



Dundas Museum and Archives

Inventory No. 8

The Lesslie Family Fonds

2010 February

Dates of creation: [1754]-1956
Predominant: 1826-1897
Physical description: 97.5 cm of textual records
43 photographs

Biographical sketch:

The Lesslie family originated in Dundee, Scotland, where Edward Lesslie was born in May 1765. He married Grace (Grizel) Watson on August 13, 1798 in Dundee. Although his father was a sailor, Edward Lesslie established himself as a bookseller and printers ink maker in Dundee. He is described in the Scottish Book Trade Index as a leader of the advanced radicals who narrowly escaped prosecution for sedition. Further details about this part of his life are unknown. What is known is that by 1819 he decided to emigrate to Canada with his family. He sent his son John in 1820 with a supply of goods to open a store. Upon arrival, John chose York (Toronto) and, together with his travelling companion, William Lyon Mackenzie, established a business in the book and drug trade. They later opened a store in Dundas, which, in addition to drugs and books, dealt in a variety of other merchandise. In 1822, ill health prevented the emigration of the remaining family so Edward sent his sons James and Charles, and daughter Grace on a chartered brig loaded with supplies for the stores. James ended up in Kingston, operating a store there for the next four years. In the meantime, Edward and Grace and their remaining children finally arrived in Upper Canada and settled in Dundas where they operated the store now named Lesslie and Sons.

The Lesslie family played an important role in early life in Dundas. They operated a thriving business and owned considerable land in the area. Edward Lesslie was instrumental in establishing the Free Church in Dundas, which offered meeting space to a variety of denominations. John Lesslie would continue to manage the store in Dundas, become the postmaster, and purchase a brewery. He and three of his sisters remained in Dundas.

Edward Lesslie died in 1828 and management of the business fell to the sons, John, James, Charles, and William. John remained in charge of the Dundas branch while James operated the York store with the help of their youngest brother, Joseph. William operated the store in Kingston. Charles emigrated to Davenport, Iowa, disillusioned after the rebellion of 1837. He would remain there for the rest of his life.

Joseph Lesslie eventually became postmaster of Toronto. He and his wife, Sarah Graham, had seven children, of which two were doctors: Rolph Bidwell Lesslie and Joseph Walter Lesslie. Rolph Lesslie led an adventurous life, acting as surgeon to African expeditions and in the Turko-Russian war. One of Joseph and Sarah's granddaughters, Constance Grace Lesslie Harding, daughter of their daughter Grace, led an equally adventurous life. She rebelled against her upbringing and lived a Bohemian life in Europe.

Of the remaining Lesslie family, the eldest son, Edward, was written out of the will, his father disagreeing with his life choices. He died in Hamilton in 1875.

Scope and Content Note:

The fonds consists of correspondence, diaries, wills, memo books, scrapbooks, memoirs, certificates, bibles, books, property and financial records, and photographs documenting the Lesslie family members' personal, professional, and political lives in Dundas, Toronto, and outside of Canada.

The Lesslie Family fonds consists of four series: 1. Edward Lesslie family; 2. John Lesslie; 3. Joseph Lesslie family; 3.1. Rolph Bidwell Lesslie; and 4. Photographs.

Series 1 consists with documents and books related to Edward Lesslie and his family who are not part of other series. Series 2 consists of documents, books, and scrapbooks created and maintained by John Lesslie. Series 3 concerns Joseph Lesslie and his family. Records created and maintained by Joseph's son, Rolph Bidwell Lesslie, are part of Sub-series 3.1. Series 4 consists of photographs of Lesslie family members, including James Lesslie whose records appear in Inventory No. 7 James Lesslie fonds.

A note about the location:

The information on the box listing tells you about the material contained in a particular box and folder. The numbers on the left hand side of the page, separated by a line (eg, 2-3) indicates that the file is located in box 2, folder 3. These numbers may not be in a sequential order. This means that the material is too large to fit in a particular box, or that material has been discovered after arrangement has taken place. Because the box listing presents the intellectual arrangement of the material, the physical arrangement, although important, is secondary.

