

Title: Curtin, Jeremiah & Alma (Cardell)

Call Number: Mss-0811

Inclusive Dates: 1827 – 1998

Bulk: 17.9 cu. ft. total

Location: LM, Sh. 088-097 (11.9 cu. ft.)
WHS A106-A107 (6.0 cu. ft.)
OS SM “C” (5 items)

Abstract: The collection offers a rare dual perspective on a unique 19th century couple; their social and business correspondence, together with Alma’s diaries, reveal the activities and reactions of a 19th century woman in a public world still thought to be the domain of men. At the same time, familial correspondence spanning three generations (from Alma’s grandmother down to Alma and her sister), over the course of 65 years, allows a glimpse of women’s domestic life and concerns in the last half of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th.

The collection is organized into seven series. See the scope and content note for a more specific description of the organizational structure.

Biographical Note: Jeremiah Curtin (1835-1906) was one of 19th-century America’s foremost ethnologists and linguists. Born in Detroit, he was brought to Milwaukee County as an infant. His family was among the earliest Irish settlers in the area, and their homestead is preserved as an historical landmark and museum in the present-day village of Greendale. Jeremiah spent his formative years in the Milwaukee area, attending Milwaukee University (a private high school) and Carroll College in Waukesha before leaving for Harvard in the fall of 1859.

Upon graduation from Harvard, Curtin spent a year in New York studying the law and languages. His particular interest in Russian secured for him an appointment, from President Lincoln, as Secretary to the United States legation to Russia in 1864; Curtin spent the next eight years in that position at St. Petersburg. In 1872, he arranged for and joined Russia’s Grand Duke Alexis’ visit to Milwaukee.

While on this trip, Curtin met and married Mary Alma Cardell (1847-1938), a Vermont-born teacher then working at a school in Madison. They spent the next 34 years together in a unique partnership. Alma returned to Russia with Jeremiah, where they tried to establish a timber business in the Crimea. With the outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey in 1877, the Curtins abandoned their plans and returned to the United States. For the next four years, the Curtins lived in the Midwest, where Jeremiah lectured and worked on an encyclopedia for a Chicago firm.

In 1882, Curtin joined the staff of the Smithsonian Institution’s Bureau of Ethnology, where he specialized in collection vocabularies and myths of American Indian tribes. From then until Jeremiah’s death in 1906, the Curtins travelled extensively and continually, collection folklore from a variety of cultures (Russian, Irish, East European, Central American). In addition,

Jeremiah made extensive translations of popular European literature into English. In this capacity, he is the best known translator of the works of Nobel Prize-winning Polish author, Henryk Sienkiewicz, whose *Quo Vadis?* Was one of the most popular books in both Europe and the United States at the end of the 19th century.

Alma Curtin was herself fluent in Russian and French. In addition to assisting her husband in the collection of folktales and myths, she acted as his copyist and photographer. Following her husband's death, she prepared several of his manuscripts for publication, and wrote much of the account that was published in 1940 as *The Memoirs of Jeremiah Curtin*. She continued to travel within the United States, but lived with her family in Vermont until her death in 1938.

Scope and Content:

This collection covers primarily the period of the Curtins' married life from 1872 until Jeremiah's death in 1906. It is divided into seven series. The first series is Jeremiah Curtin's Materials, General and Miscellaneous. It includes working and finished copies of Curtin's Indian material (arranged by tribe and geographic area), and drafts and edited versions of the *Memoirs*. Early drafts are in Jeremiah Curtin's hand and contain information that Alma edited out in revised drafts prepared after his death. Curtin's account of his early life and aspects of his dispute with the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Cassius Clay, are among the details that did not appear in the published version. The final edited transcript is also included. In addition, the first series includes Jeremiah's correspondence with family as well as business and social acquaintances. Except for brief postscripts to his wife's letters home, Curtin's correspondence with his own family after his years at Harvard was either very meager, has been lost, or has not yet come to public attention. He did, however, correspond with several noted figures of his day; of particular interest may be his correspondence with Russian artist Vassily Vereschagen and Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz.

The second series is Jeremiah Curtin's Materials, Legends, Myths and Folktales. This series consists of materials relating to Jeremiah Curtin's writings on the customs, legends and beliefs of Native Americans and other previously ignored 19th century cultures. These materials afford the researcher a window on some of the vestiges of, and differences between, pre-industrial societies in both the United States and abroad. Moreover, read together with Alma Curtin's daily diary entries and letters, they help shed light on the work of the ethnographer and reveal the development of the social science of ethnography in its infancy.

The third series is Alma (Cardell) Curtin Materials. This series consists of Alma Curtin's diaries/journals, correspondence with her family and friends, and scrapbooks. James & Mary Cardell often co-wrote letters to the Curtins, as did Mary and Jennie Cardell Norton. The letters are arranged under the name of the person who opened the letter. The scrapbooks offer a wide range of clippings from around the world, covering the Curtins' activities and giving critical reaction to their published works.

The fourth series contains material compiled by the Milwaukee County Historical Society that pertain to the Curtins and the Curtin House in Greendale.

