



The Historical  
Society of  
Pennsylvania

Collection 2188

John Wanamaker  
Collection

1827-1987

327 boxes, 196 volumes, 365 lin. feet

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**Restrictions:** None

**Related collections:** The Yost Collection, 1861-1985 (no number)

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**Abstract**

John Wanamaker (1838-1922) was a well-known merchant, entrepreneur, and lifelong resident of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was active in the city's religious, political, and philanthropic areas, founded several Presbyterian churches and Sunday schools, and served as Postmaster General under President Benjamin Harrison from 1889 to 1893. He opened his first Philadelphia clothing store, Oak Hall, with partner Nathan Brown in 1861, and founded John Wanamaker and Co. several years later in 1869. In 1876, they opened "A New Kind of Store" known as the Grand Depot at 13th and Market Streets. This store later became the flagship store, which eventually branched out into central and southeastern Pennsylvania. Satellite stores were also established in New Jersey, Delaware, and New York City. Wanamaker was at the forefront in many areas in retailing including merchandising, employee relations and advertising. His sons Thomas B. Wanamaker and L. Rodman Wanamaker were also active in the business. Thomas ran John Wanamaker and Co. in Philadelphia and Rodman took over the New York store operations in 1906.

This rich and extensive collection, which is arranged into five series and spans over one hundred and fifty years, details the history of Wanamaker's store in Philadelphia and its influence as a major city retailer in during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is also material in the collection that documents Wanamaker's involvement and impact not only on merchandising and related fields but also on issues of social reform and cultural attitudes. Throughout the collection, materials are generally arranged in chronological order; however, the loose photographs in Series four are arranged by subject and size.

The collection includes correspondence, financial volumes, scrapbooks, albums, estate and legal papers, store records, publications, photographs, financial files, sales portfolios, sound recordings, glass negatives, and deeds.

A complete inventory of the collection is available in HSP's library.

## Overview of arrangement

Series I	Personal records, 1850-1986	46 boxes and 74 volumes
Series II	Store records, 1861-1987	89 boxes and 79 volumes
Series III	Miscellaneous publications, 1827-1917	13 boxes and 24 volumes
Series IV	Prints and photographs, 1861-1980	80 boxes and 19 volumes
Series V	Addendum	99 boxes

## Series descriptions

### **Series 1. Personal records, 1850-1986 (Boxes 1-25, Gibbons' card files, Vols. 20.1-74)**

This series contains loose correspondence, letterpress copy books, speeches, diaries, editorials, estate papers and biographer's papers. The loose correspondence is primarily comprised of Wanamaker's family correspondence; however, there are letters of other correspondents such as Charles A. Dichey, Robert C. Ogden, Dwight L. Moody, George H. Stuart, George W. Childs. John Wanamaker's letterpress books are made up mostly of business correspondence with customers and with his sons Thomas B. and Rodman Wanamaker. There are also copies of letters concerning Wanamaker's political, religious and philanthropic activities, such as those with Bethany Church, which he helped establish, the YMCA, and the Friendly Inn.

There are also scrapbooks and photograph albums pertaining to personal and family interests such as John Wanamaker's political career, Bethany Sunday School, Rodman Wanamaker's aviation and collecting activities. Additionally, there are memorial scrapbooks for both John and Rodman Wanamaker.

Other records in this series include John Wanamaker's estate papers that date from 1923 to 1934 and primarily concern his various philanthropies and beneficiaries. There are also the Rodman Wanamaker estate papers, which date from 1928 to 1986. They contain information on the store, insurance trusts set up in his will, and the beneficiaries' various conflicts with the trust over income and the potential sale of the store.

Rounding out the series are papers of three John Wanamaker biographers: Russell Conwell, Herbert A. Gibbons, and Edward Robins. These materials include correspondence, research materials, and copies of the ensuing works. Also included are Gibbons' indexed research cards on the Wanamaker family, store history and practices, and related subjects. These cards contain references to original materials within the store papers and are arranged alphabetically in twenty-one boxes.