Box Listing

Series I: Edward Lesslie family

Location (box-folder):

- 5-1 Lesslie family bible, [1754].
- 1-1 List of Subscribers to the Dundee Dispensary, 1793. Edward Lesslie is listed.
- 5-2 Book belonging to Edward Lesslie: "Sermon on the Kingdom of Christ...by the late Mr Alexander Pirie", 1806.
- 1-2 Newspaper advertisement re: Edward Lesslie's improved black writing ink for sale by him and by other stationers in Britain, [before 1820].
- 1-3 Memorandum Book belonging to William Lesslie, 1823-[1834]. Details: height and weight of self, Ann and Helen; 1832 cholera outbreak in York; John and James Lesslie arrive in Kingston; "Influence of the Tariff on the Commerce of America"; Journal of a trip to Goderich, 14 September 1833; "Memorable Occurrences"- opening of canal between Lake Ontario and Burlington Bay, 1824, Desjardins Canal, 1826-1837; *Advocate Press* and Mackenzie; death of Peter Desjardins, Sept 1827; York premises of W. L. Mackenzie attacked, April 1832; airs in the key of A minor and C major; music of keys and their modes; memorandum of letters written from York and Dundas, July 1823; memorandum of letters received from Dundee and elsewhere, from July 1823; "On Selfishness"; aphorisms etc; "On Personal without Mental Beauty in the Fair Sex"; definitions - nouns, definitions - adjectives; mathematics - definitions, postulates; words not in common use; "My Father's Grave"; "The Mount of Transfiguration"; contrapositions.
- 1-3 Diary of William Lesslie, 1832-1836.
- 1-4 Edward and Grace Lesslie family record, 1826.
- 1-5 Letter from Edward Lesslie to his daughter, Ann, 1827.
Refers to Joseph and Charles taking care of the store; notes death of Captain McGregor of Nelson; enquires about the arrival of copies of Masson's pamphlet. Dated, 13 April 1827, York.
- 1-6 Edward Lesslie's will, 1828.
His sons, John, James and William to have one half of profits from Dundas, York and Kingston stores. To his wife, Grace, the balance from the above, profits from the Dundee business and his personal goods for the support of herself and the remainder of the family. When all children reach maturity, the whole estate to be divided, one third to Grace, two thirds among the children. His son, Edward, is to be disinherited unless the family decides otherwise.

- I-7 Deed regarding the sale of land in Ancaster Township from Joseph House to Grace Lesslie, 1829. Part of lot 48, third concession, comprising 2 acres. Purchase price, £20. Dated, 31 January 1829.
- I-8 Deed between the trustee of the estate of Laurent Quetton Saint George, and Grace Lesslie regarding the sale of land, 1829 [copy 1844].
Indenture between William Warren Baldwin, executor of the will of Laurent Quetton Saint George, and Grace Lesslie for lot 26 in village of Dundas, purchase price £175. Dated, 25 May 1829.
- I-9 Deed between John Paterson and others, 1830.
Bargain of sale between John W. Hare and John Paterson, part of lot 17, first concession, Township of West Flamborough, comprising 32 ½ perches. Purchase price, £1 13 sh 1½p. Dated, 29 November 1830.
[John Paterson married Grace Lesslie, daughter of Edward and Grace Lesslie sometime before 1832].
- I-10 Deed between Grace Lesslie and John Lesslie, 1831.
Sale between Grace Lesslie and John Lesslie, 30 April 1831. Lot 26 in town of Dundas, comprising 1 rood, 2 perches. Purchase price £175. [NB I - 8]. Note: Handwriting is difficult to read and paper is fragile.
- I-11 Discharge of the estate of Edward Lesslie by Grace Lesslie, executrix, 1840.
Grace Lesslie, disposed of all interest in the estate to sons John, James, and William Lesslie. Charles and Joseph Lesslie to have £50 pounds a year as long as in family employ.
- I-12 Deed regarding the sale of land from Grace Lesslie to Helen Lesslie, 1843.
Part of lot 48, third concession, in Township of Ancaster, comprising 2 acres. Purchase price, 5shillings. Dated, 11 October 1843.
- I-13 Account book, 1844-1851. This small book lists the goods sold to John Vassie by the Edward Lesslie and Sons store.
- I-14 Mortgage re: parcel of land sold to Robert and Ann(a) Holt by Thomas Hatt, 1847.
Parcel of land in town of Dundas, composed of part of lot 52 in first concession, Ancaster, 5 acres. Payments to November 1858.
- I-15 Correspondence from the Crown Land Office to Mrs (Grace) Lesslie in response to her inquiry about compensation for the loss of lands in Dundas, 1853.
Re her application for compensation for loss of land in Dundas. Office requires a copy of the judgement of the Court of Queen's Bench by which she was dispossessed. [19 February 1838. Lot 18, first concession, West Flamborough, containing one acre conveyed by Jacob Neville to the late Edward Lesslie, 28 December 1826.

