

Guide to the Roach family papers, 1889-2020

Summary Information

Collection No.:	MS 2020-036
Title:	Roach family papers
Inclusive Dates:	1889-2020
Author:	Carolyn Friedrich & Margaret Deitzer, revised by Nancy Martin
Repository:	Peters Township Public Library Archives 616 East McMurray Road McMurray, PA 15317
Creator:	Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.
Extent:	2 boxes
Language of materials:	All materials are in English.
Abstract:	Papers consist of photographs, diaries, and other documents created or accumulated by members of the Roach family. The papers document life in the Thompsonville area of Peters Township from 1889 until 2020.

Biography/History

The Roach and Caldwell families lived in the Thompsonville area of Peters Township. Robert Caldwell (1804-1873) owned 136 acres of land in the township. He died in 1873 leaving the 70 acres of his property located to the east of Route 19 (in Thompsonville) to his second wife, Margaret Bell Johnston Caldwell (1826-1883). Robert and Margaret's daughter, Mary Bell Caldwell (1866-1948), inherited this farmland upon her mother's death in 1883. During the time that Margaret and Mary owned and operated the farm, it was known as Cedar Hill Farm. As of 2025, the farmhouse still stands on Old Washington Road in Peters Township.

Mary Belle Caldwell married Franklin “Frank” Morgan Roach in 1890. Their son Boyd Caldwell Roach (1894-1963) married Mary Belle Fulton (1896-1980) in 1920. Their son, Boyd “Ike” Caldwell Roach Jr. (1927-2022), was born in Thompsonville, Washington County, Pennsylvania and lived all of his life there. Roach Jr. attended the one-room Thompsonville School for six years, from 1933 until the school closed circa 1939. He then attended McMurray School and Peters Township High School for grades seven through twelve from 1939-1945. During high school, Roach Jr. played on the basketball team and served as the first student president of the Peters Township High School Athletic Association. He graduated in 1945 as part of a class of 25 students.

Roach Jr. served with the United States Army Air Force during World War II. Following the war, he received a bachelor’s degree from Washington and Jefferson College with a major in economics and a minor in political science. He enrolled in graduate programs at both Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh for the study of metallurgy. Roach Jr. married Sara Jean “Jean” McCurry in 1953 and was a thirty-year employee of LTV Steel (Jones and Laughlin) Steel Company, retiring in 1985. He died in 2022.

The Caldwell and Roach families were members of Peters Township’s Center Presbyterian Church.

Scope and Content Note

The Roach family papers consist primarily of photographs, two diaries of Rachel Ann Bell, and school documents collected by Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. The collection contains items relevant to local history including a history of the township written by Mary Boyd Roach in the 1950s and undated photographs taken in Thompsonville, one of the constituent villages of Peters Township.

The papers also include photographs of Thompsonville and McMurray School students and buildings. Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.’s report cards from Thompsonville School, McMurray School, and Peters Township High School from 1933 to 1945 are also included in the papers.

Two diaries written by Roach family relative Rachel Ann Bell, between 1889 and 1894, document Rachel’s daily life while working as caretaker and housekeeper for her uncle, Robert Bell Sr., in Peters and, later, for her cousin Robert “Bob” Bell Jr.

Materials related to Center Presbyterian Church include a 2018 booklet about the church’s stained glass windows by Jean M. Roach. Papers also include photographs of church members from 1933, 1939 and 1942.

The papers also include newspaper clippings, legal agreements involving Roach family property, and a saddle bag once used by Robert Boyd Roach to deliver local mail.

Arrangement

The Roach family papers are arranged in 9 series:

- Series I. Mary Boyd Roach's "History of Peters Township", 1952, 1991
- Series II. Photographs taken in the village of Thompsonville, circa 1894, undated
- Series III. Rachel Ann Bell diaries, 1889-1890, 1892-1894, 2002
- Series IV. Legal agreements pertaining to rights-of-way and coal mining, 1899-1935
- Series V. Newspaper clippings, 1930s-2008
- Series VI. School photographs and records, 1900-2003
- Series VII. Center Presbyterian Church files, 1894, 1933-1942, 2018
- Series VIII. Miscellaneous files, 1800s, 1957-2020
- Series IX. Robert Boyd Roach's mail saddle bag, early 1900s

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions:

Due to their fragility, Rachel Ann Bell's diaries may not be handled. Patrons can access digital copies of the diaries online through PA Photos and Documents (PaPD). A link to PaPD can be found on the Library Archives' webpage at <https://ptlibrary.org/explore/archives/>.

Acquisition Information:

Donated by Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. in 2020.

Custodial History:

The papers were passed from members of the Roach family to Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. who donated them to the Archives.

Accruals Note:

No further accruals are expected.

