



FINDING AID

LINK-LAUER-THOMAS FAMILY PAPERS

ca. 1890-2008 (bulk dates: 1920s-1960s)

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HISTORY

Detailed information about the Link-Lauer-Thomas family may be found in the book *History of Park County, Montana, 1984*.

Lawrence "Larry" Link came to Montana about 1890 with his brother Michael and both were prominent figures in the development of the town of Gardiner, Montana. After working in Yellowstone National Park for several years, Michael married Otilia Maria Lebeis in 1902 and purchased the Culver Post Office store in 1903. Over time, the business expanded into a general store and grocery. Despite several changes in ownership, name, and location, the store continues to operate today. Laurence worked as a freighter in Yellowstone National Park and then established the Gardiner Electric Light and Water Company, also in 1903. The water company operated as the sole utility in the Gardiner basin until the 1970s when Park County, Montana, took over operations. In 1893, Larry married Florence Ann Bigelow, whose family had emigrated to Montana during the 1860s Bannack gold rush. The couple had three children: Florence Edna (later Edna F. Lauer), Katherine (later McQuillan), and Edward. Larry Link died unexpectedly in 1918 and Florence passed away in 1933.

Edna F. Link married Clarence O. Lauer in 1918. Lauer had come to Montana sometime before 1915 and had worked as a clerk in Yellowstone National Park, probably as a civilian. Originally from Warner, Ohio, the Lauer family appears to have been farmers. Note that one of Clarence's sisters was also named Edna (Edna Cinderella). After brief service in World War I, Lauer returned to Gardiner, Montana. The couple had one daughter: Betty Jane. Edna passed away in 1961. Clarence died in 1974.

Betty Jane Lauer grew up in Gardiner, Montana. After high school, she attended Montana State College (now Montana State University, Bozeman). After college, she operated the Blue J Fountain, a cafe in Gardiner, for several years. In 1950, she married Wilbur F. Thomas, who worked for and eventually managed the Gardiner Electric Light and Water Company. The family built a house behind the water tower at Main and 1st and raised their daughter Lee Ann. Lee Ann passed away unexpectedly while working in Oregon in 1996. Wilbur passed away in 2008 and Betty Jane died not long after in 2009.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

LINK-LAUER-THOMAS FAMILY PAPERS
ca. 1890-2008 (bulk dates: 1920s-1960s)

CATALOG NUMBER YELL 208011

VOLUME 7 LF

DESCRIPTION The collection documents the businesses, personal, and civic activities of the Link-Lauer-Thomas family, early settlers of Gardiner, Montana. It includes certificates, correspondence, ephemera, financial records, maps and drawings, minutes, photographs, and vital records. The records document several generations of the family, beginning about 1890 and continuing through 2008.

The family helped to develop the new town of Gardiner, Montana, establishing the Gardiner Opera Company and the first utility company, the Gardiner Electric Light and Water Company. They were also ranchers, growing hay and oats and freighting these and other supplies for Yellowstone National Park. In more recent years, they also operated the Blue J Fountain, a cafe and soda fountain. Records for these businesses include financial accounts and employee records. For the water company, there is also significant documentation of its public operation, including customer accounts for several years, minutes of stockholder and board meetings, and filings required by the State of Montana such as annual corporation and utility reports.

In addition to their businesses, the family was active in the community, and there is documentation for several civic, fraternal, and religious organizations including the local chapters of the American Legion and American Red Cross as well as the Gardiner Commercial Club, Gardiner Community Church, and the Yellowstone Ski Association.

Family records also include correspondence between family members as well as various personal documents such as birth, marriage, and death certificates; wills and other estate records; and individual records of community activities. Additional documents for Betty Jean Lauer (later Thomas) include considerable documentation of her educational career, particularly her attendance at Montana State College during World War II. There are also individual financial records such as property transactions and tax records. Finally, the collection contains numerous family photographs including portraits, snapshots of family activities and events, and images of homes, businesses, and trips to Yellowstone and the Tetons.