Past suit August 1840].

- I-16 Will of Grace Lesslie, 1853. Court of Probate.
Offer house and lands where she resided for sale as one lot to any of her children. If none of her children wishes to purchase it at valuation, then it is to be offered for public sale and the proceeds divided: likewise, her household and moveable property. Net proceeds to be divided into equal portions between her 6 children, Charles, Joseph, Grace, Ann, Ellen and Lydia. Dated 5 January 1853 [died 9 January 1853]. Court of Probate, 6 April 1853, will approved and registered.
- I-17 Valentine and note received by Helen Lesslie from her "Sincere Friend", 1844.
- I-18 Documents relating to the death of Helen Lesslie, 1897.
Canadian Bank of Commerce cheque, \$48, 27 November 1886; schedule of assets; obituary in *True Banner*, nd.; extract *Globe and Mail*, 2 January 1937, re Lesslie's drugstores; receipt for \$8.00 from executors of Helen Lesslie's will, 11 August 1898; clippings from *Hamilton Spectator*, *Dundas Star* and *Dundas Banner*, December 1897, advertising the auction sale of Helen Lesslie's property on 24 December 1897; newspaper clippings re the distribution of the estate, estimated at \$149,695.58.
- I-19 Estate of Helen Lesslie: Conditions of Sale, 1898. Sale bills posted around Dundas advertising sale on 24 December 1897. Description of 4 parcels of land/property belonging to the late Helen Lesslie.
- I-25 Deed: Sale of land (around Main Street) by the Executors of Helen Lesslie to Mary L. Pennington, 7 February 1898.

Series 2: John Lesslie

- 5-3 Book: "Some Memoirs of the Life of John Glover late of Norwich", 1774. Given to John Lesslie by his friend James Cathro in Dundas, 1827.
- I-20 Letter to A.F. Begue from John Lesslie, 1829. In French.
Lesslie informs Begue of the death of his relative, Peter Desjardins, and urges him to send someone to Canada to sort out Desjardins' affairs. He warns him that another party is seeking authority to administer the estate.
- 8-1 Draft petition from William Lyon Mackenzie, 1831. Sent to John Lesslie for suggestions.
- I-21 Booklet: "Mackenzie's own Narrative of the Late Rebellion, with Illustrations and Notes, Critical and Explanatory: Exhibiting the only True Account of What Took Place at the Memorable Siege of Toronto, in the

month of December 1837", 1838. Belonging to John Lesslie.

- 1-22 Booklet: "The Cause and Circumstances of Mr. Bidwell's Banishment" by Sir F.B. Head, 1838. Belonging to John Lesslie.
- 1-23 Diary of John Lesslie, 1838-1883.
- 1-24 Sale of land from John Ogilvie Hatt to John Lesslie, 1842.
- 2-1 Deed between John Lesslie and others, 1842.
Indenture between Ralph Leeming and James Hamilton, trustees of Richard Hatt's estate, and John Lesslie for part of lots 13 and 14, first concession, West Flamborough, comprising 12 acres, 8 perches. Purchase price, £157. Dated 20 June 1842. Also deed of just claim from John Hatt and wife Lucy Christine Hatt to John Lesslie.
- 2-23 Description of land (part of Lot 16 in First Concession of West Flamborough) conveyed by John Gamble to John Lesslie, 29 July 1846.
- 8-4 Indenture of Bargain and sale (part of Lot 16): John Gamble to John Lesslie, 8 January 1851.
- 8-5 Indenture for sale of land: John Gamble to Aaron Nash, 26 February 1852. Property sold abutts John Lesslie's property. Includes a diagram of the properties.
- 2-2 Deed of bargain and sale: John W. Mills to John Lesslie, 1852.
Part of lot 14 in first concession in township of Toronto and county of York, also known as lot 22 in John Mills survey. Purchase price, £20. Dated 13 April 1852.
- 2-3 Crown Land Grant to John Lesslie, 1854.
Sale of lots 3 and 20 in Bay Shore Range in the town of Sydenham, Grey County, comprising 3 1/4 acres. Purchase price, £22 10sh. Dated 7 June 1854, Quebec.
- 2-4 Release and quite claim: Thomas Paton to John Lesslie, 1857.
Indenture 28 October 1852, between Thomas Paton of Montreal and John Lesslie of Dundas. Paton releases Lesslie from any claims that may have been made on lands originally conveyed by Robert Holt to James Coleman in payment for monies owed, and then sold by Coleman to Paton. The lands, composed of two parts of lot 52, first concession of township of Ancaster, were sold to Lesslie for £1500.
- 2-5 Indenture: James Lesslie and John Lesslie, 1864.
Lease between James Lesslie of York and John Lesslie, Toronto, for dwelling house at 30 & 32 King Street,

