

**Benjamin Wright  
Collection, 1791-1862; bulk 1791-1827**

**SC21247**

**QUANTITY:** 1 box (0.25 cubic ft.)  
**ACCESS:** Open to research  
**ACQUISITION:** Collation of items and collections that were originally accessioned and catalogued separately, March 1996; original collection number indicated in parenthesis following the description  
**PROCESSED BY:** Fred Bassett, Senior Librarian, Manuscripts and Special Collections, April 1996; revised March 2011

**Biographical Note:**

Benjamin Wright, surveyor and engineer, was born in Weathersfield, Connecticut, October 10, 1770. His family moved to Fort Stanwix, now Rome, New York, in 1789, where he began his work as a land surveyor. During his career, he surveyed much of the land which is now situated in Herkimer, Oneida, Oswego, Lewis, Jefferson, and Saint Lawrence counties of New York State. He was hired by a number of prominent land owners (patentees) at the time. When the surveys were done, the landowners for whom he had worked often retained him as their agent.

Wright had become interested in the development of canals about 1792, when he did some preliminary surveys for a proposed canal along the Mohawk River between Schenectady and Rome, New York, on behalf of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company. In 1794 he was commissioned by the firm to do a comprehensive survey for the placement of canals and locks along the entire course of the Mohawk River from Rome to the Hudson River. However, the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company lacked the financial resources needed to build the canal Wright had designed. In 1811 he surveyed the same route again for the New York State Canal Commission. This led to his appointment in 1817 as senior engineer in charge of construction of the middle section of the Erie Canal. Later, he was placed in charge of the eastern section as well.

After the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, he worked as a consulting engineer for several other canal projects in New York State including the Delaware & Hudson Canal. He resigned as chief engineer of the Erie Canal in circa 1827 to take a similar position with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, which operated on a route along the Potomac River between Washington, D.C. and Cumberland, Maryland. He returned to New York about 1833, working primarily as a consultant on a number of canal projects. He also began doing surveys for railroads, which were in the early stages of development at the time.

Benjamin Wright was married on September 27, 1798, to Philomela Waterman. They had nine children, eight of whom survived their parents. One son, Benjamin H. Wright, was a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point (1822) and was commissioned in 1827 captain of the 157<sup>th</sup> New York Militia Regiment of Infantry. Benjamin Wright died August 24, 1842.

**Scope and Content Note:**

The collection is a collation of correspondence, field books, land survey maps, and other materials related to the life and career of Benjamin Wright that initially were cataloged separately. Several items relate to the development of canals and the commercial navigation infrastructure in the Black River and Mohawk River basins in New York State. The Western Inland Lock Navigation Company and later the Erie Canal are mentioned in some of his correspondence. Some of the survey field books and land survey maps relate to the subdivision of lands in Jefferson, Lewis, and Oneida counties of New York State. The collection also includes letters Philomela Wright sent to her son, Benjamin H. Wright, while he was a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and ancillary papers related to the military training and service of Benjamin H. Wright.

