

Mellen Family Photograph Collection

Cambridge Historical Commission
831 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Provenance: Donated by Curtis Mellen, 1983

Collection ID: P010

Dates: ca. 1890-1910

Extent: 1 flat box; 1 photograph box; 2 oversized photographs in separate oversized box for collection CHC015

Finding aid by: Meta Partenheimer, September 2017 and updated June 2018. Updated by Brittany Fox, October 2019.

Access: Collection is available for research under the CHC rules of use

Collection Description:

Family photographs as well as photographs of both the interior and exterior of Mellen family homes in Cambridge. Also included are documents related to one of the homes. Many of the photographs have been attributed to Edwin D. Mellen. Listed below are the addresses and sites that have been documented in the collection. Some images are from unknown locations.

The Mellens were a very prominent family in Cambridge, and their soap business, Curtis Davis & Co., became the American branch of Lever Brothers, the largest soap manufacturer in the world at the time.

Historical Note:

The Mellen family has been a presence in Massachusetts since 1639. The family has been associated with the city of Cambridge since 1845, when building moving and contractor James Mellen (1815-), his wife Sarah Ann (Hilton) Mellen and their young son James, Jr. moved to Cambridge from Charlestown, Massachusetts. Sarah and James had married in 1837 after the death of her first husband and James' brother, David Mellen Jr. (1804-1836), died. James Jr. (1838-1896) worked for his father for a time and then went to work for Curtis Davis & Co. Soap Manufacturers, the maker of the Welcome, Unequal Extra, and White Crest soaps. The business was started by Curtis Davis (1814-1887) who worked for his brother, Eliphalet Davis, also in the soap industry. In 1835 Curtis Davis became partners with Alexander Dickerson. This partnership was later dissolved in 1851. Curtis Davis was also active in Cambridge's municipal government, serving on the board of alderman and the city council.

In 1860 James Mellen Jr. married Curtis Davis' eldest daughter, Christine Van Ness Davis, and in 1864 he became a partner in his father-in-law's firm. He was tasked with managing the Boston office at 21 Merchants Row. The company grew and became one of the largest soap manufacturing institutions in New England, with a satellite facility in Reading, Mass.

Upon Curtis Davis' death in 1887, James Mellen Jr. inherited the business. He and his wife owned a house at 33 Washington Street, Cambridge, and a summer house on Boston's North

Shore. They had six children: Edwin Davis, Mary Lizzie, Louisa Maria, Martha Davis, Sarah Agnes, and Nettie Christina, who died prior to her first birthday. Their eldest, Edwin Davis Mellen, was born on November 23, 1861 and attended Chauncy Hall school in Boston. He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1884 with a degree in chemical engineering. In 1882, Edwin began working for the Curtis Davis & Co. as a chemist and superintendent. He was admitted as a partner upon the death of his maternal grandfather, Curtis Davis.

Edwin married Adele Adams of 11 Shepard Street in 1883 and they had four children, Lucile Christina, Edward James, Richard Adams, and Adele Louise. They moved from 9 Forest Street to 1590 Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, a residence known for its technological innovations. For further information on the house's details, see the "An Electric Clock in Every Room" newspaper article, cited below. In 1896 Edwin became sole manager and treasurer of the company after the death of his father. A year later he became associated with Boston businessman Stillman F. Kelley, who became the company's president, and W.H. Lever. W.H. Lever was the owner of Lever Brothers, Limited, an English soap company that manufactured Sunlight brand soap. Edwin died in July 1918 from health issues.

Sources Consulted

The Cambridge Tribune. *Cambridge Semi-Centennial*. 1896.

"An Electric Clock in Every Room." *Cambridge Chronicle*. August 20, 1898.

Hurd, D. Hamilton. *History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts: with Biographical Sketches of many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men. Vol. 1*. Philadelphia, 1890.

Van Slyck, J.D. *New England Manufacturers and Manufactories: Three Hundred and Fifty of the Leading Manufacturers in New England. Vol. 1*. Boston: Van Slyck and Company, 1879.

"With One Million Dollars Capital." *Cambridge Chronicle*. December 18, 1897.

Processing and Arrangement Notes:

Due to the variety of format sizes and a lack of discernable original order, the photographs in this collection have been physically separated but are all contained within one overarching organizational series. The copy prints and photocopies have been isolated within their own folders, which can be considered their own series. The photographic records have also been encased in protective plastic sleeves for preservation purposes.

