

# The Sprague Family Papers, 1709-1973

**Repository:** Hingham Public Library

**Creator:** Sprague Family

**Quantity:** 2 half document boxes

**Processed By:** Stephanie McBain

**Related Materials:** The Bicentennial Collection contains town records that relate to the Sprague family.

## Provenance

These papers were created by various members of the Sprague Family while living in Hingham, Boston, and other parts of New England. They were donated to the library by Joseph Richardson in 1976 and 1980 as part of the Bicentennial Collection.

## Biographical Note

The first Sprague to settle in Hingham was William, who arrived in Salem from England with his two brothers in 1629. William lived in Charlestown before moving to Hingham in approximately 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 was town selectman in 1645 and 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 as well as being 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. Deborah died in approximately 1706 and William married Elizabeth Rowland Tower in 1709, with whom he 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 became the apprentice of a Boston printer at the age of fifteen, becoming a fully qualified printer at 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 wood engraver. While in Hingham he also published "Hosea Sprague's Chronicle," a genealogical book on the

Spragues, and a "Register of the weather." Hosea was often viewed by others as eccentric. 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 was born in Boston on October 26, 1791 to Samuel Sprague and Joanna Thayer. He married Elizabeth Rand 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 the "Banker Poet of Boston." He died on January 22, 1875.

Peleg Sprague was born in Duxbury on April 27, 1793. He studied law at Harvard, graduating in 1812 and moving to Augusta, Maine to practice. He 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. He was nominated by President John Tyler to the United States District Court for Massachusetts, which he served on from 1841 to 1865. He died in Boston on October 13, 1880.

Isaac Sprague was born in Hingham on September 5, 1811 to Isaac Sprague and Mary Burr. He was apprenticed to an uncle at a young age to learn the trade of carriage painting. He also liked to paint pictures and gained a reputation as a painter of birds, finally catching the attention of John James Audubon. He accompanied Audubon 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; they had one daughter and moved to Cambridge, where Isaac started working for Professor Asa Gray as illustrator for his lectures. Hannah died in 1849, and in 1854 Isaac married Sarah Eaton of Roxbury; they had two sons and moved to Wellesley Hills together. Isaac continued painting and illustrating into the 1880s, and died on March 13, 1895.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The collection includes materials created by or relating to members of the Sprague family in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. One series contains items relating to Isaac Sprague, a painter and illustrator, and includes some of his illustrations; another contains materials relating to Hosea Sprague, a printer and woodcarver, including biographical information and several of the books he printed. General family papers include correspondence, a will and other deeds, a receipt, and daybook pages.

### **Arrangement**

The collection is arranged into the following three series:

- Series I. General Family Records, 1709-1844
- Series II. Isaac Sprague Papers, 1848-1971
- Series II. Hosea Sprague Papers, 1802-1973

### **Series I. General Family Records, 1709-1844**

Box 1, folder 1

This series contains materials created by various members of the Sprague family, including a 1709 deed from William Sprague granting land to his son Jonathan; the will of Anthony Sprague, dated 1716 and proved in 1719; pages from David Sprague's 1795 and 1796 daybooks, listing his payments; an 1835 letter from Peleg Sprague to the Centennial Committee of Hingham; an 1835 letter from Charles Sprague to Jairus Lincoln, also regarding Hingham's bicentennial celebration; and an 1844 receipt for a wood delivery signed by David Sprague.

### **Series II. Isaac Sprague Papers, 1848-1971**

Box 1, folder 2

This series is made up of materials relating to Isaac Sprague, a well-known painter and illustrator. It includes a photocopy of an 1848 preface written by Asa Gray with an illustration by Sprague; an 1883 copy of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Flowers de Luce," illustrated by Sprague; a page from the 1893 "History of Hingham" with a short biography of Sprague; a copy of *Garden and Forest* from 1895, which includes Sprague's obituary; a photocopy of the 1960 *Patriot Ledger* article "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. The series also contains various biographical notes relating to Sprague and his family, including John Richardson's research notes and a typewritten biography.

### **Series III. Hosea Sprague Papers, 1802-1973**

Box 2, folders 3-5

This series includes materials relating to Hosea Sprague, who worked as a printer and woodcarver. The first folder contains an 1832 report of the "Committee Chosen to Confer with Hosea Sprague" about purchasing his copy of the town records; a photocopy of the *Hingham Gazette* from 1838 including a letter to the editor praising Sprague's "Register of the weather"; a copy of the *Hingham Journal* from 1888 including "Recollections of an Eccentric Man by an Octogenarian," about Sprague; a clipping from the 1893 *History of Hingham* listing Sprague's publications; an 1868 article by John Richardson, "The Man Who Stood Alone," and a letter from the Christian Science Monitor rejecting to publish the article; a 1972 advertisement in the *South Shore News* looking for material for a lecture on Sprague put on by Peter Williams; a 1973 announcement of the lecture; a 1973 letter to Williams from John Richardson regarding the lecture and Sprague's manuscripts, and Williams' response; a copy of Williams' "Folk Art in Wood Engraving" about Sprague; Richardson's bibliography for his biography on Sprague; and several prints and copies of woodcarvings.

The second folder contains three works by Sprague: the 1828 "Genealogy of the Spragues in Hingham," the 1829 "Ralph Sprague in Charlestown in 1628 and His Four Sons and Daughters," and the 1837 "Hosea Sprague's Register of the Weather." It also contains one book published by Sprague, "The Peasant's Fate: A Rural Poem" by William Holloway, which was published in 1802.

The third folder contains five works published by Sprague: "A Discourse Delivered Before the Humane Society of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts" by Eliphalet Porter, 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.