



## George H. Gilbert Co. Records

1842-1931

26 boxes and 126 volumes (36 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 96

### Collection overview

Based in Ware, Massachusetts, a nationally known family business that made high-grade woolen flannels. Includes employee recruitment documents, labor contracts, labor accounts, wage payment books, contracts and insurance material about the property, buildings, machinery, and stock, business correspondence, bills and receipts, company cash books, and lists of sales and orders. Also contains personal records of finances and activities of Charles Stevens and the Gilbert family, production records, department expenses, stock inventories, forms, advertisements from various companies, and notices posted in the factories and tenements concerning company rules and regulations. Charles A. Stevens was George H. Gilbert's original partner.

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## Background on George H. Gilbert Co.

In 1841, George H. Gilbert and Charles A. Stevens formed a partnership to manufacture broadcloth and cloakings in Ware, Massachusetts. The partners acquired a mill building on the Ware River and expanded in 1846-1847 erecting several new factory buildings and a number of tenements to house the growing population of workers.

The partnership, known as Gilbert and Stevens, dissolved in 1851, with each of the partners taking one of the business products. The newly formed George H. Gilbert Company continued the making of high-grade woolen flannels, for which it developed a national reputation. The company exhibited goods at the London Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851 and at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 among others. The firm, however, remained a family business. In 1850, Lewis N. Gilbert joined his uncle's firm, establishing himself as a prominent Ware resident and eventually a member of the State Senate in 1877-1878. J.H. Gilbert, the son of George, joined the company in the 1870's. He eventually rose to be president of the company and stayed until the company closed in 1930. In addition, J.H. Grenville Gilbert helped found the Young Men's Library Association of Ware, and was also president of the Ware Savings Bank.

In 1860, the Gilbert Co. expanded into neighboring Worcester County, acquiring a mill and building tenements in what came to be known as Gilbertville in the Southwest corner of Hardwick. By the turn of the century, the Gilbert Company employed more than 1,000 people in its two factory complexes.

From the beginning, the Gilbert Company operated under the family (or Slater) system common to rural textile mills. Entire families were recruited for mill employment and kin networks continued to serve as an informal method of labor recruitment into the twentieth century, even as the ethnicity of the workforce shifted from Irish to French-Canadian (1870) to Polish (1900's).

The company began to experience financial problems in the 1920's, a full five years before the Great Depression. Woolen manufacturers in the region began to slowly lose business to Southern competitors. A series of wage reductions and three-day schedules for employees could not revive the company as the continued slump of the wholesale woolen market finally caused the company to close its Ware plant in 1929. Shortly thereafter, the company closed its Gilbertville complex, bringing to an end almost 90 years of continuous operation.

The George H. Gilbert Company records were originally acquired by the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts from the custody of the Smith Council of Industrial Studies. In 1984, the records were transferred to the Springfield Public Library from which they were sent to the University of Massachusetts in 1986.

Hardwick was among the five Western Massachusetts towns abolished in 1938 to allow the Swift River Valley to be flooded, thereby creating the Quabbin Reservoir to provide Boston with water.

## Scope of collection

The records have been arranged into seven series, as follows: Legal and Property, 1844-1879, 1 box, Executive, 1848-1882, 15 boxes, Financial, 1848-1929, 2 boxes and 17 volumes, Sales, 1842-1909, 5 boxes and 1 volume, Labor, 1851-1931, 1 box and 53 volumes, Production, 1846-1930, 1 box and 54 volumes, and Miscellany, 1848-1920, 1 box and 1 volume.

## Arrangement

This collection is organized into seven series:

- **Series 1. Legal and Property, 1844-1879**
- **Series 2. Executive, 1848-1882**
- **Series 3. Financial, 1848-1929**
- **Series 4. Sales, 1842-1909**
- **Series 5. Labor, 1851-1931**
- **Series 6. Production, 1846-1930**
- **Series 7. Miscellany, 1848-1920**

## Series descriptions

### **Series 1. Legal and Property**

**1844-1879**

Includes contracts with masons, carpenters, painters, and suppliers of materials for the construction of mill buildings and tenements, principally in Ware (1844-1847) and in Gilbertville (1860-1861). Among the local contractors used were Edward Estey, Lorenzo Fairbanks, Anthony Collins, Eaton & Davis, Thomas Bixley, and Samuel Sprague. Two folders on employee matters document recruitment, labor contracts (particularly for supervisors and skilled hands), and the legal problems of employees. One folder of insurance material contains sketches of property and buildings and surveys of the values of property, machinery and stock. Also contained in this series is a folder of correspondence between Charles Stevens and Artemus Lee concerning the proposed route of the Boston and Maine Railroad through Ware and Hardwick (1851), documents concerning the purchase of the mill in Gilbertville (1860), a legal opinion on damage caused by a dam on the Ware River, and the purchase rights to use a patented machine (1866).

