

The Sprague Family Bicentennial Papers, 1709-1973

Repository:	Hingham Public Library
Manuscript #:	MSC #6
Creator(s):	Sprague Family and John P. Richardson
Quantity:	2 half document boxes, One Oversize Folder
Processed By:	Stephanie McBain and Jennifer Williams. Finding aid completed in December of 2014.
Related Materials:	The Bicentennial Collection also contains records that relate to the Sprague family.

Provenance

These papers were created by various members of the Sprague Family and John P. Richardson while living in Hingham, Boston, and other parts of New England. This is an artificial collection, having been collected and assembled by John Richardson in the mid-twentieth century. Part of it was donated in 1976 and the remainder in 1980 as a part of the Bicentennial Collection.

Biographical Note

The first Sprague to settle in Hingham, Mass. was William, who left England and arrived in Salem with his two brothers in 1629. William lived in Charlestown before moving to Hingham around 1636, when land was granted to him for a homestead in the area of town known as "the Playne." He was also allotted several additional plots of land to be used for planting. In 1651 he expanded his property by purchasing land adjoining his homestead and across the river. In 1635 he married Milicent Eames (d. 1695/96), daughter of Anthony Eames (dates unknown), and they had ten children. William served as a town selectman in 1645 and as a constable in 1661. He resided on Union Street, "over the river," and died on October 26, 1675.

Anthony Sprague was born in Charlestown on June 23, 1636 to William Sprague (d. 1675) and Milicent Eames (d. 1695/96). In 1661 he married Elizabeth Bartlett of Plymouth (d. 1712/13), daughter of Robert and Mary (Warren) Bartlett, and they had eleven children. Anthony was a farmer who served as a town selectman in 1688, 1692, and 1700. He resided on the paternal homestead in Hingham Center, which was burned in 1676 by Native Americans during King Philip's War. He died on September 3, 1719.

William Sprague was born in Hingham on July 2, 1650 to William Sprague (d. 1675) and Milicent Eames (d. 1712/13). In 1674 he married Deborah Lane (1652-1706/07), daughter of Andrew and Triphany Lane, and they had eight children together. Deborah died around 1706 and William married Elizabeth Rowland Tower (b. 1672) in 1709. The couple had no children. William was town selectman in 1690, 1699, and 1708. He moved to Providence, Rhode Island between 1709 and 1711 and died there on September 26, 1723.

Hosea Sprague, great-great-grandson of Anthony Sprague (1636-1719), was born in Hingham on May 8, 1779 to Isaac Sprague (1743-1800) and Hannah Jacob (1743/44-1816). He was apprenticed to a Boston printer at the age of fifteen, becoming a fully qualified printer at the age

of twenty-one. When his printing business failed a few years later, he worked briefly at the Boston Athenaeum before returning to Hingham to work as a bookseller, farmer, and inventive wood engraver. His hobbies included philosophy, meteorology, and historical research. While in Hingham he published "Hosea Sprague's Chronicle," a subscription that contained historical, geographical, and scientific extracts, Hosea's daily observations, as well as his personal philosophy on life.

Hosea also published *Hosea Sprague's Register, and Meteorological Journal, in Hingham, Massachusetts, On the Plain, One Mile from the Sea*. The booklet contained Hosea's observations regarding the weather and geography of Hingham as well as trivia and extracts from almanacs and newspapers between 1830 and 1838. He also published two genealogies of the Sprague family. Although extremely intelligent, Hosea was often viewed by others as eccentric due to his nonconformist personality and unique ways of articulating his thoughts. He never married and died on December 10, 1843.

David Sprague, great-great-grandson of Anthony Sprague (1636-1719), was born in Hingham on May 19, 1780 to David Sprague (1754-1832) and Jane Burrell (d. 1840). In 1809 he married Mary "Molly" Leavitt Gardner (1786-1862), daughter of Levi and Molly (Vining) Gardner, and they had two children. David was a shoemaker. He resided in Hingham Center and died on October 25, 1849.