Related Resources:

See also Cambridge Historical Commission research file on the Mellen Family.

See also *Generations: My Life and my Mellen Family Ancestors* by Curtis G. Mellen, copy in Cambridge Historical Commission's library stacks, CS71 .M4 M45.

Images from the collection have been digitized and added to the CHC Flickr page:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cambridgehistoricalcommission/albums/72157685099939713>

List of Locations:

180 Broadway, Cambridge (Curtis and Davis Co.)

293-295 Broadway, Cambridge

305-307 Broadway, Cambridge

1 Chauncy Street, Cambridge

9 Forest Street, Cambridge

11-15 Hampshire Street

52 Linnean Street, Cambridge (Peabody School)

1590 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge (Greycroft)

1600 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

1775 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge (Isaac Adams, Jr. residence, stepfather of Lucille Lods Mellen)

33 Washington Avenue, Cambridge

Central Square, Cambridge

Lanesville (outlying neighborhood of Gloucester)

Washington Elm, Cambridge Common

65 Chatham Street

167 Washington Street

Scope and Content:

The collection is intellectually organized into two main series - Original Photographs and Documents and Copy Records, although the physical arrangement does not necessarily reflect this structure. The collection is largely comprised of photographs of the Mellen family and their residential homes and neighborhoods. The collection also contains a record of specifications for E. D. Mellen's residence, Greycroft.

Some of the original images are only available as negatives and copy prints have been retained as surrogate records.

Along with these copies, there are photocopied images of available photographs that have a corresponding reference document which contains pertinent information provided by the donor.

A note on one of the houses: Some of the photographs of 305-307 Broadway have been mislabeled as 293-295 Broadway. The inventory list honors the original information but also distinguishes the correct address of the house.

A note on the inventory: Some of the information in the inventory is not reflected on the actual records. This information was extrapolated from duplicate copy prints.

Item-Level Inventory:

Flat box (Box 1):

Folder 1:

Containing correspondence between Curtis Mellen and Kim Withers Brengle, a CHC employee to identify additional information concerning the donated collection, 1983. Related photocopied images also included.

Folder 2:

Containing E.D. Mellen's house (Greycroft, 1590 Mass. Ave.) specifications created by Hartwell, Richardson & Driver, Architects, July 29, 1896

Folder 3 of copy prints:

1590 Mass. Ave with baby in carriage in front. Greycroft, Edward D. Mellen's house. Baby possibly Richard A. Mellen, James Edwin Mellen, or Adele Mellen, ca. 1897-1904

1600 Mass. Ave. with baby in carriage by front steps of 1590 Mass. Ave. (Greycroft, Edward D. house, on left). Baby possibly Richard A. Mellen, James Edwin Mellen, or Adele Mellen, ca. 1897-1904

Faded image of woman and child at 1590 Mass. Ave., nd

1588-1590 Mass. Ave. with children playing in yard, nd

1590 Mass. Ave (1600 in rear) and girl sitting with doll in the yard, nd

1590 Mass. Ave (1593-1595 in rear across street) and girl sitting with doll in the yard, opposite view, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. hall, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. library, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. dining room, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. interior view, possible bedroom, nd

Clambake in Lanesville (Gloucester, MA), image taken by Edward D. Mellen, 1891

Fireworks, nd

Folder 4:

Contains duplicate copy prints of original photographs available in Box 2-small photographs box

Loose photographs:

Five (5) copies of the Greycroft, 1590 Mass Ave., nd; prints

293-295 Broadway [sic], interior view of Parlor, taken with "Lightening Flash," 305-307 Broadway, nd; mounted image

293-295 Broadway [sic], 305-307 Broadway from North West, nd; mounted image

239-295 Broadway [sic], 305-307 Broadway extreme right, street view, nd; mounted image

9 Forest Street house with children on bikes, nd; mounted image

9 Forest Street with children and dolls on front stoop, possibly Lucille Christina Mellen in middle, nd; mounted image

Curtis Davis & Co. Welcome Soap wagon, 1886; mounted image

33 Washington Ave. fireplace and mantel, nd; mounted image

33 Washington Ave. corner interior corner fireplace between two room entrances, nd; mounted image

33 Washington Ave. dining room, nd; mounted image

33 Washington Ave. dining room fireplace, nd; mounted image

33 Washington Ave. interior room, nd; mounted image

Unknown interior parlor music room, nd; mounted image

Unknown interior parlor music room opposite side view, nd; mounted image

Unknown interior room with girl sitting in far-left chair, nd; mounted image

33 Washington Ave. circular tile fireplace, nd; mounted image

Tennis game, location unknown, nd; mounted image

Curtis Davis & Co. Welcome Soap horse-drawn carriage advertisement in Central Square parade, nd; mounted image

