

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding Aid for the

John Sehler Papers

Collection # 016

July 2007 version

Abstract

The John Sehler Papers includes the documents of Sehler (1847-1918) and records of the Brown & Sehler Company (1904-1944). Included are receipts (all before 1900), bills, minutes of the stockholders' meetings, and other papers from ca. 1889-1944. These detail the firm's growth to a high point about World War I of gross annual sales over \$300,000. A copy of the firm's newsletter The Sunbeam. and Sehler genealogy and family history are also included.

Collection #: 016

Accession #: 1984.005

Donor: Carl Friedrich, 1984

Span dates: 1889-1944

Processor: Wendy K. Walker, Richard H. Harms; 1986, 1990; inventory 9/99, Andrea Stadt. Box Summary, Marcella Beck, August 25, 2000.

Size: 0.2 cu.ft.

Box Summary

<u>Box No.</u>	<u>Description of Contents</u>	<u>Box Description</u>
1	papers	slim legal

## Biography

John Sehler (1847-1918) was born in Niagara County, New York to German immigrant parents. During 1865 the family moved to Ottawa County, Michigan. John Sehler established a sawmill at Big Springs under the name of Greager & Sehler in 1871. That same year the mill burned and was rebuilt as John Sehler & Co. Two years later he operated a flour mill at Lisbon, Michigan, returning to his father's farm in 1878.

Sehler joined into a partnership with E.T. Brown and Frank Brown in 1882 who operated an implement business at 19 W. Bridge Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan under the name of E.T. Brown & Co. After moving to 8-10 N. Front the following year, E.T. Brown sold his share in the operation and the remaining partners under the name of Brown & Sehler organized a stock company. The firm's business expanded to include jobbing activities and eventually built a new plant on the northeast corner of Bridge and Front Streets. In 1900 the operation was changed over entirely to wholesale activity and added horse collars and harnesses to its product line. A fur dressing establishment was built in 1911 at the corner of Turner and Victoria.

Sehler was an active member in the community. He was a highly esteemed member of the Grand Rapids Credit Men's Association, holding numerous offices in the group including its presidency. He further served as a director of the Board of Trade and was a member of numerous other business groups. He was also an active member of the Emmanuel Lutheran Church. He served as its treasurer for 25 years, and later as a trustee and superintendent of its Sunday school.

Sehler married the former Barbara Miller in 1873. They lived at 99 Livingston Street during their entire time in Grand Rapids. The Sehler's has six children, three daughters and three sons.

## Scope and Content

The collection contains records of the Brown & Sehler Co. and documents of John Sehler. The company records include minute books, advertisements, a copy of the firm newsletter *The Sunbeam* and other financial records. These detail the firm's growth to a high point about World War I of gross annual sales over \$300,000. The personal papers include receipts and bills that detail Sehler purchases of groceries, books, furniture etc. The collection also contains data collected on the Sehler family history and genealogy.

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	1	Sehler genealogy. Brown & Sehler
	2	Minutes, 1904-35.
	3	Daybook, 1918-34, 1944.
	4	The Sunbeam, 1912.
	5	Receipts, 1891, 1900.
	6	Stock certificates & advertisements, 1940, n.d. Receipts
	7	General, 1889-1900.
	8	H.E. Barkley, 1891, 1900.
	9	Grocers, 1891-2, 1900, n.d.
	10	Miscellaneous, 1877, 1891, 1897, 1900.
	11	German, 1891, 1899, 1900.
	12	Bills, Grand Rapids Gas Co., 1891, 1900.