This collection documents the growth of the town of Gardiner, Montana, a gateway to Yellowstone National Park. It is also an example of a typical family in the rural western U. S. over several generations in the later 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries.

ORGANIZATION

The collection is organized into three series:

- I: Business & Financial Records,
- II: Biographical & Personal Papers, and
- III: Photographs

Within each series, the materials are arranged alphabetically by contents and then chronologically.

PROVENANCE

Gift of Larry Link, 2010 and 2011.

RESTRICTIONS

YES: a few folders in the Business & Financial Records series, pertaining to employees, contain Personally Identifying Information (PII), and are restricted for privacy.

*ASSOCIATED
MATERIALS*

- Memorabilia of the Blue J Fountain and Western Airlines were transferred to the Yellowstone National Park Museum Collections
- Photographs of the Lauer family and their homes in Ohio were transferred to the Ohio Historical Society (Columbus, OH)
- Yellowstone Ski Association records (MSC 006) are also housed by the Yellowstone National Park Combined Archives

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

I. Business and Financial Records

The business & financial records document the numerous businesses and economic activities of several members and generations of the Link-Lauer-Thomas family. Family enterprises ranged from homesteading, freighting, and ranching to operating a restaurant, opera house, and utility company.

Included is substantial documentation of the Gardiner Electric Light & Water Company, which was established in 1903 and served as the first utility in Gardiner, Montana. Records include articles of incorporation, meeting minutes for the board of directors and the stockholders, stock certificates, meter and subscriber information, maps and engineering drawings, and various accounting records, including some payroll records.

Other businesses include the Blue J Fountain, a restaurant that operated just after World War II in Gardiner, Montana. A family ranch (or ranches), located in the Tom Miner Basin near Carbella, Montana, appears to have sold hay and oats to the Army at Fort Yellowstone. In addition, Laurence Link operated a freighting company to haul supplies, including a contract Yellowstone National Park just after the turn of the century. The Link family may also have been partners in the operation of the Gardiner Opera House, now the Gardiner Community Center, offering moving pictures and other entertainments as well as leasing the space to other community meetings and events.

Also included in this series are records of property transactions in Gardiner, Tom Miner Basin, and other areas of Montana. The records trace purchases and sales, often between family members, of land parcels. The family ranch lands as well as several blocks of downtown Gardiner are documented. The north side of Main Street, between 1st and 2nd streets, is particularly detailed. There are records of mortgages, loans, stock purchases and other investments, and tax records. Finally, there are wills and estate records for Lawrence Link, Michael Link, Edna F. (Link) and Clarence O. Lauer, and Betty Jane (Lauer) and Wilbur F. Thomas.

II. Biographical and Personal Papers

The biographical and personal papers series consists of civic and fraternal participation, correspondence, diaries, educational records, memorabilia, military enlistments, news clippings, and genealogical documentation such as birth, death, and marriage certificates for various members of the Link, Lauer, and Thomas families.

There is a considerable amount of material pertaining to Betty Jane Lauer, later Thomas, including records and memorabilia documenting her attendance in Gardiner schools and Montana State University. Letters and cards between Betty Jane and her parents, particularly during her time at college, document town and college activities.

Other documentation includes military enlistment and club participation for Clarence O. Lauer. Materials pertaining to Edna F. (Link) Lauer include a brief diary and participation in various civic organizations including the American Red Cross and the Gardiner Community Church. A birth certificate and diplomas form the records for Edna C. Lauer. Club participation and awards are available for Wilbur F. Thomas. There are also several folders of vital records, genealogical information, family histories, and news clippings pertaining to the family as a whole over several generations.

The family also played key roles in several community civic, fraternal, and religious organizations. The American Legion, its Ladies' Auxiliary, the Gardiner chapter of the American Red Cross, the Gardiner Commercial Club, the Gardiner Community Church, and the Yellowstone Ski Association are all represented. Records for these organizations include financial records, membership, minutes, memorabilia, reports, scrapbooks, and photographs. For ease of use, the records of the Yellowstone Ski Association have been separated from this collection and reunited with the larger group of materials related to the association (MSC 06: Yellowstone Ski Association records).

