



LancasterHistory

Willie Siple Collection, 1935-1962

Object ID: MG0006

1 box 3 folders .2 cubic ft.

Repository: LancasterHistory (Organization); PV7

Shelving Location: Archives North, Side 25

Scope and Content Note: The Willie Siple Collection includes photographs, postcards, correspondence, and newspaper clippings about Siple and related to his business and boxing career.

Creator: Hauck, Johnny.

Conditions for Access: No restrictions.

Conditions Governing Reproductions: Collection may not be photocopied. Please direct questions to Research Center Staff at research@lancasterhistory.org. Permission for reproduction and/or publication must be obtained in writing from LancasterHistory.

Language: English

Biographical and historical note:

Wilbur "Willie" Siple (1904-1966) was the operator of Siple's News Stand for many years. He was originally a professional boxer when he was younger, and he had a successful, but short, boxing career. During those six years, Willie fought in 131 exhibitions with 71 wins, 9 losses, 22 draws and 29 KO's. Willie was what was called a "flyweight," weighing only 102 pounds in his heyday. However, Willie's boxing career was cut short after a 1925 automobile accident. Although many people speculated that Willie's loss of his eyesight was because of his boxing career, Willie explained the accident to a local newspaper. According to a sports news article that can be found in the Willie Siple Collection here at LancasterHistory.org, Willie was attempting to fix a car when a car tire exploded in his face, damaging his eyesight beyond repair and blinding him.

However, despite this tragedy, Willie didn't let the accident and blindness take over his life. On September 28, 1935, during the Depression, Willie made a brave move and opened his news stand in the Lancaster City Post Office, and named it Siple's News



LancasterHistory

Stand. Due to an act of Congress, the Rudolph-Sheppard Act of 1935, Willie became "one of the first blind operators to set up shop in Federal Buildings," according to an article in the Willie Siple collection. Willie's news stand featured free news and weather reports, and sold newspapers, magazines, and candy. Rare coins and stamps, a personal passion of Willie's, were also available for purchase. Willie would travel far and wide in order to acquire rare stamps to be sold to stamp collectors. Willie would travel to places like Washington, D.C. Princeton, New Jersey, and Philadelphia in order to buy what were then called "first day issues" of stamps. One newspaper article even calls him a "philatelist," or a stamp expert, much to Willie's surprise. Siple was also extremely passionate about coin collecting, and could identify and appraise coins without needing to see them. Willie also loved to travel, and had even traveled to Canada and all around Pennsylvania with the help of friends.

Willie then became a well-known public figure. He was known for his friendly, talkative personality, and his eye-catching and "loud" shirts. WDAC-FM radio, then a Christian radio station, featured an editorial on Willie, which was subtitled "the personification of good humor." In this editorial, Willie is said to have had a "flamboyant and winning personality," as well as a "belief in man's basic honesty." Despite the fact that Willie was often taken advantage of because of his blindness, and that he "was the victim of an average of \$40 worth annually in pilfered stock or dishonest dealings," Willie held on to the belief in the goodness of mankind all his life. This is not to say that Willie was completely dependent on the honesty of his customers. He was able to read dollar bills with his hands, and could tell the difference between each, much to the wonder of skeptical customers, and probably to the dismay of the rare customer who would try and take advantage of him.

Willie became a well-loved figure in the community, and anyone looking through his collection will be able to see just that. Siple was a philanthropist who supported the Tuberculosis Society with the proceeds from sales of Christmas seals (or stamps) for their charity. Willie would also dress up like Santa Claus every year, and would visit infantile paralysis victims. There are also multiple thank-you notes from school classes and the local boys club for his generous gifts of candy.

Many of Willie's friends also willingly helped him with his business, helping him with bookkeeping, driving him to and from work, taking him to lunch, helping take over the stand during lunch, and much more. He called these people his "assistants," and most of them were local business men and women who would take time out of their days to help. These people were unpaid friends, just willing to give Willie a hand. Their kindness, as well as Willie's generosity, show the kinship and kindness in the community that surrounded him in Lancaster city.

written by Elizabeth McIlhenney, 2016



LancasterHistory

Source of Acquisition: Gift of the Hauck family.

Custodial History (Provenance): This material was part of the Johnny Hauck Collection, MG0063. Because of the specific nature of the material, it was extracted to create a separate manuscript group.

Preferred Citation: Willy Siple Collection (MG0006), Folder #, LancasterHistory, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

People:

Siple, Wilbur
Moore, Archie

Subject Headings:

Blind (LHo LOC sh 85014855)
Letters
Boxers
People with visual disabilities (LHo LOC sh 85143940)
Newspaper vendors

Search Terms:

Boxers
Correspondence
Letters
Newspaper vendors
Blind
People with visual disabilities
Manuscript groups
Finding aids

Folder 1 Photographs: Most relate to Willy and his newsstand. One is of Archie Moore, and several of Willy in his boxing stance. *Photographs transferred to the Photograph Collection, 3 November 2017.*

Folder 2 Correspondence: Letters from boxers, congressmen, students thanking him for Christmas candy, several sympathy and thank you notes, letters relating to his approval to operate the newsstand on Post Office property.

Folder 3 Newspaper clippings: Related to boxing and newsstand operation.