The fifth series is Miscellaneous Family Materials. This series contains diaries/journals as well as correspondence related to Jeremiah's and Alma's relatives: the Bugbee, Bradley, Cardell, Curtin, and Norton families. The correspondence is to/from various family members (other than Jeremiah and Alma which is included in their respective sections) and is arranged by the author.

of the letter and there under chronologically. The dating and matching of this material, and indeed, of all the correspondence in the collection, was done on the basis of internal evidence, utilizing dates and information given in Alma Curtin's diaries, Jeremiah Curtin's *Memoirs*, and the Bugbee, Bradley, and Cardell family histories given by Alma Curtin. Since there is a margin of error with these letters, the researcher should use them with some caution.

The sixth series consists of an extensive collection of books which Jeremiah Curtin wrote and collected. This is his personal library, which is housed in the Cudahy Library at MCHS.

The seventh series consists of photographs—most of them probably taken by Alma Curtin—of family, friends, and various travels. The photos are arranged topically.

Administrative Info:

This collection was compiled from a number of sources. Some of the collection was donated by the Curtin family members. Other portions of the collection were purchased at auction. The collection was processed in 1999 by Judith A. Simosen and reprocessed in September 2004 by Kevin Abing. This finding aid was updated in July 2009.

Related Collections:

McShane/Curtin Papers, Mss 2645

Olson-Curtin Papers, Mss 2646

Series 1: Jeremiah Curtin Material, General/Miscellaneous	Box #	Folder #
Articles of Agreement Between Russia & Japan re: Korea, ca. 1905	1	1
Assorted Maps	1	2
Assorted Notes Copied from Jeremiah's Notebooks by Alma, n.d. (31 pages)	1	3
Assorted Notes – Fragments, n.d.	1	4
Assorted Notes (Handwritten), n.d.	1	5
Autobiographical Notes – Early Childhood Years (covers pp. 31-38 of <i>Memoirs</i>)	1	6
Autobiographical Notes – Preparing for College (in Alma's hand; copied from 1897 notes)	1	7
Autobiographical Notes – Curtin's Life, 1846-1873	1	8
Autobiographical Notes (Comprises pp. 201-06, 306-07, 323-36, & 469-72 of <i>Memoirs</i>)	1	9
Autobiographical Notes – Travel Notes/Meeting with Charles Dana (forms basis of chapter 30 of <i>Memoirs</i>)	1	10
Autobiographical Notes – Alma Curtin's Account of Meeting w/Leo Tolstoy & Travels in Russia (detailed background to material published in <i>Memoirs</i> pp. 783-815)	1	11
Autobiographical Notes – Travel Notes re: Russia (In Alma Curtin's Hand; Comprises roughly pp. 78-80, 103-128 of <i>Memoirs</i>)	1	12
Autobiographical Notes – Jeremiah & Alma Curtin's Itinerary, 1897-1904	1	13

Autobiographical Notes – Travel Notes re: Ireland & Scotland [in both Alma’s & Jeremiah’s hands]	1	14
Autobiographical Notes – Travel Notes re: Siberia & Buriat Funeral [in Alma Curtin’s hand]	1	15
Autobiographical Notes – Travel Notes re: Siberia & Buriat Life [in Jeremiah Curtin’s hand]	1	16
Autobiographical Notes – Travel Notes/Alma’s Account of Russian Trip, 1873 [pp. 5-10 missing]	1	17
Autobiographical Notes – Notes on History of Manchus [in Jeremiah’s hand]	1	18
Autobiographical Notes – Travel Notes/Alma Curtin on Trip to Holy Land, ca. 1899	1	19
Autobiographical Notes re: Russia & Clay, pp. I-XV	1	20
Autobiographical Notes, pp. A-Z	1	21
Calling Cards – Miscellaneous (In Envelope)	1	22
Christmas Cards	1	23
Certificate (in Russian), 1904 [Note: in two pieces, very fragile]	OS SM “C”	
Compositions/Essays, ca. 1840s? (Jeremiah Curtin’s?)	1	24
Contemporary Articles & Reviews Collected by Curtin	1	25
Contracts with Vassily Vereschagen, n.d.	1	26
Diaries/Notebooks, 1896-1900 & Undated	1	27
Envelopes - Miscellaneous, Empty	1	28
Essay, “The Germanic Element in Civilization” [Harvard Composition?]	1	29
Family Histories – Curtin/Cardell/Bugbee/Bradley Families	1	30
Foreign Language Materials – Letters, Certificates, etc., ca. 1869-1906	2	31
Grain Business with Russian Government	2	32
Grand Duke Alexis in Milwaukee – Menu & Invitation, 1872	2	33
“Introductory Remarks & Biographical Sketch of Henryk Sienkiewicz,” 1897 (Draft of Curtin’s <i>Century Magazine</i> article)	2	34
Japanese Items from Travels	2	35
Jeremiah Curtin Monograph by Daniel F. Curtin	2	36
Letters Received – From Maude (Mathilda) Curtin [Jeremiah’s Sister, a nun], 1891 (letters to Jeremiah & Alma)	2	37
Letters Received – Re: Family Matters From People Outside the Family, 1879-1898	2	38
Letters Received – Social/Business – From John B. Alden (publisher), 1888	2	39
Letters Received – Social/Business – From Charles Dana (editor, <i>The Sun</i>), 1890-1896	2	40
Letters Received – Social/Business – From Porfirio Diaz (President of Mexico), 1895, 1897 [letters of introduction on Curtin’s behalf]	2	41
Letters Received – Social/Business – From John Fiske, 1878-1893	2	42
Letters Received – Social/Business – From John Hay (U.S. Secretary of State), 1900-1903 [letters of introduction on Curtin’s behalf]	2	43