Related Materials:

An audio recording and transcript of Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.'s interview, part of the *Live in Peters Township: An oral history project*, is available online through Pennsylvania Photos and Documents.

Preferred Citation:

Peters Township Public Library Archives, MS 2020-036 Roach family papers

Processing Information:

The collection was processed by Carolyn Friedrich and Margaret Dietzer in December 2020.
Nancy Martin revised the description in November 2025.

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Sources Consulted:

The following sources were consulted in the creation of this finding aid:

- Roach family papers
- Article entitled “Aged Peters Resident Dies This Morning” from the Thursday, April 22, 1926 edition of *The Daily Notes* newspaper out of Canonsburg, p. 1

Contents List

Series I. Mary Boyd Roach’s History of Peters Township, 1952, 1991

Series Extent: 2 folders

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of a 1991 copy of Mary Boyd Roach’s 1952 history of Peters Township “copied and updated” by her son Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. and of photocopies of Mary’s original 1952 notes and bibliography.

Box 1	Folder title	Dates
Folder 1	History of Peters Township, updated copy by Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.	1991
Folder 2	Photocopies of Mary Boyd Roach’s “History of Peters Township” and its bibliography	1952

Series II. Photographs taken in the village of Thompsonville, circa 1894, undated

Series Extent: 2 folders

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of 6 black and white photographs taken in the village of Thompsonville in Peters Township. The oldest photo dates from around 1894 and is of the members of the Thompsonville Band. (An accompanying page identifies the members of the band by name.) Series also includes a photograph of the streetcar trestle over the valley at Thompsonville and one of the waterfalls in the “Hollow” below the Caldwell Roach homestead on Old Washington Road. Series also includes three photographs of the covered bridge near Thompsonville School.

Box 1	Folder title	Dates
Folder 3	Photograph of members of the Thompsonville Band	circa 1894
Folder 4	Five photographs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streetcar trestle over the valley at Thompsonville • Falls in the “Hollow” below the old Caldwell Roach homestead on Old Washington Road • 3 images of the covered bridge near Thompsonville School 	undated

Series III. Rachel Ann Bell diaries, 1889-1890, 1892-1894, 2002

Series Extent: 4 folders

Series Biography:

A relative of the Roach family, Rachel Ann Bell (1844-1926) was born in Peters Township but moved to Illinois with her family. The youngest of six children, she never married, living with her mother until the latter's death in 1886. Bell moved back to Peters Township in 1887 to keep house and care for her uncle Robert Bell Sr. After his death in 1890, Bell kept house for her cousin Robert “Bob” Bell Jr. Rachel Bell died on April 22, 1926.

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of two diaries written by Rachel Ann Bell. The first volume, covering the years 1889-1890, documents Rachel's daily life while working as a caretaker and housekeeper for her uncle Robert Bell Sr. The second volume, covering the years 1892-1894, records Rachel's daily life while keeping house for her cousin Robert “Bob” Bell Jr. The diaries record her daily activities including the maintenance of the house and farm, caring for her uncle, and her interactions with family, friends, and neighbors.

Series also includes a 2002 transcription of the diaries by Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. and photographs taken by Roach Jr. in 2002 to accompany the diaries.

Box 1	Folder title	Dates
Folder 5	Rachel Ann Bell diary	1889-1890
Folder 6	Rachel Ann Bell diary	1892-1894
Folder 7	Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.'s transcription of Rachel Ann Bell's diaries	2002
Folder 8	Photographs taken by Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. to accompany Rachel Ann Bell's diaries	2002

Series IV. Legal agreements pertaining to rights-of-way and coal mining, 1899-1935

Series Extent: 5 folders

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of legal agreements between Mary and Franklin Roach and other parties pertaining to rights-of-way and coal mining on their Thompsonville property.

Box 1	Topic of Agreement	Dates
Folder 9	Article of Agreement documenting Mary B. Roach's sale of coal rights on her Peters Township property to E. T. Hitchman of Canonsburg	1899
Folder 10	Receipt of payment of \$30 by the South West Pennsylvania Pipe Line for permission to erect a line of six telegraph poles on a property in Peters Township	1901
Folder 11	Indenture between spouses Franklin and Mary Roach and the Pittsburgh, Canonsburg and Washington Railway Company granting the company permission to construct a wooden bridge on their property	1908
Folder 12	Document recording Franklin and Mary Roach's agreement with the Manufacturer's Light & Heat Co. permitting the company to lay two inch pipe line through their property	1932
Folder 13	Right of Way Agreement between Franklin and Mary Roach and the West Penn Power Company permitting the company to erect "not more than two poles" on the Roach property	1935

Series V. Newspaper clippings, 1930s-2008

Series Extent: 3 folders

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of newspaper articles about the building of the Pleasant Valley fire truck in the 1930s, Peters Township residents serving in World War II, and Peters Township farms and landmarks.

