

An Inventory of the Papers of

WILLIAM J. AXFORD  
(1872-1943)

Collection Number 26

A Holding of the  
Library of the Colorado Historical Society  
Denver, Colorado 80203

Processed by Aleks Humeyumtewa  
and Tracie Etheredge

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

William J. “Billy” Axford was not only a prominent businessman of Paonia, Colorado, but also a central figure in the town’s social and theatrical sphere.

William John Axford was born on August 24, 1872 in Durham, Pennsylvania. When he was about five years old, his family moved to Salida, Colorado. As he grew older, he learned the blacksmith trade in the Arenburg and Denver and Rio Grande Railroad blacksmith shops. He later worked for a time as a brakeman for the D&RG.

In 1902, Axford left the railroad and moved to Paonia, where he opened a blacksmith shop with Frank Ash. In 1905, he bought out Ash’s interest and ran the shop on his own. In Paonia, Axford was known as a veterinarian of great skill, and he spent much of his time and money raising pure-bred poultry, which won him several awards at livestock shows. He was also on the Paonia School Board and served as its treasurer.

Axford was perhaps best known, however, for his participation in the town’s amateur theater. He served as director, set designer, makeup and wardrobe manager and lead actor in at least three plays per year. His most popular role was that of “Jerry” the tramp in the play “The Noble Outcast,” which he performed several times during his residence in Paonia.

In 1915, Axford sold his blacksmith shop and moved to Wendell, Idaho. He later moved to Chicago, where he received a degree from the National College of Chiropractic. He opened his first practice in Twin Falls, Idaho and in 1921 moved to Missoula, Montana. Axford died in Missoula on June 15, 1943.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1872 August 24: William John Axford is born in Durham, Pennsylvania.
- 1875 April 17: Helena Elizabeth Donath is born in Oro City, Colorado.
- 1893 William Axford marries Helena Elizabeth Donath in Cotton Creek, Colorado.
- 1897 September 20: Son, Harold Axford, is born in Salida, Colorado.
- 1899 Axford moves to Gunnison, then to Ouray, while working for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad.
- 1902 Axford moves to Paonia and opens a blacksmith shop with Frank Ash.
- 1902 August 2: Daughter, Fay Axford, is born in Paonia, Colorado.
- 1905 Axford buys out his business partner, Ash, and establishes control of the blacksmith shop.
- 1915 Axford sells his blacksmith shop and moves to Wendell, Idaho.
- 1920 Axford receives his degree from the National College of Chiropractic in Chicago, Illinois.
- 1921 Axford moves to Missoula, Montana.
- 1940 Axford runs unsuccessfully for the Missoula County coroner's office.
- 1943 June 15: Axford dies in Missoula.

## SCOPE AND CONTENTS

This collection spans the years 1910 to 1940 and includes material on William Axford's life in Paonia, Colorado, especially relating to his theater productions. The series includes BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL; LITERARY MATERIAL (1910-1940), which includes newspaper articles, programs and play scripts; and a SCRAPBOOK (undated), which contains material collected by Axford and his family on family matters, personal interests and poetry samples.

With the collection were numerous photographs of Axford and his theatrical exploits. They have been transferred to the Colorado Historical Society's Department of Photography,

The collection was donated in 1963 by Harold Axford, William Axford's son.

COLLECTION CONTENTS

Biographical Material (1966)

FF	Description	Date
1	Biographical survey of William John Axford, by Harold Axford (son)	1966

Literary Material (1910-1940)

2	Article copied from the <u>Paonia Booster</u> Article copied from unknown publication	8-20-10 undated
3	Dedication program of Paonia High School	1911
4	Newspaper clippings regarding the early history of Saguache	1936
5	Newspaper article titled "Greatest Christmas Story Told 19 Centuries Ago" Newspaper article titled "Little Hitch-Hiker"	1939 1940
6	Poem titled "The Man of Galilee," author unknown	undated
7	Play titled "Silas the Chore Boy"	undated
8	Book titled <u>Wehman's Selection of Popular Recitations No. 3</u>	undated
9	Miscellaneous newspaper clippings	undated

Scrapbook (undated)

10	Scrapbook belonging to William John Axford containing newspaper clippings of family matters, interests and poetry	undated
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