
Birchall and Owen archive, 1849-1857

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Birchall and Owen Archive,

Date (inclusive): 1849-1857

Collection number: 331

Creator: Birchall and Owen (Springfield, Ill.)

Extent: 4 folders (0.25 linear ft)

Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library. Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library History and Special Collections for the Sciences

Los Angeles, California 90095-1490

Abstract: A small collection of business correspondence from the firm of Birchall and Owen, retail suppliers of drugs, patent medicines, medical supplies, and stationers to Springfield, Illinois and wholesalers to the surrounding region. The firm also printed and distributed almanacs. Price lists and circulars from some of their suppliers provide an interesting overview of the popular medicines of mid-19th century America. The correspondence provides a window on commercial practices of the time, and the emerging emphasis on marketing and advertisement of products.

Physical location: UCLA Biomedical Library History and Special Collections in the Sciences locked cage

Language of Material: Collection materials in English

Access

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Birchall and Owen Archive (Manuscript collection 331). Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library History and Special Collections for the Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles.

UCLA Catalog Record ID

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Acquisition Information

Purchased from aGatherin', West Sand Lake, N.Y. in 2009.

Historical Note

The partnership between printer/bookbinder Caleb Birchall (1808-1860) and druggist Thomas Jefferson Vance Owen (1827-1876) lasted from 1848 to 1855. Their drugstore in Springfield, Illinois seems to have been a thriving business, with supplies arriving from New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, etc. and customers scattered over a wide region. The firm dealt not only in drugs and patent medicines, but also sold various medical and dental supplies, stationery goods, and printed and distributed an almanac (e.g., "Goudy's Illinois and Missouri farmers' almanac and repository of useful knowledge, for the year 1849...") In documents not in this collection, there is a record of Abraham Lincoln being a customer of the firm for office ledgers.

A great volume of the Birchall and Owen business correspondence has survived, but has been split into various-sized lots scattered amongst individuals and institutions; the Illinois State Historical Library houses one of the largest holdings.

Scope and Content

This collection contains 45 items of correspondence, printed circulars, and other commercial communications. Suppliers' printed lists provide a good overview of the popular drugs and patent medicines of the time. The letters from individual customers and jobbers highlight not only the most popular products, but also mention rarer items such as gold paint or gum opii. A list compiled by the bookseller (see Folder 1) itemizes each document with date, name of correspondent, and a short indication of content.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects

Birchall and Owen (Springfield, Ill.) -- Records and correspondence

Drugstores -- Illinois -- Springfield

Box 1, Folder 1

Itemized Birchall and Owen Archive contents

Scope and Content Note

aGatherin', the bookseller, compiled a list of documents providing date, correspondent's name, a terse summary of content, and whether the document was sent through the mail and includes pertinent markings

Box 1, Folder 2

Printed price lists and circulars. 1849-1851

Scope and Content Note

from the firms of: Philip Schieffelin and Co., New York; Jenks and Ogden, Philadelphia (1849, 1951); Jno. M. Maris and Co., Philadelphia; J. N. Keeler and Brother, Philadelphia; Douglass and Taylor, Kentucky Glass Works, Louisville; Phelps, Fowler and Co., New York

Note

7 items

Box 1, Folder 3

Business documents. 1849

Scope and Content Note

letters of inquiry and orders, invoices, bills of lading, bearer notes, etc.

Note

21 items

Box 1, Folder 4

Business documents. 1850-1857

Note

17 items