Box 1	Folder title	Dates
Folder 14	An article about the building of the Pleasant Valley Volunteer fire truck	1930s
Folder 15	Articles about Peters Township residents serving in World War II	1940s
Folder 16	Articles about Peters Township farms and landmarks	1944-2008

Series VI. School photographs and records, 1900-2003

Series Extent: 8 folders

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists largely of photographs of students at the Thompsonville and McMurray schools in Peters Township, including members of the Roach family. Many of the photographs are accompanied by documents identifying the students in the photographs. Handwritten lists of student names were created by Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. Series also includes Roach Jr.'s report cards from Thompsonville School, McMurray School, and Peters Township High School and his Peters Township High School alumni directories and reunion and anniversary programs.

Box 1	Folder title	Dates
Folder 17	Thompsonville School building photographs and documents	circa 1900-1994
Folder 18	Thompsonville School student and teacher photographs	circa 1900-1939
Folder 19	Original McMurray School building and student photographs	1917-1918
Folder 20	McMurray School (in the high school building) class photographs	1938-1942
Folder 21	Report cards for Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.	1933-1945
Folder 22	Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.'s copy of <i>The Constitution of the Peters Athletic Association</i>	1944-1945
Folder 23	Peters Township High School 50 th anniversary program and a speech about the Peters Township Jr-Sr High School given at an open house on October 30, 1957	1952, 1957
Folder 24	Peters Township High School alumni directories and reunion and anniversary programs	1990s-2003

Series VII. Center Presbyterian Church files, 1894, 1933-1942, 2018

Series Extent: 4 folders

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of a concert program for a performance by the Pleasant Valley Singing Society at Center Presbyterian Church directed by Robert Boyd Roach from 1894, three black and white photographs of church members, and a booklet about the church's stained glass windows written by Boyd Caldwell Roach's wife Jean. The earliest photograph is of the male participants in the 1933 or 1934 "Womanless Wedding" in which Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. played the baby. Womanless weddings were comedic fundraisers popular in the early twentieth century in which men, often prominent local citizens, dressed as women to perform a parody of a traditional wedding ceremony.

Box 1	Folder title	Dates
Folder 25	Concert program for a performance by the Pleasant Valley Singing Society at Center Presbyterian Church under the direction of Robert Boyd Roach	1894
Folder 26	Photograph of participants in the "Womanless Wedding" in which Boyd Caldwell Road Jr. played the role of the baby	1933 or 1934
Folder 27	Photograph of the members of the F. M. Roach Sunday School Class at Center Presbyterian Church	March 3, 1939
Folder 28	Photograph of Center Presbyterian Church members wearing ceremonial sashes	August 4, 1942
Folder 29	Jean M. Roach's <i>The Stained Glass Windows of Center Presbyterian Church</i> booklet	2018

Series VIII. Miscellaneous files, 1800s, 1957-2020

Series Extent: 3 folders

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of five black and white photographs, including two tintypes of unidentified individuals from the 1800s, a 1957 Peters Township Farm Fair program, and Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.'s family history research notes.

Box 1	Folder title	Dates
Folder 30	Miscellaneous photographs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two tintypes of unidentified individuals, 1800s Sprowl house being moved across McMurray Road from the parking lot beside the BP gas station to behind the Union National Bank, 1957 The stream at the corner of Old Washington Road and Valley Brook Road, 1970 Copy of a photograph of the McMurray mill, stable and general store by Joseph H. Rodgers, 1971 	1800s, 1957-1971
Folder 11	Peters Township Farm Fair program	1957
Folder 12	Photocopies of Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr.'s family history research notes	1990-2020

Series IX. Robert Boyd Roach's mail saddle bag, early 1900s

Series Extent: 1 box

Series Biography:

Robert Boyd Roach (1862-1929) was Franklin Morgan Roach's older brother. He lived in the Thompsonville area of Peters Township. In the 1880 census, he listed his profession as "shoemaker". In 1898, the *Washington Observer* newspaper referred to him as "Prof. Robert Roach" and reported that he taught vocal music at the reform school at Morganza. He married Vinnie M. Kerr (1871-1950) in 1904. In the census of 1920, he listed his occupation as "farmer".

Series Scope and Content Note: Series consists of the leather saddle bag which Boyd Caldwell Roach Jr. reported was used by his great uncle Robert Boyd Roach to deliver mail by horse in the early years of the twentieth century. Roach Jr. reported that his uncle delivered mail from the Canonsburg and Hills Station post offices to the Peters Township post offices of Bower Hill, Thompsonville, and McMurray.

Box 2	Item	Dates
	Robert Boyd Roach's mail saddle bag	early 1900s