### **Series 2. Executive**

**1849-1882**

Routine business correspondence of the company from 1849 to 1882. Among the topics are sales, shipments, orders, insurance, employment opportunities, and purchases of machinery, supplies, and wool. Among companies for which there is considerable correspondence are Davis and Farber (North Andover), the Rodney Hunt Co. (Orange), Renfrew Manufacturing Co. (Adams), and Litchfield and Co. (Southbridge). Also there is considerable correspondence with commission agents, including Farnham, Gilbert and Co.; Faulkner, Kimball and Co.; and the Troy Wool Depot.

### **Series 3. Financial**

**1848-1929**

Includes early bills and receipts, company cash books (1854-1859, 1882-1900), petty cash books, an early receipt book, two volumes of wool purchases (1849-1851), and ledgers from the first and last decades of the George H. Gilbert Co.

### **Series 4. Sales**

**1842-1909**

Lists of sales of flannels and cassimeres from the Gilbert and Stevens partnership (1842-1853), orders (1862-1863 and 1904-1909), and sketches of sales by Farnham, Gilbert, & Co. (1866-1877), the commission agents used by the Gilbert Co.

### **Series 5. Labor**

**1851-1931**

Four volumes of early labor accounts (1851-1863, 1872-1884) documenting monthly and weekly wages in the various departments, thirty-four volumes of weavers' accounts spanning 1874 to 1928, scattered volumes of accounts for labor in the "burling" and "drawing-in" departments, five volumes of wage payment books (1908-1911), one box of miscellaneous labor accounts for transportation with Barney Snow and repair work, and one volume of paymaster notices, which detail the names and rates of pay for new employees (1918-1930).

## Series 6. Production

1846-1930

Time books spanning 1885 to 1930, production cost calculations (1889-1905), working estimates of expenses (1889-1905), three volumes of production order samples (with the cloth stapled into the volume), one box of department expenses (1917-1930) and stock inventories (1846-1850), nine volumes of weave-room production records (1879-1895), and three volumes of yarn prices (1904-1909).

## Series 7. Miscellany

1848-1920

Includes advertisements and by-laws from various companies, exhibit forms and correspondence, and some material concerning the personal finances and activities of Charles Stevens and the Gilbert family. Also included is a stationery sample book which, in addition to samples of letterhead and forms used by the company, contains notices posted in the factory and tenements concerning company rules and regulations.

## Inventory

### Series 1. Legal and Property

1844-1879

Contracts for Buildings and Supplies	1844-1861	Box 1: 1-5
Employee Matters	1848 (1860-1879)	Box 1: 6-7
Insurance	1847-1851	Box 1: 8
Legal Opinion	n.d.	Box 1: 9
Patent Permission	1866	Box 1: 10
Property Purchase (Gilbertville)	1860	Box 1: 11
Railroad Correspondence	1851	Box 1: 12

### Series 2. Executive

1849-1882

Correspondence	1849-1856	Box 2: 1-8
Correspondence	1857-1862	Box 3: 9-16
Correspondence	1863-1867	Box 4: 17-23
Correspondence	1868-1869	Box 5: 24-28
Correspondence	1869-1871	Box 6: 29-34

Correspondence	1871	Box 7: 35-40
Correspondence	1872-1873	Box 8: 41-46
Correspondence	1873-1874	Box 9: 47-53
Correspondence	1874	Box 10: 54-58
Correspondence	1875	Box 11: 59-64
Correspondence	1875-1876	Box 12: 65-69
Correspondence	1876-1877	Box 13: 70-74
Correspondence	1877	Box 14: 75-79
Correspondence	1879-1881	Box 15: 80-85
Correspondence	1882	Box 16: 86-88