Charles Sprague, great-great-grandson of Anthony Sprague (1636-1719), was born in Boston on October 26, 1791 to Samuel Sprague (1753-1844) and Joanna Thayer (1756-1848). He married Elizabeth Rand (dates unknown) in 1814 and they had four children, two of whom died young. Charles worked at the Globe Bank in Boston and was also a fairly well-known poet, which led to his nickname "Banker Poet of Boston." He died on January 22, 1875.

Peleg Sprague, great-great-great-grandson of William Sprague (d. 1675), was born in Duxbury on April 27, 1793 to Seth Sprague (1760-1847) and Deborah Sampson (1761-1844). He studied law at Harvard, graduating in 1812, and then moved to Augusta, Maine to start his law practice. In 1818 he married Sarah Deming (1794-1881), daughter of Moses and Sarah (Norton) Deming, and they had four children together. Peleg was a member of the Maine House of Representatives from 1821 to 1822, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1825 to 1829, and a Maine Senator from 1829 to 1835. President John Tyler appointed him a judge in the United States District Court of Massachusetts, a position he held from 1841 to 1865. He died in Boston on October 13, 1880.

Isaac Sprague, great-great-great-grandson of Anthony Sprague (1636-1719), was born in Hingham on September 5, 1811 to Isaac Sprague (1782-1826) and Mary Burr (1781-1856). He was apprenticed to an uncle at a young age to learn the trade of carriage painting. In his spare time he liked to paint pictures and gained a reputation as a painter of birds. He eventually caught the attention of John James Audubon, whom he accompanied as painter and naturalist on a trip to the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers in 1843. Isaac married Hannah Colbath of Middleton, New Hampshire in 1844, and they had one daughter together. They moved to Cambridge, where Isaac started working for Professor Asa Gray as an illustrator for his lectures. Hannah died in 1849, and in 1854 Isaac married Sarah Eaton (c. 1818-1870) of Roxbury. They had two sons together

and moved to Wellesley Hills. Isaac continued painting and illustrating into the 1880s, becoming one of the best-known botanical illustrators of his time. He died on March 13, 1895.

Scope and Content Note

The collection includes documents relating to, or created by, members of the Sprague family of Hingham, Mass. These materials were produced between approximately 1709 and 1973. The majority of the items concern either Isaac Sprague (1811-1895) or Hosea Sprague (1779-1843). These records include books, newspaper articles, artwork, obituaries, essays, and letters created between 1802 and 1973. Some of the materials were created or collected by Isaac and Hosea Sprague, while others were written about them nearly one century later. They discuss both the professional and private lives of these two individuals, including their hobbies, their families, and professional successes. The rest of the collection contains miscellaneous materials owned and/or created by other members of the Sprague family between 1709 and 1844. While there are day book pages and receipts that focus on the family members' professional lives, the majority of the records are deeds, wills, and letters that touch principally upon their personal lives.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into the following three series:

- Series I. Isaac Sprague Papers, 1848-1971
- Series II. Hosea Sprague Papers, 1802-1973
 - Subseries I. Professional Papers, 1802-1807
 - Subseries II. Personal Papers, 1828-1838
 - Subseries III. Historical Notes, Articles, and Essays, 1828?-1973?
- Series III. Miscellaneous Family Records, 1709-1844

Series I. Isaac Sprague Papers, 1848-1971

Box 1, Folders 1-4

This series is composed of materials relating to Isaac Sprague (1811-1895), the well-known painter and illustrator. There are multiple records created in the 19th century during and directly after Sprague's lifetime including: a copy of an 1848 preface written by Asa Gray with an illustration by Isaac; an 1883 copy of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Flowers de Luce," also illustrated by Isaac; a greeting card that was illustrated by Isaac, date unknown; a page from the 1893 "History of Hingham" with a short biography of Isaac; and a copy of *Garden and Forest* from 1895, which includes his obituary.

The series also includes materials created in the 20th century that focus on Isaac and his acquaintances. These items include a photocopy of a 1960 *Patriot Ledger* article entitled "Work of Forgotten Hingham Artist Recognized in Show at Cambridge," along with the 1971 letter with which the article was enclosed; and a copy of *Massachusetts Audubon* from 1969, which includes an article about Thomas Mayo Brewer (who may have introduced Sprague to Audubon). Finally, the series also contains various biographical notes relating to Sprague and his family, as well as a biography written by Isaac Sprague, Jr. in 1960. Parts of the biography were used to create an exhibit of Isaac Sprague's work at Harvard University later that same year.

