

Isaac Sprague IV (1811-1895) Collection, 1803, 1857-1899, 1958-1970
Wellesley Historical Society

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The Wellesley Historical Society
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Title

Isaac Sprague IV (1811-1895) Collection

Date

1803, 1857-1899, 1958-1970

Extent

5 Boxes

Name of Creator

This collection was created by multiple sources.

Biographical History

Isaac Sprague IV, an ornithological, botanical, and landscape painter, was born in 1811 in Hingham, Massachusetts to Isaac and Mary (Burr) Sprague. The son of a box-cooper, not much is known about Sprague's childhood/early life, as he wrote almost nothing about his personal life (Johnson). However, it is known that he apprenticed at the age of fourteen with his uncle, Blossom Sprague, who was a carriage painter. Sprague appears to have been a self-taught artist and was noted for his illustration and paintings.

Sprague's talent attracted the attention of illustrator, John James Audubon, who invited him to join an expedition in 1843, up the Missouri River to the Yellow Stone River (Sprague 1-2). Upon returning from this trip, Sprague traveled through northern New England, working on a series of images for William Oakes' *Scenery of the White Mountains*, which was published in 1848. It is estimated that between 1839 and 1843, Sprague created around sixty paintings of birds, which are now part of the Boston Athenaeum's collection. In the fall of 1844, Sprague began to work with Asa Gray, a professor at Harvard University, creating the illustrations for Gray's lectures. Sprague's illustrations were published with Gray's botanical work, and through Gray's connection, he illustrated a number of Geographical Surveys of the South West. He also illustrated George Barrell Emerson's *Trees and Shrubs of New England* (Sprague, pg. 3). Sprague would become one of America's most respected nineteenth-century illustrators (Johnson).

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Isaac Sprague IV married Hannah Colbath of Middleton, New Hampshire on December 10, 1844. They had one daughter together. After Hannah died in 1849, Sprague married Sarah Eaton of Roxbury on December 21, 1854. They had two sons together, Isaac Sprague V and Marvin Sprague. In the early 1860s, the family relocated to Grantville (what is now Wellesley Hills) from Cambridge, in the hope that the change of location would help Sarah's health. Sarah died on September 17, 1870.

Sprague continued to illustrate, draw, and paint until he was in his late seventies. He died on March 13, 1895, at eighty-four years old (Sprague, pg. 4-5).

Scope and Content

The Isaac Sprague IV collection contains a number of Sprague's drawings and sketches, including photographs of his drawings; notebooks and journals with observations; printed books in which Sprague's illustrations appear; a book and pamphlet, possibly belonging to Sprague, and an account book. It is likely that the account book belonged to Isaac Sprague's (1811-1895) father, as it begins in 1803. There are also a number of newspaper clippings about Sprague that were published in 1958 and 1960.

System of Arrangement

The collection has been divided into four series: Drawings and Sketches, Notebooks and Journals, Printed Materials and Other. The series Drawings and Sketches contains pencil sketches, lithographs, and photographs of Sprague's drawings in both black & white, and color.

The series Notebooks and Journals contains one notebook and journals on topics such as: the art of drawing, household information, and plate descriptions of moths and caterpillars. These items are dated from 1877 until 1889. One notebook, which contains the topics, "Art of Drawing" and "Household Information", is a photocopy.

The series Printed Materials contains published books that feature Sprague's illustrations, including several copies of *Wild Flowers of America: With Fifty Colored Plates from Original Drawings* (1882). One of these books has a handwritten inscription to Marvin Sprague from his father, Isaac Sprague, IV.

The fourth series, Other, contains newspaper clippings on Sprague, a photograph of Sprague, a pamphlet from the third annual centennial exhibition of the National Audubon Society in 1951, a book *Flora of North America...Arranged According to the Natural System*, and an account book from Sprague's father, from 1803 until 1827.

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research purposes by appointment only. Please contact the Wellesley Historical Society for more information.

info@wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org

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Physical Access

Some of the materials are fragile. One notebook has been restricted due to condition.

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Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

Copyright restrictions may apply

Languages and Scripts of the Material

English

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The majority of the material in this collection were a gift from Nancy and Bertram Clarke Sprague, in 2010 (accession #2010.25). Fourteen pencil sketches (box 1, folder 3) were donated by Elizabeth Sprague Putnam in 2013 (accession #2013.37). Materials not marked with one of these two accession numbers are from an unknown source.

The books came from a variety of sources, each source is clearly marked on the book: Lawrence Bunker (accession #1971.6A, 1963.72A, and 1963.72B), anonymous donors (accession #C.1.12, 2002.11.1, B.710.1, and A-5), Anne B. Orser (accession #2003.7.4, 2003.7.1, 2003.7.2, and 2003.7.3), Col. Bunker (accession #1962.91 and 1962.92), the Wellesley Free Library (accession #1964.18 and 1962.27), the Friends of the Wellesley Free Library (accession #2000.14.1), Margaret Urann (accession #2002.12.1), and Wellesley High School (accession #1965.41).

