



120 Academy Street, Trenton, N.J. 08608  
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**Collection 195**  
**Clayton L. Traver (1857-1941)**  
**Papers**

**By Laura M. Poll**  
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### **Biography**

Clayton Leavenworth Traver (18 February 1857 – 15 August 1941) was the founder of Traver's Book Store on South Broad Street in Trenton and was the first bookseller to specialize in the field of New Jerseyana.

The Traver Family moved from Orange County, N.Y. in 1871 to Trenton to enable L. Morris Traver (1823-1909) to enroll his son Clayton in the Trenton Academy, which he attended 1872-1876. The elder Traver opened a furniture store c.1874 at 8 Greene (now Broad) Street with his son working as a clerk. The store moved to 108 South Broad Street in 1878, where it would remain for nearly 50 years. By 1881, some second-hand books were placed outside the store for sale. The elder Traver retired in 1887 and his son took over the store, gradually phasing out the furniture by 1920 and soon collecting and specializing in titles related to the history of New Jersey.

On his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1922, Traver gave the business to his own two sons, Morris Shuman (b. 1888) and Lewis Benzon (b.1890) who then built a store in 1926 at 19 East State Street. It was said to be the largest book store in New Jersey. The building was especially designed for the sons by architect Lewis S. Kaplan and built by Trenton firm Harrison & Fisher.

Traver died at age 85 while vacationing in Canada and is buried in Riverview Cemetery in Trenton. The store went out of business in August 1967 and the building was sold.

### **Scope and Content Notes**

This collection consists mostly of material related to Traver's Book Store, including items dated after he turned the business over to his two sons in 1922. Several items appear to have his handwriting which demonstrates that he was still active in the business even when he was no longer the owner.

Within the overall Trentoniana Collection are items that have labels affixed to them which credit Traver as presenting them to the City of Trenton. These items, presumably found by Traver over the years while conducting his book business, are filed within their appropriate collection with attribution to Traver. See Appendix A for a list of these items.

## **Series Description**

### **Series I. Business Records**

This series contains material related to business operations and the book store. Some items date to the years his sons ran the book store, including the first (and only) published bookstore catalog (1936), personally signed by Traver and given to Trenton Free Public Library director Howard L. Hughes, “Builder of Trentoniana in the Trenton Public Library,” as well as a large store ledger (1941-1943). Also included in this series are small labels in the shape of open books, which were affixed to books for sale in the shop, reading lists, and advertising material about books available to the public for purchase. A folder of general information gathered for research purposes from various sources, including copies of newspaper articles and a copy of Joseph J. Felcone’s *Clayton L. Traver: Antiquarian Bookseller & New Jerseyana Specialist* (2019), are also in this series.

There is correspondence between Traver and the Trenton Library that includes a letter sent to the commissioners of the library board (1900) asking to be the purchasing agent for the board. He would be authorized to purchase several thousand books from the American Library Association’s list of recommended books for a model public library. One folder contains notes that appear to be for books that others wished to buy or were looking for, including the University of Delaware (1935) and the American Consular Service in Guatemala (1930), a typed list of “Trenton Imprints not in the Library” and another typed list on Traver’s letterhead (E. State St.).

### **Series II. Publications**

This series contains items that were published by Traver, including *Old Fashion Mother Goose Melodies*, believed to be the only surviving copy. “Do not sell – L[ewis].B.T[ra]ver” is written on the top corner. Traver published a number of postcard views of Trenton buildings during the height of the postcard craze c.1907-1908. They include images of the Old Barracks, Old Masonic Building, Saving Bank & YMCA Building, State Model & Normal Schools, and the City Library. He also published a “Souvenir Letter” of Trenton, which was a packet of these postcard views printed on paper which could be mailed together.

Also included in this series is a copy of the reprinted (1888) *Minutes of the Convention of the State of New Jersey* which was originally printed by Isaac Collins in 1787, and which has the original marbled paper wrappers. One hundred copies were printed and sent to local libraries, historical societies, and newspapers. His personal copy of his compilation, *Early Trenton Imprints and Maps*, which is a reprint from the 1929 *A History of Trenton, 1679-1929*, contains penciled notes.

### **Series III. Personal Papers**

This series contains a personal invitation to the unveiling of the John A. Roebling statue in Cadwalader Park (1908), as well as the program of exercises and a photo of the statue.

**Provenance:** mostly unknown, but gathered together from throughout the overall Trentoniana Collection

**Restrictions:** none

**Container List**

**Box / Folder / Folder Title**

Series I. Business Records

1 / 1 / General Information

1 / 2 / Correspondence to Library (1916-1924)

1 / 2a / Letter to Library Board (1900)

1 / 3 / Working Notes

1 / 4 / Bookstore Catalog (1936)

1 / 5 / Reading Lists

1 / 6 / Bookstore Labels

2 / Ledger (1941-1943)

Series II. Publications

1 / 7 / *Minutes of the Convention of the State of New Jersey* (1888 reprint)

1 / 8 / *Early Trenton Imprints and Maps* (1929)

1 / 9 / *Old Fashion Mother Goose Melodies*

1 / 10 / Postcards

1 / 11 / Souvenir Letter [2]

Series III. Personal Papers

1 / 12 / Invitation and Programme of Roebling Statue unveiling

**Bibliography**

Felcone, Joseph J. *Clayton L. Traver (1857-1941): Antiquarian Bookseller & New Jerseyana Specialist*. Princeton, 2019.

**Appendix A**  
**Items in the Trentoniana Department**  
**Attributed as being donated by Clayton L. Traver**

Minutes of the Committee of Common Council Appointed to Investigate the Practicability of Acquiring Certain Lands for the Purpose of a Public [Stacy] Park, 24 June 1903 to 4 August 1908 (Vol. 1) – includes letter to committee from Frederic L. Hulme, attorney, with listing of negotiations with owners of lands desired for park purposes, 30 October 1905  
*Presented to the City of Trenton, 5 October 1917*

Minutes of the Committee of Common Council on the Acquisition of Park Lands Formerly the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Practicability of Acquiring Certain Lands, 10 August 1908 to 3 May 1911 (Vol. 2)  
*Presented to the City of Trenton, 5 October 1917*