Unknown dining room (possibly in Annisquam), nd; mounted image

Unknown hall with balcony (possibly in Annisquam), nd; mounted image

Unknown drawing room (possibly in Annisquam), nd; mounted image

Unknown dining room opposite side view (possibly in Annisquam), nd; mounted image

Two overlapping images of Curtis Davis & Co. plant at 164-190 Broadway, nd; printed images

Interior machinery at Curtis Davis & Co. plant at 164-190 Broadway, nd; mounted image

Curtis Davis & Co. horse-drawn carriage with soaps in front of George G. Page Box Co., 11-15 Hampshire St, nd; mounted image

Small photograph box (Box 2):

“The Cemetery,” in Plymouth. Burtless Lewis, Charles Lewis, Caroline Lewis, and Mrs. Lewis in picture, June 20, 1909.

Plymouth Cemetery, people circling obelisk, June 20, 1909.

1 Chauncey St. (unlabeled) viewed diagonally from across the street, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. street view with snow. Verso: “Cambridge looking up the avenue from sidewalk in front of home,” nd

1590 Mass. Ave. Verso: “Pigeons and grackles, Cambridge Mass.”

1590 Mass. Ave. yard landscaping, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. Lucille on bike, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. yard with tree and fence in background, nd

1590 Mass. Ave. with unidentified woman holding tennis racket by road, 1902

1590 Mass. Ave. street view looking south with snow. A church and trolley are visible in the background, February 1902.

Mass Ave. street view. Verso: “The avenue looking towards the square,” June 1909.

Possibly Greycroft, 1590 Mass. Ave., adjacent cement path and neighbor’s house. Photographer’s shadow is visible, nd

Unidentified linen object next to interior window, possibly child’s bedroom, 1900

McIntyre’s driveway and Chauncy Street. Verso: “Looking across McIntyre’s Drive and Chauncy St,” nd

Peabody School, 52 Linnaen St., 1910

Washington Elm, Lucille under it, nd

Possibly Greycroft, 1590 Mass. Ave., basement entrance, nd

Lucille Mellen on fence, ca. 1900

Mass Ave. looking north from 1590, February 1902

Possibly Greycroft, 1590 Mass. Ave. outside window, ca. 1906-1907

4th of July parade, French Cadets, 1910

4th of July parade, high school float, 1910

4th of July parade, Rindge Manual Training School float, “Work is one of our greatest blessings. Everyone should have an honest occupation” sign, 1910

4th of July parade, Knights of Columbus float, “Landing of Columbus” sign, 1910

4th of July parade, school boys and man on far right, 1910
4th of July parade, school boys in white and black uniforms, 1910
4th of July parade, French citizens float, float representing Champlain ship *Le Don De Dieu*,
1910
4th of July parade, Chinese soldiers from Chinatown, Boston, 1910
4th of July parade, school boys, Peabody School banner bearers followed by Peabody Boys, 1910
4th of July parade, Morse School float, "The Spirit of '76," 1910
Group gathering on grass. Verso: "1st 'safe and sane Fourth,' 4th of July exercises, 'Reading of
the Declaration of Independence," 1910
Two (2) copies of 31 Essex St parlor, E.D. Mellen's home, nd
Two (2) copies of 31 Essex St parlor fireplace, nd
1776 Mass. Ave., Isaac Adams, Jr. residence, stepfather of Lucille Lods Mellen- Edwin D.
Mellen's wife, nd
33 Washington Ave fireplace, nd

Oversize photographs stored separately with Oversize Photographs and Documents Collection
(CHC015):

Group portrait: men with Curtis Davis Co. (65 Chatham Street) wagon, nd
House at 167 Washington Street, nd

Added entries:

Buildings --Specifications
Curtis, Davis & Co.
Soap trade
Soap factories
Lever Brothers and Unilever, ltd.
Fourth of July celebrations
Parades
Cemeteries--Plymouth (Mass.)

[Return to CHC Collections home:](#)

<http://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/researchaids/archivalcollections>