Accruals

The Historical Society may add materials to the Collection in the future; however, no further accruals are currently expected.

Existence and Location of Originals

Wellesley Historical Society Family Archives

Related Collections

The Wellesley Historical Society has a collection of paintings by Isaac Sprague IV including a self portrait (accession #2010.25.1).

Isaac Sprague Collection, Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Carnegie Mellon University.

The Isaac Sprague Collection, Boston Athenaeum

Bibliography

Johnson, Laura. "A Northern New Englander." *Historic New England*. Summer 2012.

Sprague, Isaac. "Isaac Sprague: 1811-1895." Speech given at the Annual Meeting of Wellesley Historical Society, May 23, 1965.

Description

DACS Finding Aid created October 2014, by Hilary Streifer.

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Appendix: Box and Folder List

Box 1: Isaac Sprague IV Collection

Drawings and Sketches; Notebooks and Journals; Other

- Folder 1: Drawings and Sketches: Photographs of drawings, undated
Folder 2: Drawings and Sketches: Pencil sketches, lithographs, undated
Folder 3: Drawings and Sketches: Sketches, undated
Folder 4: Notebooks and Journals: Notebook with loose pages, topics: art of drawing, household information, 1881, undated (photocopies)
Folder 5: Notebooks and Journals: "Notes on the Art of Drawing" undated, "Plate Descriptions: Moths and Caterpillars" 1883-1887, "Plate Descriptions: Caterpillars" 1887-1889
Folder 6: Other: Newspaper Clippings and Photograph: Newspaper clippings, 1960, undated
Folder 7: Other: Newspaper Clippings and Photograph: Newspaper clippings, *Townsmen*, 1958
Folder 8: Other: Newspaper Clippings and Photograph: Photograph, undated
Folder 9: Other: Miscellaneous: Pamphlet for the National Audubon Society's Third Annual Centennial Exhibition, 1951
Folder 10: Other: Miscellaneous: Book, *Flora of North America: Containing Abridges Description of all the Known Indigenous and Naturalized Plants Growing North of Mexico*, by John Torrey and Asa Gray, 1841
Folder 11: Other: Miscellaneous: Account book, 1803-1827

Box 2: Isaac Sprague IV Collection

Notebooks and Journals (Restricted Access due to Condition)

- Folder 1: Notebook with loose pages, topics: art of drawing, household information, 1881, undated

Box 3: Isaac Sprague IV Collection

Printed Materials

- Oakes, William. *Scenery of the White Mountains: With Sixteen Plates from Drawings by Isaac Sprague*. Somersworth, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1970.
Hervey, A. B. *Wayside Flowers and Ferns: With Colored Plates from Original Water Color Drawings After Nature by Isaac Sprague*. Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1899. (three copies)
Sprague, Isaac. *Flowers of the Field and Forest: from Original Water-Color Drawings After Nature*. Boston: S. E. Cassino, Publisher, 1883.
Sprague, Isaac. *Beautiful Wild Flowers of America: from Original Water-Color Drawings*

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After Nature. Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1882. (three copies)
Hervey, A. B. *Beautiful Wild Flowers of America: With Colored Plates from Original Water Color Drawings After Nature by Isaac Sprague*. Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1899.

Gray, Asa. *First Lessons in Botany and Vegetable Physiology, Illustrated by Over 360 Wood Engravings, from Original Drawings, by Isaac Sprague, to which is Added a Copious Glossary or Dictionary of Botanical Terms*. NY: Ivison, Phiney, Blakeman and Company, 1868.

Box 4: Isaac Sprague IV. Collection

Printed Materials

Gray, Asa. *Gray's Lessons in Botany and Vegetable Physiology, Illustrated by Over 360 Wood Engravings, from Original Drawings, by Isaac Sprague, to which is Added a Copious Glossary, or Dictionary of Botanical Terms*. NY: Ivison, Phinney, Blakeman and Company, 1869.

Gray, Asa. *Gray's School and Field Book of Botany, Consisting of "Lessons in Botany" and "Field, Forest, and Garden Botany"*. NY: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor and Company, 1879.

Gray, Asa. *Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States: Revised Edition, Including Virginia, Kentucky, and All East of the Mississippi; Arranged According to the Natural System*. NY: G. P. Putnam and Company, and Ivison and Phinney, 1857.

Sprague, Isaac. *Beautiful Wild Flowers of America: From Original Water-Color Drawings After Nature*. Troy, NY: Nims and Knight, 1888.

Sprague, Isaac. *Flowers of the Field and Forest From Original Water-Color Drawings After Nature*. NY: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1882. (two copies)

Sprague, Isaac. *Wild Flowers of America: With Fifty Colored Plates from Original Drawings*. Boston: S. E. Cassino, Publisher, 1882. (two copies, 2010.25 is inscribed by Isaac Sprague IV to his son Marvin Sprague.)

Archives Oversize Box 4

Folder 19: Oakes, William. *Scenery of the White Mountains: With Sixteen Plates from the Drawings of Isaac Sprague*. Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Company, 1848.