Letters Received – Social/Business – From Little, Brown & Co. (publishers), 1892-1899	2	44
Letters Received – Social/Business – From Henryk Sienkiewicz, 1897-1906	2	45
Letters Received – Social/Business – From Henryk Sienkiewicz (letters of introduction on Curtin’s behalf), 1897, 1903	2	46
Letters Received – Social/Business – Agreements with Henryk Sienkiewicz, 1898	2	47
Letters Received – Social/Business – From Vassily Vereschagen, 1891, 1901	2	48
Letters Received – Social/Business – Assorted Letters of Introduction Written on Curtin’s Behalf, 1895-1904	2	49
Letters Received – Social/Business – Re: Wintu Tribe, 1889-1890	2	50
Letters Received – Social/Business – From Acquaintances in Indian Territory, 1885-1890	2	51
Letters Received – Social/Business – 3 rd Party Letters re: the Curtins, 1890-1900	2	52
Letters, Notes, & Invitations Received, 1870-1879	2	53
Letters, Notes, & Invitations Received, 1880-1889	2	54
Letters, Notes, & Invitations Received, 1890-1899	2	55
Letters, Notes, & Invitations Received, 1900-1906	2	56
Letters, Notes, & Invitations Received, Undated	3	57
Letters Received – Miscellaneous – J. G. Vore to Andrew Curtin re: Indian Affairs, April 5, 1886 (letter given to Jeremiah Curtin)	3	58
Letters Sent – To Alma (Cardell) Curtin [wife], 1872-1891	3	59
Letters Sent – To His Sister (From Harvard), 1860-1861	3	60
Letters Sent – To Morgan Furlong (cousin), 1855, 1859-1861	3	61
Letters Sent – To James & Mary (Bradley) Cardell [Parents-in-Law], 1872-1897	3	62
Letters Sent – To Lucretia (Bugbee) Bradley [Grandmother-in-Law], 1873-1877	3	63
Letters Sent – To Anson M. Norton (brother-in-law), 1899	3	64
Letters Sent – Social/Business – Assorted, 1885-1901	3	65
Letters Sent – Social/Business – To Little, Brown & Co. (Publishers), 1891-1902	3	66
Letters Sent – Social/Business – To Henry Sienkiewicz, 1901, 1904	3	67
Memoirs (manuscript – original), pp. 1-25 & pages re: John Fiske	3	68
Memoirs (manuscript), pp. 1-202 [In Alma Curtin’s Hand; pp. 31-317 in published <i>Memoirs</i>]	3	69
Memoirs (manuscript), pp. 13-107 [pp. 356-476 in published <i>Memoirs</i>]	3	70
Memoirs (manuscript), pp. 437, 475-720 [pp. 667-920 in published <i>Memoirs</i>]	3	71
Memoirs (manuscript), p. 78 [pp. 142-43 of published <i>Memoirs</i>]	3	72

Memoirs (manuscript) – “A Few Pages of Autobiography,” pp. 1, 326-327 [Comprising pp. 1, 478-81 of published <i>Memoirs</i> ; all in Alma Curtin’s hand]	3	73
Memoirs (manuscript), p. 36 [pp. 385, 399-400 of published <i>Memoirs</i>]	3	74
Memoirs (manuscript), no page # [p. 450 in published <i>Memoirs</i>]	3	75
Memoirs (manuscript) – draft [p. 359 in published <i>Memoirs</i>]	3	76
Memoirs (manuscript) – Last Page [in Alma Curtin’s hand]	3	77
Memoirs (manuscript) – pp. 691 & 720	3	78
Memoirs (typescript), pp. 1-300	3	79-80
Memoirs (typescript), pp. 301-827	4	81-84
Miscellaneous	4	85
Monograph on <i>Quo Vadis</i>	4	86
Mythology Lecture	4	87
Newspaper Clippings re: Jeremiah Curtin’s Folk Tales, 1893, 1901	4	88
Newspaper Clippings re: Jeremiah Curtin (includes obituary), ca. 1906-1953	4	89
Newspaper Clippings re: Family Members, 1891-1955	4	90
Newspaper Clippings re: Visit of Grand Duke Alexis of Russia to Milwaukee & U.S., 1872	4	91
Newspaper Clippings re: Henryk Sienkiewicz, ca. 1914-1916	4	92
Newspaper Clippings – Russian & Polish, 1906-1907	4	93
Newspaper Clippings – Miscellaneous	4	94
Newspapers – <i>The Vicksburg (Miss.) Daily Citizen</i> , July 2, 1863 (Facsimile -last of the “wallpaper edition,” 2 days before surrender of southern army)	4	95
Notes on Mythology & Curtin’s Philosophy	4	96
Passports for Jeremiah Curtin, 1894, 1900	OS SM “C”	
Portsmouth Peace Conference, 1905	4	97
Postcards (Miscellaneous) from Various Travels	4	98
Publication Agreements & Copyrights	4A	99
Publication-Related Material – Miscellaneous	4A	100
Publications Owned by Curtin, Preface to, with extracts, <i>A Book of the Beginnings</i> by Gerald Massey	4A	101
Publications Owned by Curtin, “Remarks on the Centres of Ancient Civilization in Central America,” by Dr. C. Hermann Berendt	4A	101
Publications Owned by Curtin, <i>Lucasen</i>	4A	101
Published Articles Written by Jeremiah Curtin	4A	102
Reviews of Curtin’s Works	4A	103
Stanson, George (Stojanovitz) & Jeremiah Curtin (includes photos)	4A	104
Tickets & Receipts from Various Travels	4A	105
Travel Memorabilia – General	4A	106
Will & Probate Records, 1898, 1907	4A	107
Working books, Prus, Boleslaw. (Alexander Glowacki). <i>Faraon</i> . Vol. III. Warsaw: Naklad Gebethnera I Wolffa, 1897. Notation by Curtin on p. 387, “Finished, Nov. 24, 1899,” in Polish	7A	Loose