### **Series 2. Store records, 1861-1987 (Boxes 26-114, Vols. 48.01-.72, 69B-H)**

This series contain records of the executive divisions of John Wanamaker Philadelphia and New York and the sales division of the flagship store. It also includes various store publications and several boxes of deeds.

Executive division records include material such as meeting minutes of each of the board of directors of the New York and Philadelphia stores; A. T. Stewart Realty company papers concerning the NY property; annual, quarterly, and monthly financial statements; store contracts and operations manuals; and store policy statements, memoranda, and surveys on merchandising. Additionally, there are late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century correspondence concerning and advertisements and samples of the store's trademarks. There are also papers documenting the establishment, renewal, cancellation and infringement of trademarks and copyright on Wanamaker products and advertising campaigns. Concerning these matters, there is a sizeable amount of correspondence between representatives of the New York and Philadelphia stores and their respective legal counsels. Also included in the executive division records are papers on John Wanamaker's involvement with the design, construction and installation of the Founder's Bell atop the Lincoln-Liberty Men's Store once located at Broad and Chestnut Streets, with Isaiah Williamson and the Williamson Free Trade School, and with the YMCA.

This group of records also contains several bound volumes, such as scrapbooks, sample books, account books, department profit ledgers, salary ledgers, and a visitor's register for the Philadelphia store. The scrapbooks contain historical store ephemera such as advertisements, flyers from store openings, store policies and notices, and material concerning the Wanamaker Athletic Award. The printer's sample books contain samples of plates illustrating store business and activities, as well as John and Rodman's personal interests.

The second group of records under this series is the sales division records, which include materials relating to the store's visual and marketing departments. Art department records include information on artists whose works were collected by John and Rodman Wanamaker, inventories of art displayed in the store and at Wanamaker residences, and material from the 1920s and 1930s on the Paris salons. Display department records include correspondence, materials on exhibitions within the store, and Howard Kratz's files as department head. The decorating department's files consist primarily of budgetary papers. The publicity department records document advertising promotions and events planning, especially the store's annual Christmas displays and the 100th Anniversary celebration. There are also the files of Reeves Wetherill, Vice President for Public Relations from 1960 to 1987, which contain information on the John Wanamaker Athletic Association, the store's 100th Anniversary event, and various celebrity in-store appearances.

The store publications section of this series includes product catalogs, children's story booklets, employee manuals, and exhibition catalogs published by Wanamaker's. It also contains programs (some pertaining to the Wanamaker-Millrose games), songbooks, store guides (for both the New York and Philadelphia stores), store newspapers, and newsletters such as the employee newsletter entitled *The Eagle Speaks*. Additionally, in this section are John Wanamaker's personally-published diaries, which he began producing yearly in 1900. In addition to blank, dated pages for daily writing, these books contained printed store advertisements and columns similar to those found in farmer's almanacs (useful lists, recipes, anecdotes,

etc.) The majority of the diaries in this section were acquired by the store as part of an effort to archive the store's history and activities. Encouraged by this notion, many Wanamaker patrons sent in their own copies of the diary; thus many of these diaries contain personal stories not necessarily related to Wanamaker's. There are also nineteen volumes of Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware newspaper advertisements for Wanamaker's merchandise.

At the end of this series are twenty-three boxes of deeds to Wanamaker Store properties, other business properties, Wanamaker residential properties, and miscellaneous properties in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Kentucky, Virginia, New York, Washington, D.C., and Illinois.

**Series 3. Miscellaneous publications, 1827-1917 (Boxes 114A, 114K, 115-116, Vols. 111A-J, 116.01-14)**

This series contains annual reports of the Federal Department of the Treasury and the Office of the Postmaster General. Also included are miscellaneous volumes from the Loan Collection of Rodman Wanamaker, ten large atlases of the Philadelphia area and Atlantic County, NJ from dating from 1883 to 1914, and several sound recordings.

**Series 4. Prints and photographs, 1861-1980 (Boxes 117-196, Vols. 127B-P)**

This series consists primarily of photographs, both loose and in albums, many of which were taken by store photographers to document store operations and events. The following photographers are represented: D. Sargent Bell, Harry S. Hood, Richard T. Dooner, and Charles H. Miller. There are also glass plate negatives and lantern slides.