### Series 3. Financial

1848-1929

Bills and Receipts	1848-1850	Box 17: 1-5
Bills and Receipts	1851-1861	Box 18: 6-13
Cashbook B	1854-1859	Box 18: v. 1
Cashbook C-G	1882-1900	Box 18: v. 2-6
Petty Cash	1897-1910	Box 18: v. 7-10
Petty Cash	1921-1924	Box 18: v. 11
Receipt Book	1851-1859	Box 18: v. 12
Wool Purchases	1849-1851	Box 18: v. 13-14
Ledger	1851-1864	Box 18: v. 15
Ledger	1920-1929	Box 18: v. 16-17

### Series 4. Sales

1842-1909

Sales of Cassimeres	1842-1853	Box 19: 1-25
Sales of Flannels	1843-1853	Box 20: 26-52
Orders	1862-1863	Box 21: 53-54
Sales Sketches	1866-1870, 1874	Box 22: 55-59
Sales Sketches	1875-1877, 1897	Box 23: 60-63
Orders	1904-1909	Box 23: v. 19

<b>Series 5. Labor</b>	<b>1851-1931</b>	
Labor Accounts	1851-1863	Box 23: v. 20-21
Labor Accounts	1872-1884	Box 23: v. 22-23
Weavers Accounts	1874-1910	Box 23: v. 24-55
Weavers Accounts	1922	Box 23: v. 56
Weavers Accounts	1928	Box 23: v. 57
Drawing-in Accounts	1898-1916	Box 23: v. 58-64
Burling Accounts	1929-1930	Box 23: v. 65
Wage Payment Books (mills #1-3, weave sheds, B & C)	1908-1911	Box 23: v. 66-70
Miscellaneous Labor Accounts		Box 24
Transportation	1858-1862	Box 24: 1-3
Labor Prices	1861	Box 24: 4
Accounts with John Goodwin	1882-1883	Box 24: 5
Accounts with R.T. Lee	1924-1931	Box 24: 6
Repair Shop Accounts	1922-1930	Box 24: 7
Paymaster Notices	1918-1930	Box 24: v. 71

<b>Series 6. Production</b>	<b>1846-1930</b>	
Time Books	1885-1930	Box 24: v. 72-107
Production Cost Records	1889-1905	Box 24: v. 108-109
Working Estimates	1889-1896	Box 24: v. 110
Production Order Samples	1877-1878	Box 24: v. 111-113
Department expenses (includes: Dyehouse, Dyestuffs, Yard Supplies, Repair Shop, Finishing, Postage, Weave Room, & Engine Room)	1917-1930	Box 25: 1-9
Stock Inventory	1846-1850	Box 25: 10-14
Weave-Room Production Records	1879-1895	Box 25: v. 114-122
Yarn Prices	1904-1909	Box 25: v. 123-125

<b>Series 7. Miscellany</b>	<b>1848-1920</b>	
Advertisements (other companies)	1857-1877	Box 26: 1
By-Laws (other companies)	1868	Box 26: 2
Centennial Exhibit Forms	1875-1876	Box 26: 3
Construction Specifications	n.d.	Box 26: 4
House Specifications	1853	Box 26: 5
London Fair Exhibit Forms	1851	Box 26: 6
Personal Expenses - Charles Stevens	1848	Box 26: 7
Personal Finances - Gilbert Family	1959-1962	Box 26: 8
Personal Matters	1869-1876	Box 26: 9

Stationery Sample Book

c1890-1920

Box 26: v.  
126

Shipping receipts

Box 26: 10

Shipping receipts

Box 26: 11

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## Administrative information

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### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Springfield Public Library, 1986.

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### Processing Information

Processed by Ken Fones-Wolf, July 1985.

### Language:

English

### Acknowledgments

Encoding funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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*Cite as:* George H. Gilbert Co. Records (MS 96). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

## Search terms

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### Subjects

- George H. Gilbert Co.
- Gilbertville (Mass.)--Economic conditions--19th century--Sources.
- Textile manufacturers--Massachusetts.
- Ware (Mass.)--Economic conditions--19th century--Sources.

### Contributors

- George H. Gilbert Co. **[main entry]**

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