

Joseph Lapsley Wilson Papers
1922-1929
JLW

Finding aid prepared by Katy Rawdon

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June 01, 2022

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

The Barnes Foundation Archives

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Barnes Foundation Archives
2022

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Summary Information

Repository	Barnes Foundation Archives
Creator	Wilson, Joseph Lapsley, 1844-1928
Title	Joseph Lapsley Wilson Papers
Date	1922-1929
Extent	0.25 Linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	Joseph Lapsley Wilson (1844-1928) served as the first director of the Barnes Foundation Arboretum. His papers include correspondence with horticulturists and nurseries, primarily documenting the purchase of plant specimens for the Barnes Foundation in the 1920s.

Preferred Citation

[Description of item], [date]. Joseph Lapsley Wilson Papers, Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia.

Biographical Note

Joseph Lapsley Wilson (1844-1928) was born in Philadelphia on September 17, 1844, a great-grandson of Dr. John Carson (1752-1894), an incorporator and original fellow of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

Wilson attended West Chester Academy (which later evolved into West Chester University) for five years, but was unable to attend a planned "college course" due to the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1862, Wilson entered the military and became a member of the C Company Gray Reserves, which served the Union army in Maryland and Pennsylvania, including seeing fire in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in July of 1863. By the time Wilson was discharged in 1867, he had risen to the rank of sergeant.

Wilson joined the Little Schuylkill Navigation Railroad and Coal Company as secretary in 1865, and continued to work for them for the following thirty-eight years.

In November 1868, Wilson was elected to the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry, the oldest continuously active military unit in the country, currently part of the Army National Guard. Wilson served as Captain of the Troop from 1889-1894. He was a member of the Troop's building committee from 1899-1901, during the period when the troop built its current Armory building on 23rd street in Philadelphia. He was also editor of the Troop's published histories printed in 1875 and 1915.

Wilson was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Pennsylvania Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, the Union League of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, the Rose Tree Fox Hunting Club, a founding member of the Radnor Hunt Club, and an original subscriber to and first president of "The Rabbit" (a private men's club in Philadelphia).

In 1880, Captain Wilson moved from Philadelphia to a property in Merion, just outside of the city, which he called "Red Slates." He married Caroline Alice Yates, originally from Kentucky, in 1901. Wilson established an arboretum on the property, with over two hundred specimens of trees, a number of which are still extant.

Dr. Albert C. Barnes purchased Wilson's Merion property in 1922, for the purposes of erecting new buildings on the property for his recently chartered educational institution, the Barnes Foundation. The sale included the stipulation that a house would be constructed on one side of the property, which Wilson and his wife would be allowed to rent for the remainder of their lives. The road in front of that house, which currently houses the Foundation's horticultural programs, was named Lapsley Lane after the Captain. Captain Wilson served on the Board of Trustees of the Barnes Foundation, and as its first Director of the Arboretum, until his death on April 12, 1928 at age eighty-three.

Sources

- 1 "Penn in the 18th Century: Dr. John Carson (1752-1894)," http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/people/carson_john.html.
- 2 Pennsylvania. National Guard. Troop of Philadelphia Cavalry, 1st. *Book of the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry, 1774-1914*. Philadelphia : Hallowell, 1915, pp. 281-282.
- 3 First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry web site: <http://www.firsttroop.com/>.

- 4 Obituary: "Joseph L. Wilson." *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, April 12, 1928.
 - 5 *Yearbook of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society*. Philadelphia: The Society, 1926.
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Scope and Content

These records include correspondence between Joseph Lapsley Wilson, Director of the Barnes Foundation Arboretum, and various horticulturists, nurseries, and others, primarily documenting the purchase of plant specimens for the Barnes Foundation in the 1920s.

Of particular interest are several folders concerning the Foundation's *Gordonia alata* (or *Franklinia alata*, the Franklin Tree), including information about its purchase, history, and care.

There also exists a draft letter to Nelle McClury Ludwig containing information about the Lapsley family, a copy of Wilson's last will and testament, and a copy of Caroline Yates Wilson's last will and testament, including an inventory of household goods.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Barnes Foundation Archives 2022

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research to qualified researchers by appointment only. Please contact the Archives and Library Department for information on access and research.

Use Restrictions

The Joseph Lapsley Wilson Papers are the physical property of the Barnes Foundation Archives. The Foundation holds literary rights only for material created by staff of the Foundation and material given to the Foundation with such rights specifically assigned. For all other material, literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. Researchers are responsible for determining the identity of rights holders and obtaining their permission for publication and for other purposes where stated.

Acquisition Information

These records were housed in filing cabinets in the Arboretum House of the Barnes Foundation prior to processing.

Processed By

Katy Rawdon. Finding aid written by Katy Rawdon, April 2008.

Related Materials

Related Collections

- Joseph Lapsley Wilson Collection. First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Joseph Lapsley Wilson, d. 1928. Scrapbook, 1874-1881 (Collection 2082), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- Trust estate-Joseph Lapsley Wilson (folder 156), Series VII, Financial Information 1909-1962. Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, 1894-1973, MC 9. Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, School of Nursing – University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- The Barnes Foundation

Genre(s)

- Correspondence

Geographic Name(s)

- Lower Merion (Pa. : Township)
- Merion (Pa.)

Personal Name(s)

- Barnes, Laura L., 1875-1966
- Wilson, Joseph Lapsley, 1844-1928

Subject(s)

- Botany
- Horticulture

Series I. Correspondence

Collection Inventory

Series I. Correspondence 1922 - 1926 0.25 Linear feet

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically by correspondent name.

Andorra Nurseries 1922 2.0 Folder(s)

Bassett, George William 1925-1926 1.0 Folder(s)

Foster, Fanny 1925 1.0 Folder(s)

Garden Magazine & Home Builder 1924-1925 1.0 Folder(s)

General note

Includes a history of the Foundation's Gordonia tree.

Gest, John Marshall 1926 1.0 Folder(s)

Hunt, Benjamin W. 1925 1.0 Folder(s)

Lewis & Valentine Company 1922 1.0 Folder(s)

Ludwig, Nelle McClury 1925 1.0 Folder(s)

General note

Series II. Miscellaneous

Includes information about the Lapsley family.

Murray & Walsh 1923 1.0 Folder(s)

General note

Regarding the cutting down of twelve trees in the arboretum.

United States. Bureau of Plant Industry 1925 1.0 Folder(s)

Series II. Miscellaneous 1924 - 1929 2.0 Folders

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Copy of last will and testament of Joseph Lapsley Wilson July 24, 1924 1.0 Folder(s)

Copy of last will and testament of Caroline Yates Wilson 1929 1.0 Folder(s)

General note

Will of the wife of Joseph Lapsley Wilson. Includes an inventory of household goods.