Working books, Senkiewicz, Henryk. <i>Pisma</i> [Collected Writings]. - Tom. I: 294 pp., no covers. Includes “Stary Sluga,” “Szkice Weglem,” “Janko Muzykant,” and “Hania.”	7A	Loose
Working books, Senkiewicz, Henryk. <i>Pisma</i> [Collected Writings]. - Tom IV: 270 pp., no front cover. Includes “Przey Stepy,” “orso,” “Z pamietnika poznanskiego nauczyciela,” “Czyja wina?” & “Za chlebem.”	7A	Loose
Working books, Senkiewicz, Henryk. <i>Pisma</i> [Collected Writings]. - Tom. V: “Latarnik,” “Niewola Tatarsk,” “Jamioł,” “Najednkarte,” “Bartek Zwyciezca.”	7A	Loose
Working books, Senkiewicz, Henryk. <i>Pisma</i> [Collected Writings]. - Tom XX: “Wyrok Zeusa,” “Z Wrazen Wloskich,” “Organista Z Ponikly,” “U Zrodla,” “Lux in Tenebris Lucet,” “Badz Blogoslawiona!,” “Pojdzmy Aznim!,” “Listy O Zoll.” 212 pp.	7A	Loose
Working books, Senkiewicz, Henryk. <i>Potop</i> [The Deluge]. Warsaw: 1886. (Tom II only).	7A	Loose
Working books, Unknown. Polish Text, 242 pp., no covers, title, author, or date	7A	Loose
Working books, Unknown. “Tribal Names & Synonyms.” No publisher, n.d. 54 pp., no covers	7A	Loose
Series 2: Jeremiah Curtin’s Materials, Legends, Myths and Folktales	Box #	Folder #
Native Americans:		
New York Indians – Seneca Myths	5	108
Indian Territory (Oklahoma) Tribes – Creek Myths/Customs	5	109
Indian Territory (Oklahoma) Tribes – Muskota Myths	5	110
Indian Territory (Oklahoma) Tribes – Osage, Pottawatami, & Sac & Fox Myths	5	111
Indian Territory (Oklahoma) Tribes – Paiute Myths/Customs	5	112
Indian Territory (Oklahoma) Tribes – Seminole Legends/Customs	5	113
Oregon Tribes – Warm Springs Myths	5	114
Oregon Tribes – Wasco Legends	5	115
California Tribes – Bluff Creek Myths	5	116
California Tribes – “General Bidwell” Legends	5	117
California Tribes – Hat Creek Myths	5	118
California Tribes – Hoopa (Hupa) Myths	5	119
California Tribes – Klamath & Hoopa [working copies]	5	120
California Tribes – Klamath	5	121
California Tribes – Hoopa (Hupa) [working copies]	5	122
California Tribes – Orleans Bar Myths	6	123
California Tribes – Pitt River Myths	6	124
California Tribes – Shasta Myths [working copies - Books I - IV]	6	125
California Tribes – Shasta Myths [finished copies]	6	126
California Tribes? – Shawnee Myths	6	127
California Tribes – Somes Bar Legends	6	128

California Tribes – Uchee (Yuchi) Myths	6	129
California Tribes – Wintu Myths	6	130
Pacific Coast Tribes – 2 unidentified myths/general notes/vocabularies	6	131
Draft Notes for Introduction to Published Myths of Wintus	6	132
Assorted Groups:		
Indian Stories from Victoria, British Columbia	7	133
Spanish/Indian Stories from Central America & Spain	7	134
Spanish/Mexican Stories	7	135
Serbian Legends	7	136
Egyptian Legends	7	137
Irish Songs	7	138
Irish Stories	7	139-142
Vocabularies/Miscellaneous Notes	7	143
Series 3: Alma (Cardell) Curtin Material	Box #	Folder #
Diaries/Journals, 1861-1862, 1864-1866	8	144
Diaries/Journals, 1869-1870, 1874, 1884-1886	8	145
Diaries/Journals, 1887-1889	8	146
Diaries/Journals, 1891-1894	8	147
Diaries/Journals, 1894-1899	8	148
Diaries/Journals, 1899-1904	9	149
Diaries/Journals, 1904-1936	9	150
Letters Received – From Assorted Relatives/Friends, 1881-1891	9	151
Letters Received – From Lucretia Bugbee Bradley [Grandmother], 1874-1886	9	152
Letters Received – From William H. Bradley [Alma's Uncle], 1894	9	153
Letters Received – From David Bugbee [Alma's Great Uncle], 1892, 1895	9	154
Letters Received – From James Cardell [Alma's Father], 1876-1889	9	155
Letters Received – From Jeremiah Curtin Cardell [Nephew], 1913 (post card)	9	156
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell [Alma's Mother], 1860s	9	157
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1873-1877 (to Curtins in Russia)	9	158
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1880-1883	9	159
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1884-1885	9	160
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1886	9	161
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1887-1888	9	162
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1889	10	163
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1890	10	164
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1891 (through September)	10	165
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, Dec. 1891-1892 (to Curtins in Ireland)	10	166
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, Jan.-Sept. 1893 (to Curtins in Ireland)	10	167

Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, Oct. 1893-1894 (to Curtins in Italy)	10	168
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1895	10	169
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1896-1897 (to Curtins in Mexico)	10	170
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1897 (to Curtins in US/Europe/Russia)	10	171
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1898 (to Curtins in U.S. & Europe)	10	172
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1899 (to Curtins in Europe/Middle East)	10	173
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1900 (to Curtins in Europe/Russia/etc.)	10	174
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1901 (to Curtins in Europe)	10	175
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, 1902 (to Curtins in U.S.)	10	176
Letters Received – From Mary Cardell, Undated Fragments	10	177
Letters Received – From William H. Cardell [Brother], 1882, 1886	10	178
Letters Received – From David & Anne (Decker) Curtin [Brother- & Sister-in-law], 1879-1908	10	179
Letters Received – From Joanna Curtin [Jeremiah's Sister], 1872	10	180
Letters Received – From James Cardell Norton [Alma's Nephew], 1902	11	181
Letters Received – From Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton [Alma's Sister], 1870s	11	182
Letters Received – From Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1880s	11	183
Letters Received – From Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1890s	11	184
Letters Received – From Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1900s	11	185
Letters Received – From Ella Bradley Raymer [Cousin; Daughter of William H. Bradley], 1882, 1895	11	186
Letters Received – General Social Correspondence, ca. 1870s-1912	11	187
Letters Received & Sent re: Jeremiah Curtin's Death & Literary Estate, 1906-1909	11	188
Letters Sent – To Assorted Relatives, 1862-1896	11	189
Letters Sent – To Lucretia Bugbee Bradley [Grandmother], 1873-1877	11	190
Letters Sent – To Lucretia Bugbee Bradley, 1880-1885	11	191
Letters Sent – To Anice Tucker Cardell [Sister-in-Law], 1904 (post card)	11	192
Letters Sent – To James Cardell [Nephew], 1905-1908 (post cards)	11	193
Letters Sent – To Jeremiah Curtin Cardell [Nephew], ca. 1906	11	194
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell (parents), ca. 1860-1871	11	195
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1872	11	196
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1872 (from England & Russia)	11	197
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1873 (from Russia & England)	11	198
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1874 (from Russia & Europe)	12	199
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1875 (from Russia & Europe)	12	200
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1876 (from Russia & Europe)	12	201
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1877 (from London)	12	202
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell (letter fragments), 1872-1877	12	203

Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1879-1881	12	204
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1882-1883 (from Washington, D.C)	12	205
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, Nov.-Dec. 1883 (from New York state)	12	206
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1883-1884 (from Indian Territory)	12	207
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1884-1885 (from west coast)	12	208
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1886 (from Washington, D.C.)	12	209
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1887 (from New York state)	12	210
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, Sept. 1887 (from Ireland)	12	211
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1888 (from Washington, D.C.)	12	212
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell,, 1888-1889 (from California, Washington, D.C., & Boston)	12	213
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1890-1891 (from Washington, DC)	12	214
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1891-1893 (from Ireland & Scotland)	12	215
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1894 (from Europe)	12	216
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1895-1897 (from Mexico & Guatamala)	12	217
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1897-1898 (from Europe & U.S.)	12	218
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1899 (from Middle East)	13	219
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1899 (from England & Ireland)	13	220
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1900 (from round the world trip)	13	221
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1901 (from round the world trip)	13	222
Letters Sent – To Mary &/or James Cardell, 1902 (from Washington, D.C.)	13	223
Letters Sent – To William H. Cardell [brother], 1873-1877	13	224
Letters Sent – To William H. Cardell, 1888	13	225
Letters Sent – To William H. Cardell, 1895-1899	13	226
Letters Sent – To William H. Cardell, 1903-1904	13	227
Letters Sent – To William H. Cardell, 1906, 1908 (post cards)	13	228
Letters Sent – To Anne Decker Curtin [Sister-in-Law], 1893	13	229
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton [Sister], 1873-1877 [from Europe & Russia]	13	230
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1879-1882 (from U.S.)	13	231
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1885 (from Oregon)	13	232
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1886 (from Washington, D.C.)	13	233
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1889 (from California)	13	234

Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1890 (from Washington, D.C.)	13	235
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1892-1893 (from Ireland & Scotland)	13	236
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1894 (from Italy)	13	237
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1896, 1898 (from Mexico & England)	13	238
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1901 (from Japan)	13	239
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1903 (from Europe & Russia)	13	240
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1904, 1906 (from Europe, etc.)	13	241
Letters Sent – To Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton, 1911	13	242
Liquidation & Endowment Certificate from Daughters of the American Revolution to Alma Curtin, Ca. 1911	OS SM “C”	
Newspaper Clippings re: Alma Curtin	13	243
Passport for Alma Curtin, 1903	OS SM “C”	
Tax Records/D.A.R./American Pen Women’s Association, 1912-1937	13	244
Scrapbook, Curtin, Alma. Contains account, in Alma’s hand, of her marriage; numerous accounts of her travels published in U.S. papers; press announcements of Jeremiah Curtin speeches & appearances; interview w/Jeremiah; poems; clippings re: execution of Haymarket Square martyrs, 1870s – 1887	13	Loose
Scrapbook, Black Binding w/”Annl. Mess. And Acc’g. Docs. 1849-1850. Part II” embossed on spine. Contains poetry clippings from papers, accounts of Jeremiah Curtin’s activities & speeches, and reprints of 2 Irish myths. 1870s-1880s. Alma Curtin’s	13	Loose
Scrapbook, Curtin, Alma. Newscippings of Jeremiah Curtin’s activities, reprints of Irish myths along with press reviews, 1889-1892	13	Loose
Scrapbook, Curtin, Alma. Press notices re: Jeremiah Curtin, 1889-1905. Also includes copy of J. Curtin’s pamphlet “The Visit of the Grand Duke Alexis to Milwaukee, June 2, 1872 “ (London, 1874)	13	Loose
Scrapbook, Curtin, Alma. Newspaper clippings re: Jeremiah Curtin’s activities & life; press reviews; obituaries of J. Curtin from around the world. Packet of clippings re: Grand Duke Alexis’ visit to Milwaukee; assorted loose clippings; 1868-1906	13	Loose
4 Envelopes with loose scrapbook pages and loose clippings	13	Loose
Series 4: MCHS Material Re: Jeremiah & Alma Curtin	Box #	Folder #
Collection Guide & Abstract (Outdated)	14	245
Curtin Collection, MCHS: Correspondence & Materials re: Development	14	246
Curtin Collection, MCHS: Books/Bibliographies/Research Guides	14	247
Biographical/Genealogical Information re: Jeremiah & Alma Curtin	14	248
Chronology – Life of Jeremiah Curtin (compiled from diaries & memoirs)	14	249
Additional Archival Sources with Curtin Material	14	250

Research & Writings on the Curtins (by M.C.H.S. & other Journals)	14	251
Sienkiewicz, Henry, File	14	252
Reference File: Curtin's Translation of "The Trilogy"	14	253
Polish Newspaper Article on Curtin, 1992, & Recent Newsclippings	14	254
David Curtin's property inventory & those of his neighbors	14	255
Information on Curtins' neighbors	14	256
Acquisition, restoration & dedication of Curtin homestead: news clippings, programs, & articles	14	257
1936 D.A. R. meeting: program & news clippings (photocopies)	14	258
1938 Centennial Celebration: programs & copy of news clippings	14	259
Archeological digs, Jamestown, VA.	14	260
Ireland's architecture – reference	14	261
Research file – mainly Furlongs	14	262
Newspaper Clippings re: Greendale, WI, as a "Greenbelt" Community, 1936-1937	14	262A
Curtin House furnishing committee	15	263
Research notes – Curtin House (Director's File HHA)	15	264
Research notes – misc. (Director's File HHA)	15	265
Research notes – misc. (Director's File HHA)	15	266
Correspondence – misc. (Director's File HHA)	15	267
Research notes – Curtin manuscript papers	15	268
Mikos, Michael – Research on Curtin	15	269
Audiocassettes (6) — recorded conversations w/Jeremiah Curtin Cardell, conducted by Robert & Betty Norton in Florida in 1982: recollections of the Curtins.	16	Loose
Boxes of Slides re: Curtin House (16)	16	Loose
MCHS Printed Captions 1953/54 ? Exhibit	16	270
MCHS Typed/Laminated Excerpts from Alma Curtin's Diaries/Letters (For Exhibit?)	16	271
MCHS Curtin Slide Show Text, Updated 1998 & 1987 Curtin Exhibit Text	16	272
MCHS Negatives, Misc. Copies of Curtin Images	16	Envelope
MCHS Negatives for Slide Show Browntones	16	Envelope
MCHS Negatives for Curtin 1987 Exhibit	16	Envelope
MCHS Microfilm on Curtin	16	Loose
Series 5: Miscellaneous Family Materials	Box #	Folder #
Bugbee Family		
Aurin Bugbee [Alma's Great Uncle] Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (Sister), 1853-1858	17	273
David Bugbee [Alma's Great Uncle] Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (Sister), 1865-1886	17	274
David Bugbee Letters to Mary Bradley Cardell (Niece), 1886	17	275
David Bugbee Letters to James Cardell (Nephew-in-Law), 1885-1886	17	276
David Bugbee Letters to Jennie Cardell Norton (Grand-Niece), 1892	17	277