Toronto. Dated 17 October 1864.

- 2-6 Summons to witness in the matter between James Lesslie and John Lesslie, 1866.
Summons to Mr and Mrs Brunel and J M McCausland to appear as witnesses at the Court House on 23 January 1866.
- 8-3 Indenture describing a conveyance of certain land from B.B. Osler to John Lesslie, 26 May 1869.
- 2-24 Extract of indenture describing use of land (Lot 16) for Fire Engine House. 11 June 1869.
- 8-2 A copy of an indenture describing a conveyance in fee simple for the purchase of land by John Lesslie from the Town of Dundas, 6 July 1869.
- 3-1 Scrapbook re: personal matters.
- 3-2 Scrapbook re: political matters.
- 2-25 Execution of mortgage on Old Red Mill property in Ancaster by Edward and Jessie Hughes to John Lesslie, 16 October 1877.
- 2-7 John Lesslie: will, 1882.
H M Surrogate Court. Probate. Registration of executor, James Lesslie, executrix, Helen Lesslie. Will: To James Lesslie, all his lots and real estate in Guelph and Owen Sound. The residue and remainder of the estate property and personal effects in Canada, US and elsewhere to his sister, Helen Lesslie of Dundas. Dated, 6 January 1882. Probate, dated 13 January 1883. Exemplification of probate of the will. Will of John Lesslie proved and registered in Surrogate Court on 13 February 1883. Typescript of will. [John Lesslie died 16 December 1882].

Series 3: Joseph Lesslie family

- 2-8 Sarah Graham school prizes, 1837. Sarah Graham was the future Mr. Joseph Lesslie.
Poems of William Cowper, vols I (1827) and II (1832)
- Oversize Archives cabinet Family Bible presented to Joseph and Sarah Lesslie by John Lesslie, 16 June 1843.
Includes birth and death information for family members.
- 5-4 Book: "Daily Texts with Verses of Hymns". Given to James Graham Lesslie by his mother, Sarah Graham

Lesslie, 1853.

- 2-9 Joseph Lesslie: deed, 1863.
Indenture releasing James Walker of Woodhouse and Joseph Lesslie of Toronto as trustees responsible for the administration of the property of Elizabeth Graham in Woodhouse, Norfolk. Dated, 17 December 1863.
- 2-10 Booklet for Mary Lesslie, 1868.
Mostly quotations from the scriptures.
- 2-11 Joseph Lesslie: Layout of pear orchard on Murray Street, c. 1871. Planted May 1871.
- 5-5 Book: "Brief Outline of the Books of the Bible". Belonged to Mary Graham Lesslie, 1873.
- 5-7 Book: "Jenkins's Vest-Pocket Lexicon". Belonged to Mary Graham Lesslie. Inscribed with the date: November 12, 1868. Acc 65-33.
- 2-12 "Georgie's Last Words", 1873. Transcript of the last words of Joseph and Sarah Lesslie's daughter Georgina Sophia before she died at age 17.
- 2-13 Harold Harding's journals from China, 1929-1930 (copies). Harold Ivan Harding was the son of Joseph and Sarah Lesslie's daughter Grace and her husband Edwin John Harding.
"The Yangtze Gorges after Eighteen Years" ; "The Spiked Helmet"; "By Air to the Yunnan Alps".
- 2-14 Scrapbook pages. Includes print: Old Customs House, Dundee; four views of Dundee; remembrance of early Lesslie businesses; clippings re: death of Joseph Lesslie, postmaster; Sir Oliver Mowat's funeral, "The Lesslie Stores"- obverse, dates of birth of Joseph and Sarah Lesslie's children; family genealogy; various Lesley coats of arms; clippings and photographs of Joseph Walter Lesslie, MD [1907].
- 2-22 Queen's Own Rifles. Ambulance Corps. "Instructions for First Aid to Wounded" by J.W. Lesslie, MD, Assistant Surgeon to Queen's Own Rifles. Toronto: printed by Copp, Clark and Co, 1883. Inscribed: "T.D. Bell Compts J.W.L."