III. *Photographs*

The photographs in this series document a wide variety of activities, locations, and family members. Included in the images are depictions of Yellowstone National Park, its geysers, thermal features, landscapes, and historic hotels, the Roosevelt Arch, and other structures. Also included are images of Lawrence Link and his freight teams at work in the park. Additional views document the town of Gardiner, Montana, especially the Park Street and Main Street areas. Several early views of the town are particularly notable. Included are numerous images of the family's home at Main and 1st. There are also photos of the construction and operation of the waterworks building along the Yellowstone River and the water tower, which once stood at the intersection of Main and 1st. The new school, constructed in the present location, is also shown.

Images of the Link, Lauer, and Thomas family are also well represented. There are portraits, informal snapshots, group images, and family events such as births, birthdays, weddings, and celebrations. The collection includes some images of the Lauer family in Ohio, both prior to C. O. Lauer's move to Montana and sent by family members to Clarence in later years. An attempt was made to document the immediate Lauer family members, particularly Clarence and his time in Ohio, by retaining a sampling of images selected from those with duplicates or similarities. The remaining large group of photographic materials documenting the Ohio branch of the family and their communities has been transferred to the Ohio Historical Society. Note that Clarence had a sister named Edna (Edna C.) as well as a wife named Edna (Edna F.) and images of both may be found in the collection.

Additional images of unidentified people are presumed to be extended family or friends who likely sent images as objects of remembrance or documentation of significant events such as graduations. There are also a few views, probably taken during trips, to Cooke City, Montana; Absaroka, Montana; the Karst Dude Ranch in Gallatin Canyon, Montana; and various points in Wyoming, Washington, and Nevada.

There are several photograph albums within this series. The contents of the albums are similar to that of the loose photos: family members, family events, family houses and their surroundings, and images of the Tetons and Yellowstone National Park. The albums have been maintained in their original order and are housed together at the end of the series.

CONTAINER LIST

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Series Nbr | Series Title |
| 01 | Business and Financial Records |
| | |
| Box | Title |
| 01 | Blue J Fountain, 1947-1960 RESTRICTED |
| 02 | Gardiner Electric Light & Water Co., account ledgers, 1920-1973 |
| 03 | Gardiner Electric Light & Water Co., account ledgers, 1927-1944 |
| 04 | Gardiner Electric Light & Water Co., account ledgers, 1944-1974 |
| 05 | Gardiner Electric Light & Water Co., annual reports-customer accounts, 1903-1975 |
| 06 | Gardiner Electric Light & Water Co., customer accounts, 1961-1974 |
| 07 | Gardiner Electric Light & Water Co., history-stocks, 1903-ca. 1985 |
| 08 | Gardiner Electric Light & Water Co., taxes-workers' tax payments, 1933-1970 RESTRICTED |
| 09 | Gardiner Opera House, Link freighting, Link ranch, 1903-1981 |
| 10 | mortgages, property records, 1899-1986 |
| 11 | receipts, stocks, taxes, wills & estates, 1895-1996 |
| | |
| Series Nbr | Series Title |
| 02 | Biographical and Personal Papers |
| | |
| Box | Title |
| 12 | Lauer, Betty Jane, 1932-1951 |
| 13 | Lauer, Clarence O.-Thomas, Wilbur F., 1891-2006 |
| 14 | Organizations & Clubs: American Legion & Auxiliary, 1941-1962 |
| 15 | Organizations & Clubs: American Red Cross, Gardiner Commercial Club, Gardiner Community Church, Yellowstone Ski Association, 1942-2005 |
| | |
| Series Nbr | Series Title |
| 03 | Photographs |
| | |
| Box | Title |
| 16 | Photos: Corwin Springs & Roosevelt Arch, Fraternal Organizations, 1904-1961 |
| 17 | Photos: Friends, Gardiner, Karst Dude Ranch, Lauer family, Link and Scott families, Thomas family, water tower and works, and Yellowstone National Park, ca. 1890-1988 |
| 18 | Photo albums: Yellowstone National Park, family, Gardiner, and Ohio, 1902-2008 |