Series II. Hosea Sprague Papers, 1802-1973

Subseries I. Professional Papers, 1802-1807

Box 1, Folders 5-6; Box 2, Folder 1

This subseries contains six books and pamphlets dated between 1802 and 1807 that were printed by Hosea Sprague (1779-1843) through his printing business in Boston. The items include the following: "A Discourse Delivered Before the Humane Society of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts" by Eliphalet Porter, published in 1802; "The Peasant's Fate: A Rural Poem" by William Holloway, also published in 1802; "The Art of Preserving Health" by John Armstrong, published in 1802; "Poems" by Matthew Green, published in 1804; "A Sermon Delivered at the Ordination of Mr. Joseph Richardson" by Reverend William Bentley, published in 1806; and "An Oration Pronounced Before the Republican Citizens of the Town of Hingham in Commemoration of American Independence" by Benjamin Gleason, published in 1807.

Subseries II. Personal Papers, 1828-1838

Box 2, Folders 2-4

This subseries contains materials relating to the personal life of Hosea Sprague (1779-1843). The first two items are genealogies that were both written and printed by Hosea. The first book was written in 1828 and is entitled "Genealogy of the Spragues in Hingham," while the second book was written in 1829 and is called "Ralph Sprague in Charlestown in 1628 and His Four Sons and Daughters." There are also two items related to his publication entitled *Sprague's Register of the Weather*: there is a bound copy of the booklet as well as a photocopy of the *Hingham Gazette* from 1838 containing a letter to the editor praising the publication. Finally, the subseries also includes an 1832 report of the "Committee Chosen to Confer with Hosea Sprague" about purchasing his copy of the town's historical records.

Subseries III. Historical Notes, Articles, and Essays, 1888-1973?

Box 2, Folder 5

This subseries is composed of notes, articles, and essays written about Hosea Sprague (1779-1843) between approximately 1888 and 1973. Articles and essays include: a clipping from the 1893 *History of Hingham* listing Hosea's publications; a 1968 biography of Hosea written by John Richardson as well as a letter from the *Christian Science Monitor* declining to publish the article; Richardson's bibliography for his biography on Hosea; and a copy of the *Hingham Journal* from 1888 that includes an article about Hosea entitled "Recollections of an Eccentric Man By An Octogenarian."

There are also several items relating to a lecture given by Peter Williams in 1973 about the life and works of Hosea Sprague. These records include: a 1972 advertisement in the *South Shore News* looking for material for the lecture; a 1973 announcement of the

lecture; correspondence between John Richardson and Peter Williams regarding Hosea and their work on his life; a copy of Williams' lecture on Hosea entitled "Folk Art in Wood Engraving;" and several copies of Hosea's woodcarvings.

Series III. Miscellaneous Family Records, 1709-1844
Box 2, folder 6; Flat File Folder 1

This series contains materials owned and/or created by various members of the Sprague family, including deeds, wills, day book pages, letters, and receipts. The deeds and wills include an oversized 1709 deed from William Sprague (1615-1723) granting land to his son Jonathan and the will of Anthony Sprague (1636-1719), dated 1716 and proved in 1719. There are also two pages from David Sprague's (1780-1849) daybooks which list the cost of materials and services he both received and gave to others between 1795 and 1802.

The series also contains two letters relating to Hingham's Bicentennial Celebration. The first is an 1835 letter written by Peleg Sprague (1793-1880) to the Centennial Committee of Hingham stating that he is happy to have received an invitation to the event and will most certainly attend. The second letter, written in 1835 by Charles Sprague (1791-1875) to Jairus Lincoln, states that he is unable to write an ode for Hingham's Bicentennial Celebration as was requested of him. Finally, the series contains a certificate from 1844 stating that David Sprague (1780-1849), Sworn Measurer of Wood and Bark for the Town of Hingham, found there to be 8.75 feet of beach wood in the wagon driven by B. Thomas.