Sub-Series 3.1: Rolph Bidwell Lesslie

- 5-6 Bible (in French) belonging to Rolph Lesslie, 1859.
- 5-8 Miniature book: "Small Rain Upon Tender Herbs". Deut. xxxii.2.. Inscribed: "RB Lesslie from his dear mother. Jan'y 1st 1870. Toronto." Acc 65-38.

- 2-15 Correspondence from Rolph Lesslie to his sister Mary Lesslie, 1870-1871.
- 2-16 Articles of agreement between Musurus Pasha on behalf of the Imperial Ottoman Government and Rolph Lesslie re: employment as Physician and Surgeon in Military service, 1876.
- 2-17 Correspondence (handwritten copies) from Rolph Lesslie to his brother Joseph Walter Lesslie, 1877-1878.
- 2-18 Letter copy book (Rolph Lesslie), [1877-1878]. Booklet contains carbon copies of letters sent to his siblings.
- 2-19 *The Graphic*, May 18, 1878. Regarding Red Cross and other charitable work in Turkey during the Russo-Turkish War. Some individuals are identified as Rolph Lesslie's friends.
- 2-20 Rolph Lesslie journal entries, 1884-1885.
- 2-21 Certificates re: service to Belgium, 1886-1889.
- 4-1 License to accept and wear the Insignia of a Knight of the Order of Leopold, 1886. Granted to Rolph Lesslie by Queen Victoria.
- 4-2 Certificate from Hygienische Institute der Universitat Berlin, 1887.
- 4- Universal Review. November 15, 1890. Article about H.M. Stanley by Harry Quilter. Acc X2005-402.
- 4-3 Correspondence from Rolph Lesslie to his sister Grace Harding, 1892.
- 4-4 Obituary of Rolph Lesslie by Lady Isabel Burton, wife of Sir Richard Burton, 1894.
- 4-5 Scrapbook about Rolph Lesslie created after his death by his sister Mary Graham Bell, 6 February 1896. Includes correspondence between Rolph and his mother, and correspondence between family members after his death; correspondence from Lady Burton to Joseph Lesslie after his son's death; 11 photographs; numerous clippings from a variety of sources. Also includes Rolph's diploma from the University of Toronto conferring the degree of MA, 1875, and a copy of his booklet "Practical Hints for Travellers in the Tropics".
- 4-6 Research notes about Rolph Lesslie compiled by his nieces, c. 1950s.

