

Guide to the Garfield Holden Collection

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Collection Number V-65-6-2

Accession Number 2022.19

Compiled 2023

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The majority of this collection is made up of personal letters sent to Garfield Holden (GH) in Groton, New York, during the first years of the 20th century. GH was apparently a popular young man and an active member of a large extended group of friends living in the Finger Lakes region. He received correspondence from many young people, mostly women, but occasionally from male friends as well. These letters offer a snapshot of social life in rural upstate New York between the years 1899 and 1904.

Two women, in particular, sent frequent and long letters. Winifred Beach and Jennie Swarhout felt comfortable enough with GH to write confidingly and sometimes quite intimately. Their letters are filled with rich details about their lives, as well as the comings and goings of their many mutual friends. The letters are so well written that they sometimes read like chapters in a novel.

Through this correspondence a picture of GH emerges as a young man who was open and approachable, and who must have invited, and even encouraged, such lengthy letters from women friends. The only complaints about him seem to be that he didn't write back often enough or come to visit as frequently as was desired. Also, at one point, it's mentioned that he was known to play practical jokes and that he liked a good argument. His friend Winifred writes "I never met anyone who would argue about nothing the way you will...."

Both Winifred and Jennie are highly literate, socially engaged, and politically aware young women. Jennie has a job with the Board of Supervisors in Waterloo, has taught herself stenography, and uses a typewriter at work. The women's letters include details about the books they are reading; the plays they go to; the parties, balls, and masquerades they attend; informal gatherings including card parties; and more organized entertainments like sleigh rides, concerts, and church-related events. These letters are newsy, playful, teasing, and sometimes flirtatious.

After the publication of the novel "Eben Holden," by Addison Bacheller, in 1900, some of GH's friends (especially Jennie) begin to address their letters to "Dear Eben."

In general, the personal correspondence offers a vivid description of social life (including some intrigue, romantic disappointments, engagements and marriages) among a large extended group of young people living

in the Finger Lakes region of New York State in the early years of the 20th century. (There are references made to Groton, Waterloo, Etna, Ovid, Lansing, and Ithaca.)

Jennie's letters, written to GH in 1903 and 1904, start out offering details about mutual friends, social events, church activities, and her work. But over time these letters evolve into a more personal and intimate correspondence, with Jennie offering support and advice to her friend. When she contracts typhoid in 1904 GH sends her books and flowers. Over time she starts signing her letters "With love, Jennie," and "Yours, Jennie." She jokingly writes that the two of them could plan a secret "get away" that their mothers would not approve of. Jennie and GH become engaged to be married toward the end of 1904. In her last letter, written in January, 1905, she mentions that she is packing her things and moving out of her boarding house in Waterloo, back to her family's home in Ovid (until the wedding takes place).

In addition to the personal correspondence, there are papers in this collection that date from 1835-1875; mostly handwritten (pencil) notes related to farm purchases.

There is one letter of particular interest, written by Selah Holden and addressed to "Father." It is undated but was sent from "Camp Cornell" in Washington, D. C. during the Civil War and is an excellent reference, including quotes from other soldiers who have had contact with those fighting for the Confederacy. (See Box 1, Folder 2 for additional details.)

From 1901-1903 GH worked as an egg salesman, representing businesses in Groton that provided "Fancy Eggs" to hotels and restaurants in New York City. He and Benn Townley established their own company ("Townley and Holden") and much of their business involved a working relationship with Benn Conger, from Groton. GH spent some time living in NYC during these years. Ultimately the business venture was not successful. The correspondence and receipts in the business folders (Box 3) offer details about the economic ties between Groton and New York City: egg farmers upstate provided daily shipments of eggs to NYC hotels and restaurants.

The last items included in the collection date from the 1950s and include business mail addressed to Claude Holden in Groton.

CONTAINER LIST

BOX 1

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Folder #</i>
Early papers, no envelopes 1835-1875 Most items relate to business dealings with John W. Holden. (19 items)	1
A handwritten letter from Selah Holden, no envelope. Addressed to "Father," dated February 23, no year noted. Sent from Bladens Burg, Camp Cornell, Washington, D. C. Co. G, 109th Regiment (New York) (1 item) The letter states that Selah enclosed a Confederate ten dollar bill for his father; it cost him 10 cents to purchase it.	2

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Folder #</i>
Includes personal and business records (7 items)	3
Personal letters to GH, autumn 1899 (4 items)	4
Personal letters, from friends and cousins, to GH, 1900 (13 items)	5
Personal letters to GH, 1901(7 items)	6
Personal letters to GH, 1901 continued (6 items)	7
Personal letters to GH, 1902 (12 items)	8
Personal letters to GH, 1902 continued (10 items)	9
Personal letters to GH, 1902 continued (11 items)	10
 BOX 2	
Personal letters to GH, 1903 (7 items)	11
Personal letters to GH, 1903 continued (11 items)	12
Personal letters to GH, 1903 continued (5 items)	13
Personal letters to GH, 1904 (15 items)	14
Personal letters to GH, 1904, plus two letters dated 1905 (16 items)	15
 BOX 3	
Business correspondence, 1901 (6 items)	16
Mainly invoices and receipts from Conger Produce Co., Groton, New York sent to Garfield Holden in New York City, 1902 (20 items)	17
Mainly invoices and receipts from Conger Produce Co., Groton, New York sent to Garfield Holden in New York City, 1902 (23 items)	18
Mainly invoices and receipts from Conger Produce Co., Groton, New York sent to Garfield Holden in New York City, 1902 (27 items)	19

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Folder #</i>
Newspaper clippings (16 items)	20
Misc. mail addressed to Claude Holden, 1950 and 1951 (12 items)	21