

Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society
P.O. Box 716 Dayton, VA 22821
540-879-2616

Archival and Manuscript Collections Finding Aid

ACCESSION No.: HRHS-5

COLLECTION TITLE: John J. Forrer Papers

DATES: 1916-1971

SIZE: .225 c.f., plus one oversized
item [9 folders]

DONOR: David R. Forrer, grandson

PROCESSED: August 2003, Tracy Harter, *updated 1/2/04, TH*

RELATED COLLECTIONS: HRHS-5.1, Forrer Family Papers

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

“The successful development of Virginia’s Highway system, for more than a third of a century, has been due in large measure to the ability, energy and example of our Assistant Chief Engineer, Mr. John J. Forrer.” So wrote J. A. Anderson, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Highways, in a letter dated 28 March 1952 to Dr. F. P. Gaines, President of Washington and Lee University, Forrer’s alma mater. Born in Harrisonburg on 15 February 1886 to Henry and Maria Showalter Forrer, John Jacob Forrer became a highly regarded pioneer in the asphalt paving industry. A 1909 graduate of Washington and Lee, he worked as a river levee engineer in Mississippi and as an engineer for various concrete building construction projects in Memphis, Tennessee and Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1917 he began a lengthy career with the Virginia Department of Highways as resident engineer, maintenance engineer and Assistant Chief Engineer. In 1952 Forrer left the Highway Department to become executive director of the Virginia Asphalt Association, Inc. Upon retirement in 1958, Forrer and his wife, Florence [Firebaugh] moved to Saluda, Virginia. Forrer was a member of several professional associations, including the American Society of Civil Engineers, Virginia Engineers Club, Association of Asphalt Paving Technologists and the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce. He was also a Mason and a member of the Methodist Church. He and his wife had three children: John Jacob Forrer, Jr. (father of the donor), William Henry Forrer and Margaret [Forrer] Wren. Forrer died October 17, 1973 at the age of 87.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The collection consists of biographical and professional information, correspondence, typed reports, an unpublished manuscript (“Modern Methods of Highway Maintenance”), trade publications, certificates, awards, magazine articles, newspaper clippings and photographs pertaining to his career in the asphalt paving industry. The unpublished manuscript contains original photographs and should be handled with care. Folder 9 (oversize) contains a Forrer family tree printed after John J. Forrer’s death. The donor included the item in this collection although technically it was not part of John J. Forrer’s papers. A portrait photograph of Forrer’s maternal grandmother is housed in HRHS-5.1.

COLLECTION INVENTORY:

- Folder 1: Biographical/Professional Information, 1956-1958
- Folder 2: Correspondence, 1916-1971
- Folder 3: Typed Reports, 1939-1953
- Folder 4: Unpublished manuscript, "Modern Methods of Highway Maintenance," 1924
- Folder 5: Magazine articles and newspaper clippings
- Folder 6: Trade Publications, 1951, 1956
- Folder 7: Certificates/Awards, 1946-1960
- Folder 8: Photographs, c.1968 [10 items]
- Folder 9: [oversize] Forrer family tree

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Archival and Manuscript Collections Finding Aid

ACCESSION No.: HRHS-5.1

COLLECTION TITLE: Forrer Family Papers

DATES: 1872-1972

SIZE: .15 c.f. [4 folders]

DONOR: unknown

PROCESSED: August 2003, Tracy Harter

RELATED COLLECTIONS: HRHS-5, John J. Forrer Papers

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

This collection pertains to the family of Henry Forrer (1845-1937) and Maria Showalter Forrer (1846-1926) and their descendants. Henry was the son of Jacob Forrer and Susan Whitmore, and Maria Showalter Forrer was the daughter of David and Maria Eversole Showalter. They married in 1874 and lived in Harrisonburg. The couple had four children: Catherine Eversole Forrer [Rolston] (1875-1910), Elizabeth Susan "Sue" Forrer (1880-1969), David Henry Forrer (1883-1966) and John Jacob Forrer (1886-1973).

Of their four children, Sue and John's genealogical interests figure prominently in this collection. Perhaps their interest in genealogy was in their blood; Maria Forrer's obituary credits her with a sharp memory and an extensive knowledge of several local families' genealogies. While Sue never married, John married Florence Firebaugh Forrer and had three children: John Jacob Forrer, Jr., William Henry Forrer and Margaret Elizabeth Forrer [Wren]. John became a highly regarded pioneer in the asphalt paving industry. Upon retiring in 1958, Forrer and his wife moved to Saluda, Virginia.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The collection consists of genealogical papers, notes, correspondence, newspaper clippings, postcards and photographs relating to the Forrer, Eversole and other allied families. Most of the genealogical papers and notes appear to have been either written by or retained by Sue Forrer or her brother John J. Forrer, and possibly others. Correspondence to and from Sue Forrer is in a separate folder. Newspaper clippings primarily pertain to historic family homes and auctions. Many of the clippings contain faded handwritten notations, and therefore have not been photocopied. Several postcards also contain handwritten notations, probably by Sue Forrer. A portrait of Maria Showalter Forrer, the maternal grandmother of Sue and John J., was donated by great-great-grandson David Forrer.

COLLECTION INVENTORY:

Folder 1: Genealogical Papers and Notes, 1901-1972

- a. Typed Notes, Reports, etc.
- b. Letters and Memos
- c. Notes and Ephemera

Folder 2: Sue Forrer Correspondence, 1920-1963

Folder 3: Clippings, 1957-1963

Folder 4: Photographs and Postcards, 1872, and n.d. [sizes given are estimates]

Postcards:

To Henry Forrer from cousin Bettie Harmon. Sam Forrer's Mossy Creek home. [b/w]

Sam Forrer home at Mossy Creek...from a distance [b/w]

Old Mossy Creek Mill. [color]

Mossy Creek Dam [b/w]

Photographs:

8" x 11" portrait of Maria Eversole Showalter, wife of David Showalter

2" x 4" Two men in work clothes with survey equipment [one could be John J. Forrer?]

2" x 3" Two men, [John J. Forrer on left] in suits and hats; from bust.

2" x 3" Henry Forrer, seated

2" x 3" Henry Forrer, bust portrait

"Tintypes":

2 ½" x 3" Henry Forrer with "First Dogs"—"Taken at Old Stuarts Draft Spring, 4/18/72 on Greenville-Waynesboro Rd.

2" x 3" Sue Forrer, white dress, tinted cheeks

2" x 3" Sue Forrer, standing, with dark shawl

2" x 3" Hannah Forrer, dark dress with white headcovering.