

**Kingston Public Library: Local History Room**  
**Manuscript Collection Finding Aid**

**Invitations and Calling Cards**  
**Bulk dates: 1857 - 1940**

**Pamphlet Collection, PC - 8**

1 Box (3 linear inches)

**Historical Sketch:** The following history of calling cards is from the Complete Victorian web site<sup>1</sup> and can be described as follows: Mingling with the Victorian elite, the aristocracy, was the social goal of the enterprising middle class. Desiring to introduce themselves to the aristocrats, the morning call became one way to further one's step up the ladder. Morning calls enabled the caller to introduce themselves to people, while it was a way to keep callers at a distance. When one went to pay a call, it wasn't necessary to actually see the one you were paying the call upon. You may wish to leave a card announcing your presence in a new town, or that you've returned after a trip, or that you are leaving town. In that case, the caller rode around in their carriage, stopping at the houses they wished to notify. The letters PPC (for "pour prendre congé" or "I am leaving") were written on a card when announcing one was leaving town. The footman would go to each house and leave one of the callers cards (for the mistress), and two of her husbands (one for each) that the caller had written on whatever they were announcing. These were given to the butler who placed them in a calling card receiver, a dish sitting on a table or on the mantle.

A call could also be paid in hopes of improving one's social standing, or to introduce an unmarried daughter to someone with an eligible son or other male relative. When making a call with daughters, they did not have their own cards, but their names were listed by hand on your card. When a caller came in person to pay a call, they were shown into the parlor to wait while the butler went to see if the lady of the house was "at home". The lady may be out paying calls of her own, or she may not be receiving callers. That was quite all right as long as one didn't get caught. It was an effective way to avoid people one did not wish to see. While the callers waited, they had the opportunity to look through the cards in the card receiver to see who else had paid calls recently. After receiving a card or a visitor, the lady of the house was obligated to return the call, either in person or with a card.

During the afternoon, calls to known acquaintances took place. If one was well acquainted, the call was generally paid between 4 and 5, if you weren't that well acquainted with your hostess; calls were made between 3 and 4. If a caller did get to see the lady of the house, they were shown into the drawing room, located on the first floor of the house (second story, to Americans). Ladies left their parasols on the ground floor; gentlemen took their riding crop and hat with them.

A proper call only lasted 15 minutes. If someone else came during their call, it was polite to ease their way out after introductions (if the other caller was a social equal, or superior

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved on October 3, 2003:  
<http://www.thecompletevictorian.homestead.com/CallingCardEtiquette.html>

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**(Historical Sketch continued...)**

and didn't mind the introduction). With another person present, conversation stayed comfortably in the areas of the weather and other generalities, without mention of people who might not be acquaintances of everyone present. Refreshments weren't given until the last half of the 19th century when "teas" became popular.

While this is an elaborate explanation of the history of calling cards, the cards in this Collection are evidence that Kingston residents eventually adopted a similar practice of calling. The invitations in this Collection are additionally examples of social practices in Kingston throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

**Scope and Content Note:** The invitations in the Collection are gathered from notable Kingston residents, including many from the Adams family. The Collection contains approximately thirty-seven invitations and calling cards. The invitations in the Collection are primarily wedding invitations or party invitations. The Collection ranges from July 23, 1857 – June 7, 1940. There are four invitations with no dated year and four miscellaneous envelopes, in the collection.

**Box and Folder List:**

All items in this Collection are located in Box 1 of the Collection. Please refer to the attached spreadsheet for a complete listing of the items housed in this Collection.

**Acquisition:** Retrospective.

**Access:** Unrestricted.

**Copyright:** Public domain.

**Processor:** Volunteer Dorothy Garfield processed this Collection. Archivist Carrie Elliott created the finding aid for the Collection.