entry appears on the final page: "A list of Indians who has paid [me] for pork got when clearing the place for the school house: Shawny; Jas. Shawny; John Salt; Kenewy; J. Arbego; Tho. Buck; an Indian with Jas. Shawny; a young Indian").

****Blue Binder**:**

Binder consists of loose items which were removed from the above Birdsall diaries prior to donation of this fonds to the Archives; these loose items are contained in 231 archival sleeves. The diary source and page number for each item has been carefully recorded. Many of the loose items are undated. Items include:

- Random notes: undated, unattributed;
- Flowers, leaves, four-leaf-clovers: these "pressed" items are brittle and fragile;

- Newspaper articles: these had originally been attached with dressmaker's pins to various pages within the diaries of Frank Birdsall; the pins created perforations and rust marks on a number of pages.

Large Materials Cabinet – Drawer 53

Printed ephemera:

“Limited Service. Attestation for the Seventh Provisional Battalion of Militia of Upper Canada.” (2 copies; these forms are blank, except that one has rough number calculations on 3 sides and the handwritten words “Battalion Papers”). These items are torn and fragile and are stored in mylar sleeves.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published
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Access points

- Birdsall, Richard (subject)
- Textual records (documentary form)
- Pioneers and Early Settlers (subject)
- Settlement and Surveys (subject)