**Container List:**

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents /Description</b>
1	1	Letter: Benjamin Wright and George Huntington, Rome, [N.Y.], to Nicholas Low, March 4, 1792; regards land settlement and frontier life: 1 p.; 33 cm. (19282)
1	2	Letter: Benjamin Wright, Albany, [N.Y.], to Committee of the Western Lock Navigation [sic], August 2, 1803; discusses the process of making the Mohawk River navigable from Schoharie Creek to Schenectady; mentions the choices of building a canal the entire way or the erection of dams and locks; offers his services in the surveying and engineering of dams, should that be the option chosen; 1 p.; 30 cm. (906)
1	3	Letter: Benjamin Wright, Rome, [N.Y.], to Col. [Thomas] Walker, Utica, [N.Y.], August 28, 1810; regards ordering a deed for Timothy Maltby who purchased lot 53 of Selkirk Patent; 1 p.; 20 cm. (18211)
1	4	Letter: Benjamin Wright, Albany, [N.Y.], to Stephen Van Rensselaer, Albany, [N.Y.], September 15, 1821; regards construction of the Erie Canal near Schoharie Creek; 2(4) p.; 31 cm. (6713)
1	5	Letters: Philomela Wright at Rome, N.Y., to Benjamin H. Wright, at West Point, N.Y., 1818-1820 (13762) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Rome, October 16, 1818; 4 p.; 25 cm.</li> <li>b) Rome, November 18, 1818; 4 p.; 25 cm.</li> <li>c) Rome, March 6, 1820; 4 p.; 25 cm.</li> <li>d) Rome, October 1, 1821; 4 p.; 25 cm.</li> </ul>
1	5	Military Papers of Benjamin H. Wright, 1820-1827 (13762) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Register of officers and cadets at U.S. Military Academy, June 1820 (printed booklet); 14 p.; 16 cm.</li> <li>b) Commission: Benjamin H. Wright as captain of 157<sup>th</sup> N.Y. Militia Regiment Infantry, November 20, 1823; 1 item; 25 x 40 cm.</li> <li>c) Letter, Benjamin H. Wright to Col. B.P. Johnson, Albany, N.Y., November 10, 1827; regards his resignation as captain of the 157<sup>th</sup> Regiment; 1 p.; 32 cm.</li> <li>d) Military Pass: Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, March 1, 1862; 1</li> </ul>

Box	Folder	Contents /Description
		item; 7 x 13 cm.
1	6	Surveys and maps of Lot No. 46 of Fonda's Patent for John Taylor, ca. 1791 (5792) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Map of number 46 in Fonda's Patent; details agricultural value and timber resources of the land; 2 p.; 20 cm.</li> <li>b) Survey and map of subdivisions 1-5 of Lot No. 46 in Fonda's Patent with note to John Taylor, June 2, 1791; 4 p.; 30 cm.</li> </ul>
1	7	Minutes of survey of State Road from Salina to Adams, N.Y. by Benjamin Wright and George Breton, n.d., 1 v.; 30 p.; 21 cm. (12373)
1	8	Field book: Survey of Town No. 3 [Rutland] on the Black River, the property of William Henderson, surveyed and subdivided into lots by Benjamin Wright, 1796; 1 v.; ca. 80 p.; 20 cm. (10653)
1	9	Field book of the land and traverse of Wood Creek from the junction with Canada Creek to the lock at Rome, performed in March 1802 at the request of the Canal Company by Benjamin Wright; 1 v.; 10 p.; 20 cm. (3919)
1	10	Copy of surveys from field book of surveys by Benjamin Wright of lots 1, 2, and 3 of Macombs Purchase, c. 1799-1800, 1 v.; ca.100 p.; 19 cm. (BD1129)
1	11	Survey of eleven towns on the Black River; surveyed in April-May 1796 by Benjamin Wright; contains land survey field notes and maps of eleven towns on the Black River, including in Jefferson County: Hounsfield, Watertown, Rutland, Champion, Henderson, Adams, and Rodman; and in Lewis County: Denmark, Pinckney, Harrisburg, and Lowville. The field notes include maps for four towns: in Jefferson County: Town 1, Hounsfield, Town 2, Watertown, Town 4, Champion; and in Lewis County: Town 5, Denmark; the book plate indicates this item was originally from the Franklin B. Hough Collection; 1 v.; ca. 100 p.; 29 cm. (BD11413);
1	12	General observations of the Brantingham Tract by Benjamin Wright, ca. 1806; remarks relative to the survey of land that is now located mostly in present-day Town of Greig, Lewis County, N.Y.; 28 p.; 33 cm. (20779)
1	13	Letters. Benjamin Tripp to Benjamin Wright <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) August 25, 1822; 2(4) p.; 31 cm.</li> <li>b) June 29, 1823; 2(4) p.; 32 cm.</li> </ul>
1	14	Notes and remarks on a line run for a canal from Rome to Seneca River near Montezuma as surveyed and level taken in 1816 by Benjamin Wright; photocopy of original held by Jervis Library, Rome, N.Y. (19530)

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