Series 4: Photographs

- 6-1 Sarah Graham (Lesslie) – daguerreotype – date unknown.
- 6-2 Mary Graham Lesslie – ambrotype – c. 1862.
- 7-11 Mary Graham Lesslie – copy print – 1915. Copy print of 6-2 made by Wm. Notman and Son.
- 6-20 Dundas view looking west – print – 1869. Included in view is Town Hall. Titled “Dundas in 1869”.
- 6-3 Ann Lesslie (Mrs Robert Holt) – carte de visite – [1875].
- 6-4 Robert Holt and his daughter, Helen Holt – carte de visite – [1870].
- 6-5 Helen Lesslie – carte de visite – [1870].
- 6-6 James Lesslie – carte de visite – [1880].
- 6-7 James Lesslie – photographic print – [1880]. Same image as 7-3 and 7-4.
- 7-3 James Lesslie – carte de visite – [1880]. Same image as 6-7 and 7-4.
- 7-4 James Lesslie – photographic print – [1880]. Same image as 6-7 and 7-3.
- 6-8 Jacqueline Moir Jameson Lesslie, wife of James Lesslie – carte de visite – [1880]. Same image as 6-9.
- 6-9 Jacqueline Moir Jameson Lesslie, wife of James Lesslie – photographic print – [1880]. Same image as 6-8.
- 6-10 “The Willows”, Eglinton. Home of James Lesslie. – carte de visite – [1880]. Same image as 6-11.
- 6-11 “The Willows”, Eglinton. Home of James Lesslie – photographic print – [1880]. Same image as 6-10. Attached on verso is a clipping of the Lesslie home on Baldwin Street in Dundas.
- 7-1 Joseph and Sarah Lesslie and three children – daguerreotype – c. 1850.
- 7-2 Album belonging to Mary Lesslie, daughter of Joseph and Sarah Lesslie depicting members of her family – 10 carte de visite and 1 tintype – c. 1870. Consists of images of the following family members: James Graham Lesslie, Joseph Lesslie Jr., Rolph Bidwell Lesslie, Georgina Lesslie, Mary Graham Lesslie, and Louisa Lesslie.

- 4-7 Scrapbook page on which is pasted 9 carte de visite size photographic prints of James Lesslie, James Graham Lesslie, Georgina Lesslie, Grace Lesslie, Mary Lesslie, Louisa Lesslie, Rolph Lesslie, Joseph Walter Lesslie, and Georgina and Louisa Lesslie. Likely taken around the same time, c. 1861. On the verso are clippings of the death announcements of Mrs. R. Leonard (daughter of John Rowland and Jane Lesslie) and Helen Lesslie.
- 7-5 Joseph Lesslie and family in the garden of their home (on Murray Street?). Two different photographic prints are pasted to cardboard. One image shows the family near the home, the other places them on the lawn. Some of the people have been identified. Taken c. 1882.
- 7-6 Home of Joseph Lesslie. Two different photographic prints are pasted to cardboard. One image shows the home of Joseph Lesslie with the family on the front step. The other is a different view of the house. Likely taken at the same time as 7-5. c. 1882.
- 6-12 Georgina Lesslie, daughter of Joseph and Sarah Lesslie – carte de visite – c. 1870. Georgina died in 1873 at the age of seventeen.
- 6-17 Family group at Orchard Beach, 3 September 1874. Informal image of Louie Lesslie, Mary Lesslie, Joseph Lesslie, Jimmie Lesslie, and Agatha Lesslie (neice of Joseph Lesslie and daughter of William Lesslie). – tintype – 1874.
- 6-13 Grace Lesslie Harding and her daughter, Constance – tinted carte de visite – [1886].
- 6-14 Mary Graham Lesslie Bell with her daughter Muriel, her sister Louisa Lesslie (standing) and Mary Lawson Bell, Mary Lesslie's sister-in-law, at old Orchard Beach – tintype – c. 1885. Note on verso: "I think you look sweet in this and if you were alone (only with Muriel) I should keep it – perhaps you have not a copy so send it to you – "Isn't it awful". Also contains paper frame.
- 6-19 Rolph Bidwell Lesslie – carte de visite – February 1880. Carte de visite by Thomas E. Perkins, Toronto.
- 6-15 Rolph Bidwell Lesslie – carte de visite – [1880]. Carte de visite by Abdullah Freres, Constantinople.
- 7-9 Dr. Stoker's Field Ambulance Corps (Stafford House Society) – copy print taken from publication – c. 1885.
- 7-7 Henry (M) Stanley – carte de visite – 1886. Autographed.
- 6-18 Joseph Lesslie – tintype – July 1888. On verso: "Tintype photo of myself taken at "New Brighton" near Liverpool on my way to see dear Rolph July 1888."

- 7-8 Lady Isabel Burton – carte de visite – 1894. Autographed: “To Mr Lesslie with sincere regard, Isabel Burton, March ‘94”. Likely sent to Joseph Lesslie after the death of his son, Rolph.
- 7-10 Rolph Bidwell Lesslie – coloured photograph – c. 1890. Framed.
- 6-16 Negative of 7-10.