The loose photographs are arranged into three topical groups: "people", "buildings," and "other subjects." There are then further divided by size into small, medium, and large photographs. The "people" section contains images of John Wanamaker and Wanamaker family members, store personnel, and other non-Wanamaker related persons. The "buildings" section documents interior and exterior views of all Wanamaker stores, as well as store displays and store events. Notably, this section contains images of various Christmas, Easter, and patriotic-themed displays. The "other subjects" section consists of images of various Wanamaker-related organizations, such as the John Wanamaker Commercial Institute (both in the store and at their summer camp in Island Heights, New Jersey) and the American Legion John Wanamaker post. Additional photographs include those of Meadowbrook and other sports teams, the Salvation Army, family residences, Wanamaker Memorial sites (such as the Free Library Wanamaker Branch, the Friendly Inn, and Bethany Church), and Wanamaker art and flag collections.

Other material in this series includes albums created by display department head Howard Kratz to document store decorations for each holiday season from 1921 to 1931. There are also chronologically-arranged photographs of Reeves Wetherill with celebrities at store public relations events. There is also an album of images that

recorded the construction of the flagship store in Philadelphia at 13<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets in 1904.

**Series 5. Addendum (Boxes 197-295)**

The Addendum consists of material that was not included when the collection was originally processed and cataloged. Some items are duplicates of previously cataloged papers. There are also miscellaneous photographs and cabinet cards, several boxes of correspondence and financial records from the Wanamaker Institute of Industries, copies of Wanamaker's newspaper editorials, miscellaneous prints, booklets, and other publications. A full box list of material in this series is available in HSP's library.

## Separation report

None.

## Related materials

At HSP:

The Yost Collection, 1861-1985 (no number)

Description: This collection chronicles several decades of displays and promotions at John Wanamaker's department store, much of it under the supervision of Frederick Yost. Yost began working at Wanamaker's in 1948. From 1952 to 1965 he was in charge of sales promotions, and in 1965 became the Corporate Vice President. Yost's background included theater and lighting design.

The collection includes papers and scrapbooks documenting public relations, advertising, special events, and store design and display. Also included are internal office memos, photographs of displays and their construction, architectural drawings, news clippings, and many materials pertaining to the elaborate Christmas displays and light shows that were a tradition at Wanamaker's.

## Subjects

Christiana Mall (Christiana, Del.)  
Plymouth Meeting Mall (Plymouth Meeting, Pa.)  
Advertising  
Advertising, Newspaper  
Clerks (Retail trade)  
Department stores  
Department stores – Employees  
Department stores – Pennsylvania – History  
Department stores – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia.  
Department stores – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia – History  
Display of merchandise  
Employee rules  
Employee handbooks  
Employees' magazines, newsletters, etc.  
Retail trade  
Sales personnel  
Shopping  
Shopping centers  
Shopping malls  
Store decoration  
Store fixtures  
Stores, Retail  
Berks County (Pa.) – Department stores  
Bucks County (Pa.) – Department stores  
Burlington County (N.J.) – Department stores  
Dauphin County (Pa.) – Department stores

Delaware County (Pa.) – Department stores  
Gloucester County (N.J.) – Department stores  
Lehigh County (Pa.) – Department stores  
Montgomery County (Pa.) – Department stores  
New Castle County (Del.) – Department stores  
Philadelphia (Pa.) – Department stores  
Wilmington (Del.) – Department stores

Wanamaker, John, 1838-1922  
Wanamaker, Rodman, 1863-1928

John Wanamaker (Firm)

## **Administrative Information**

### **Restrictions**

The collection is open for research.

### **Acquisition information**

Gift of Woodward and Lothrop, Inc., 1988

Gift of the Wanamaker Institute of Industries, 1995

### **Preferred citation**

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], John Wanamaker collection (Collection 2188), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

## **Box and folder listing**

A complete inventory of the collection is available in HSP's library.