



**WESTERN ARCHIVES**

FINDING AID FOR

**William Davies fonds**

**AFC 472**

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# AFC 472

**William Davies fonds.**  
**1854-1944.**

**6.5 cm of textual records**

## **Biographical Sketch/Administrative History**

William Davies: William Davies was born in Wallingford, England in 1831. When he was 12 years old, he left school to complete an apprenticeship in trade. In 1853, he married Emma Holtby. They immigrated to Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1854 and had six children. In 1906, Emma died and he remarried Rosa Bessa Talbot in 1907.

William Davies began his business with a stall at the St. Lawrence Market in Toronto in 1854, where he sold cured hams and bacon. He realized that Canadian meats would sell well in England and wrote to his brother for support in starting a new venture. He convinced his brother of the quality of Canadian meats in 1860, stating, "I think you will say that the quality of the meat that I send you is as good as you ever saw."

He then began his meatpacking business, William Davies Company, by renting a two-storey building at Front Street and Frederick Street in Toronto. Business expanded rapidly and he was able to grow his company with new buildings and products. In 1874, he built Canada's first large-scale hog slaughtering facility in Toronto. He was also credited with the creation of peameal bacon. When sending pork shipments to England, he would pack them in ground yellow peas to preserve them, which was well-received and the product became very popular.

A pioneer in many ways, William Davies also built the first continuous hog-slaughtering facility in Canada. The millions of pigs that came through his facility helped Toronto earn its "Hogtown" nickname. In 1891, he was the first in Canada to install an artificial refrigeration unit. Eventually, the company also became one of the first Canadian food producers to establish its own retail and grocery stores. This venture was successful as they chose busy locations in Toronto where streetcar lines stopped, ensuring customers had easy access to their products. The William Davies Company was the largest meat packer in Canada, with some claims that it may have been the largest meat packer in the British Empire by the early 1900s.

In 1892, William Davies sold shares to Joseph Wesley Flavelle, another prominent businessman in Toronto. Flavelle took on a leadership and management role in the company, acting as president. The company now became the William Davies Company Limited. Flavelle was known for bringing new strategies and ideas to the company and boosting profits. Although William Davies did not always approve in the beginning, he often admitted the success of Flavelle's ideas. Due to the success of the company, both Flavelle and Davies became millionaires.

The company continued to prosper throughout the First World War, but profits decreased due to price drops in the 1920s. This greatly effected the company and led to a merger with Canada Packers Limited in 1927. They eventually joined with Maple Leaf Mills, which became known as Maple Leaf Foods.

Williams Davies passed away in 1921. The original company buildings have been demolished or renovated, but a commemorative plaque was installed in 2012 at their old location in honour of William Davies' legacy.

## **Scope and Content**

Fonds consist of personal and business-related correspondence and research documents used by William Davies. Personal correspondence to Davies' brother, other family members and friends, business-related correspondence with agricultural journals, and research relating to agricultural journals are included.

## **Custodial History**

This material was donated by Dr. William Sherwood Fox.

## Series Descriptions

**AFC 472-S1 Correspondence.  
1854-1895.**

**3.5 cm of textual records**

*Scope and Content*

Series consists of the personal and business-related correspondence of William Davies. This includes correspondence with William Davies' brother primarily, as well as other family members, friends and agricultural journals, including the Farmer's Advocate, Hog Raising and Pork Products, and Canada Farmer.

**AFC 472-S1-F1 Correspondence. -- 1854-1856. -- 1 cm of textual records. -- Box Number AFC 472-1**

**AFC 472-S1-F2 Correspondence. -- 1857-1861. -- 1 cm of textual records. -- Box Number AFC 472-1**

**AFC 472-S1-F3 Correspondence. -- 1875-1880. -- 0.5 cm of textual records. -- Box Number AFC 472-1**

**AFC 472-S1-F4 Letters to agricultural journals. -- 1864-1895. -- 1 cm of textual records. -- Box Number AFC 472-1**

**AFC 472-S2 Research Documents.  
1867-1944.**

**3 cm of textual records**

*Scope and Content*

Series consists of research documents relating to agricultural journals. Includes source documents relating to the Farmer's Advocate, the University of Western Ontario, the University of Saskatchewan, the Municipality of Toronto and sessional papers.

**AFC 472-S2-F1 Source documents. -- 1867-1944. -- 3 cm of textual records. -- Box Number AFC 472-1**