These are manuscript notebooks of genealogical records kept by a circuit-riding Baptist minister in the northern Ozarks. The records cover Phelps, Pulaski, Texas, and parts of Maries, and Dent counties in south-central Missouri. An index is included.

John Jones Watts was born in 1839 in Warren, Maine, where he became a member of the Warren Baptist Church in 1858. He moved to Missouri sometime after the Civil War, and married Jane Woolsey of Rolla in 1872. He began preaching the gospel in 1877, and was ordained a minister at the Beaver Creek Baptist Church in 1879. Watts maintained close ties with the congregation at Beaver Creek, but traveled extensively throughout Phelps, Pulaski, and Maries counties preaching at baptisms, marriages, funerals, and organizational meetings for local churches. His travels are documented in volumes 34-36 of this collection.

The Watts Collection consists mostly of notebooks filled with genealogical data, and represent thirty years of record-keeping by Watts. He was an avid genealogist, and as a circuit-riding preacher had the opportunity to gather family information from a wide geographical area. His record-keeping may have begun while he was still in Maine, as Volume 25 records deaths there, but the bulk of the collection consists of records of families in Phelps County and the areas along the Big Piney and Gasconade rivers. Apparently he began compiling data in these areas around 1874, but he also gathered as much information as possible on the earliest settlers in the area. Most entries contain dates and locations for births and deaths, marriages, and a list of children born to each marriage. Some entries contain more detailed information concerning the cause of death.

The Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Rolla has compiled a unified index to most of the collection, and many of the individual volumes are indexed inside the front covers. A separate index to the first ten books, probably compiled by Zina Emerson Watts, the oldest son of John J. Watts, has been filmed as Volume 1. Many marriages are indexed in Volume 20, and there is a “school index” for students in rural schools, but it does not correlate with Volume 32, the “Grayson School Register.”

In some cases the microfilm is difficult to read. Volumes 18 and 19 have been typescripted for the convenience of researchers. It is believed that other volumes are extant, which were not available for microfilming.
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[See separate index for list of names in genealogical records.]