David Bugbee – Notes on Money Given to Sisters	17	278
James Bugbee [Alma’s Great Uncle] Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (Sister), 1827	17	279
Lizzie Bugbee Letters to David Bugbee (Uncle), 1893	17	280
Bradley Family		
Lucretia Bugbee Bradley [Alma’s Grandmother] Letters to Children & Grandchildren, 1845-1872	17	281
Lucretia Bugbee Bradley Letters to Friends, 1845	17	282
Lucretia Bugbee Bradley Letters Received from Friends & Relatives, 1862-86	17	283
William Bradley Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (wife), 1856-1862	17	284
William H. Bradley [Alma’s Uncle] Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (mother) , 1852-1887	17	285
William H. Bradley Letters to Mary Bradley Cardell (Sister), 1890-1894	17	286
William H. Bradley Letters to Jennie Cardell Norton (Niece), 1894	17	287
William H. Bradley Letters to Ella Bradley Raymer (Daughter) & Lizzie Bradley Parker (Daughter), 1882, 1892	17	288
Sarah Bradley [d. 1881] Letters to William H. Bradley (Husband), 1856	17	289
Malcolm C. Bradley [d. 1890; “Mac”] Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (Grandmother), n.d.	17	290
Ella Bradley (Raymer) Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (Grandmother), 1872-1885	17	291
Ella Bradley Raymer Letters to William H. Bradley (Father), 1890-1891	17	292
Ella Bradley Raymer Letters to Mary Bradley Cardell (Aunt), 1895, 1897	17	293
Cardell Family		
William Cardell, Sr., Letters to James Cardell (Son), 1845	17	294
William Cardell, Sr., Letters Received, 1844	17	295
William Cardell, Jr., Letters to Parents, 1839-1840	17	296
William Cardell, Jr., Letters to James Cardell (Brother), 1839-1852	17	297
Hiram Cardell (d. 1844) Letters to James Cardell (Brother), 1841-1842	17	298
Loren Cardell Letters to James Cardell (Brother), 1844-1845	17	299
Emeline & Eliza Cardell Letters to James Cardell (Brother), ca. 1856	17	300
Elizabeth Cardell Letters Received from Esther Davis, 1857	17	301
James Cardell [Alma’s Father] Letters Received from Old Girlfriends, 1844-48	17	302
James Cardell Letters to Loren Cardell (Brother), 1846	17	303
James Cardell Letters to Family/Wife, 1835-1863	17	304
James Cardell Letters to Family/Wife re: Western Trip, 1871	17	305
James Cardell – Notebook, ca. 1870s	17	306
Mary Miranda Bradley Cardell [Alma’s Mother] – Autograph/Poetry Book, 1839-1844	17	307

Mary Miranda Bradley Cardell Diaries/Journals, 1879-1883, 1890-1892, 1894, 1896-1897 (Note: 1879-1882 diary also includes entries by Jennie Cardell Norton)	18	308
Mary Miranda Bradley Cardell Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (Mother), 1845	18	309
Mary Miranda Bradley Cardell Letters to David Bugbee (Uncle), 1886-87, 1899	18	310
Mary Miranda Bradley Cardell Letters to Jennie Cardell Norton (Daughter), 1886-1896	18	311
Mary Miranda Bradley Cardell Letters Received from Friends/Relatives, 1834-1898	18	312
Mary Miranda Bradley Cardell – Deed for Family Pew, 1882	18	313
William Henry Cardell {Alma’s Brother] Letters to Mary Bradley Cardell (Mother), 1896-1899	18	314
William Henry Cardell Letters to Jennie Cardell Norton (Sister), 1886-1892	18	315
William Henry Cardell Letters Received – Miscellaneous, 1899-1902	18	316
Annice Tucker Cardell [Mrs. William H.] Letters to Mary Bradley Cardell (Mother-in-Law), 1896-1897	18	317
Jeremiah Curtin Cardell [Son of Annice & William] Letters to Robert A. Norton (2 nd Cousin), 1965, 1975	18	318
Mrs. J. C. Cardell Letters Received, 1936, 1942	18	319
Cardell Letter (author unknown) to Knights Templar re: Temperance, n.d.	18	320
List of Cardell Beneficiaries of Cadwell Estate, n.d.	18	321
Deeds to Cardell Family Land in Vermont, 1899	18	322
Agreement between Warren, Vermont, Selectmen (including L. Cardell) & Contractor for Construction of a Bridge, 1844	18	323
Curtin Family		
Jo Curtin [Jeremiah’s Sister] – Scrapbook	18	323A
Norton Family		
Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton [Alma’s Sister] – Bequests, n.d.	18	324
Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton – Description of Colors for Paintings, n.d.	18	325
Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton – Diary/Journal, Feb.- May 1882 (Note: Includes some entries by Mary Bradley Cardell)	18	326
Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton Letters to Lucretia Bugbee Bradley (Grandmother) , 1882	18	327
Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton Letters to Mary Bradley Cardell (Mother), 1885-1898	18	328
Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton Letters to Anson M. Norton (Husband), 1888-92	18	329
Jennie Hazard Cardell Norton Letters Received, 1887-1950	18	330
Dr. Anson M. Norton [Jennie’s Husband] Letters to Jennie Cardell Norton (wife), 1889, 1896	18	331
Dr. Anson M. Norton Letters/Bills Received, 1890-1895	18	332

Robert A. Norton [Alma's Grand-Nephew] Letters to Jennie Cardell Norton (Grandmother), 1948	18	333
Robert A. Norton Letters to James & Ruth Norton (Parents), n.d.	18	334
Robert A. Norton Letters Received, ca. 1940	18	335
Cardell Norton – School Language Exercise, 1900	18	336
Series 6: Curtin's Personal Library (Books and Articles) [Located at WHS, Sh. A106-A107]		
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U.S. Government. <i>Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs</i> . 2 volumes. Washington: GPO, 1867.		
Wilson, Dale. "Editorial." <i>Historical Messenger</i> , vol. 8 (December 1952): 2.		
<i>Wisconsin Magazine of History</i> . Vol. 29, no. 2, December 1945.		
Series 7: Photographs	Box #	Folder #
Family and Friends		
Jeremiah Curtin	19	1-2
Alma (Cardell) Curtin	19	3
Curtin Family	19	3A
Drawings by Alma Curtin	19	3B
Cardell & Norton Family; Curtin Mausoleum	19	4
Cardell & Norton Family; Henryk Sienkiewicz (Negatives)	19	5
Henryk Sienkiewicz, Family, & Home (with Curtin)	19	6
Henryk Sienkiewicz, Family, & Home (with Curtin)	19	7
American & European Notables, Friends, & Acquaintances	19	8
6 contact proof sheets & 5 envelopes of negatives of photos of Cardell & Norton families, also Furlongs of Milwaukee	19	9 (envelope)
Photos of Jeremiah Curtin House, Greendale, WI, taken by Robert A. Norton (Alma Curtin's Grand-nephew) on visit to Milwaukee	19	10 (envelope)
Photos of Jeremiah Curtin Hall, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, taken By Robert A. Norton on visit to Milwaukee	19	11 (envelope)
Russian Photos		
Russia – Assorted Locales	20	12
Russian People	20	13
Siberia – Buriat Community	20	14
Siberia – Buriat People	20	15
Mongolian Masks	20	16
Russian Notables, Friends, & Acquaintances of the Curtins	20	17
Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Peace Conference, 1905	20	18
Russia (Negatives)	20	19
Irish Photos		
Aran Islands	21	20
Blasket Island	21	21

County Clare	21	22
County Cork	21	23
County Donegal	21	24
County Dublin	21	25
County Galway	21	26
County Kerry	21	27
Skellig Island	21	28
Tory Island	21	29
Ventry Strand	21	30
Ireland – Miscellaneous Locales	21	31
Ireland – Unidentified Locales	21	32
Ireland – Unidentified People	21	33
MCHS Prints of 35 Irish & Scottish Photos	21	34
MCHS Prints of 35 Irish & Scottish Photos	21	34A
MCHS Prints of 35 Irish & Scottish Photos	22	Loose
Other Locations		
Native American Communities (New York & California)	23	35
Canada	23	36
Egypt	23	37
Egypt	23	37A
France (including Monaco)	23	38
Germany	23	39
Greece	23	40
Guatamala	23	41
Holy Land	23	42
Italy (including museum photos of classical Roman statuary)	23	43
Mexico	23	44
Poland	23A	45
Spain	23A	46
Switzerland	23A	47
Unidentified People & Places	23A	48
Negatives of California & Canada	23A	49
Negatives of Austria, Sarajevo, Naples, & Others	23A	50
Miscellaneous Photos		
4 photo albums, primarily travel photos with some personal/family photos 1 photo album of Cardell family portraits	24	
33 glass plate negatives; primarily of Jeremiah Curtin but also travel photos	25	
Packet of Oversize Photos		CL W7
Curtin House Photos		
Photos – Curtin House 1902 & 1907 Alma Cardell Curtin photos & original negatives	26	51

Photos – Curtin House 1930's	26	52
Photos – Curtin House 1936 HABS photos and DAR meeting	26	53
Photos – Curtin House Ca. 1942 Albert Toepfer photos	26	54
Photos – Curtin House 1958-1962	26	55
Photos – Curtin House 1966-1967	26	56
Photos – Curtin House 1974 Jeremiah Curtin Cardell visit	26	57
Photos – Curtin House 1975	26	58
Photos – Curtin House 1975 MPS Milwaukee Public Schools Archeological Dig	26	59
Photos – Curtin House 1977 Restoration Work	26	60
Photos – Curtin House 1977 work, timber removal documentation	26	61
Photos – Curtin House 1978 MCHS Archeological Dig	26	62
Photos – Curtin House 1980 Restoration Work	26	63
Photos – Curtin House Opening/Dedication 1985	26	64
Photos – Curtin House Drawings/Models	26	65
Irish prototypes – Curtin House	26	66
Photos – Curtin House Furnishings (Contact Sheets)	26	67
Photos – Curtin House Exterior Views (Includes Negatives & Contact Sheets)	26	68
Photos – Curtin House – Miscellaneous Maps, Events, Negatives	26	69
Photos – “Brown-Toned” Photos for Use in Curtin House Slide Show	26	70