

CAPE ANN Museum

Library & Archives

1+ 978-283-0455 x19

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SEA MOSS AND SEAWEED COLLECTION

Creator:	Lenore Spiering; Sarah Parsons; unknown
Dates:	1845-1885; undated
Quantity:	[0.5 linear feet (1 document box)]
Acquisition:	Accession #: 1148; 1880; unknown; Donated by: L G. Lucille Smith; Lenore Spiering
Identification:	A93 ; Archive Collection #93
Citation:	[Document Title]. The Sea Moss and Seaweed Collection, [Box #, Folder #, Item #], Cape Ann Museum Library & Archives, Gloucester, MA.
Copyright:	Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be addressed to the Librarian/Archivist.
Language:	English
Finding Aid:	Amber L. Wingerson, Curatorial Assistant, 2019.

Biographical/Historical Note

Sea moss and seaweed collecting and scrapbooking were popular hobbies for young women during the nineteenth century. The rise of the middle class created a population of young, educated women who didn't have to do manual labor and needed edifying activities to fill their time. At the same time, the Industrial Revolution was making paper and books less expensive, and women had access to unprecedented numbers of magazines, newspapers, prints and fashion plates.

The process of sea moss and seaweed collecting differentiated it from other forms of natural history collecting. Those who collected seaweed needed to wade out into the water to obtain

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the seaweed and moss, before painstakingly preserving and mounting the seaweed and moss specimens. In the late nineteenth century, the book *Sea Mosses: A Collector's Guide and an Introduction to the Study of Marine Algae* by A. B. Hervey (1881) described how to properly press and mount various types of algae. Collectors needed a pair of pliers, scissors, a stick with a needle in the end, at least two bowls for washing algae, blotting paper for drying, cotton cloth and cards to mount the specimens on. Pliers and scissors were used to handle the specimens and cut away any extraneous, superfluous branches. The collector used the needle to move the plant with relative ease to show the finer details. The drying and pressing process consisted of layering the mounting papers with various types of blotting cloth and additional paper topped with weight. Most seaweed adhered to the mounting board via gelatinous materials emitted from the plant itself. This process was used by collectors throughout the 19th century, and likely the collectors featured in this collection.

This Cape Ann Museum Library & Archives collection includes seaweed and sea moss that was mounted in books, on paper sheets and on cards by various collectors. Most of the small cards are not labeled, but the majority of the books and larger paper sheets are labeled with the name of the collector, the location in which the specimens were found, and, in some cases, the purpose of the collection. Recorded locations of collecting range from Gloucester, to other locations in Massachusetts, to as far away as Scotland. According to one of the collector's notes, their book of seaweed and sea moss was presented at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Acquisition Note

The Sea Moss and Seaweed Collection in the Library & Archives of the Cape Ann Museum is the combination of three acquisitions, which were accepted into the Library & Archive collection at different times, from different donors.

The Davis and Bray Sea Moss Collection, which encompasses a large portion of the collection, was given by Lenore Spiering of Burbank, California in 1966 (Acc# 1880). The donor's grandfather was "Grandpa Mueller," who created and signed one of the books of pressed seaweed within this donation. This group includes several books as well as sheets of varying sizes of pressed seaweed. Another book of pressed sea mosses in the collection was collected by Sarah Parsons and given to the Library & Archives by Miss G. Lucille Smith in 1946 (Acc# 1148). The final part of the collection does not have a known accession number, but is a typescript how-to and history of sea moss and seaweed collecting likely from the early 20th century. The dated part of the collection ranges from 1845 to 1885, with bulk dates between 1845 to 1852 and includes several undated objects.

Scope and Content of the Collection

This is a manuscript, object, and scrapbook collection of pressed sea moss and seaweed primarily from the nineteenth century. The collection includes several books of pressed sea

moss and seaweed, sheets of varying sizes of pressed seaweed, and handwritten and typed writings. While many of the objects are undated, the dated objects range from 1845 to 1885, with bulk dates between 1845 to 1852.

The first series, Series 1: Writings, has a typed how-to and history of seaweed and sea moss collecting. Other parts of this series include handwritten notes and quotations. This includes one page of handwritten notes and quotations that was found folded and loose in Miss Harriet P. Mason's sea moss collecting book, 1852. This page was not part of the book, but rather a piece of lined paper with handwritten notes and quotes by an unknown author. In order to unfold and preserve the page, the curatorial assistant removed the paper from the book, placing it in a folder in the corresponding series and noting where the article was originally found.

The largest series, Series 2: Pressed sea moss and seaweed collections, consists of the books, envelopes, and sheets of pressed sea moss and seaweed. The series is broken into three subseries, including Books, Envelopes, and Unmarked cards. Each of the subseries has several examples of pressed sea moss and seaweed in these formats.

The final series, Series 3: Objects, consists of two objects, including a small leather box and a prize ribbon. Both objects were found with the collection with no other information.

Series Description

- I. Series 1: Writings, 1852, undated
- II. Series 2: Pressed sea moss and seaweed collections, 1845 to 1885
- III. Series 3: Objects, 1885, undated

Container List

- I. Series 1: Writings, 1852, undated
 - I. Typescript, How-to and history guide for sea moss and seaweed collecting, undated
 - II. Handwritten quotations about the sea, friendship, and death
 - III. Handwritten inventory of the Davis and Bray Sea Moss collection, undated
- II. Series 2: Sea moss and seaweed collections
 - I. Subseries 1: Books
 - I. Book 1, 9.5" x 7" leather bound, Miss Harriet P. Mason from her mother Mrs. Davis, 1852
 - II. Book 2, 8" x 6" leather bound, Sea Mosses Gathered at Gloucester Mass & mounted by Grandpa Muller, 1883

- III. Book 3, 11" x 9" leather bound, Miss E.G. Davison, Boston, Taken from Good Harbor Beach, Gloucester, 1848
 - IV. Book 4, 10.5" x 8.5" leather bound, Sea Mosses Collected and pressed by Miss Harriet P. Mason, 1845, given (eventually) to Catalina Davis in 1905, 1845
 - V. Book 5, 10" x 7" leather bound, Sea Mosses, C. Ferson, undated
 - VI. Book 6, 14" x 11" card bound with ribbon and flower print, undated
 - VII. Book 7, 15" x 10" card bound, Collected by Belle Harty, E. Glos., undated
 - VIII. Book 8, 15" x 11" card and leather bound, Mabel F. Barker, undated
 - IX. Book 9, 10" x 7" leather bound, Collection of Sea Mosses from Cape Ann Mass, Collected and Pressed by Miss Harriet P. Mason (Mrs. Wm. F. Davis) 1849-50
 - X. Hard cover, fold out book, Sea Mosses, "Prepared and arranged by Miss Maria Bray. Exhibited at the world Fair at Chicago," undated
 - XI. Hard cover book, Ocean Gems, undated
 - XII. Handmade paper book, green ribbon, Magnolia Mosses, undated
 - XIII. Unbound book, undated
 - XIV. Book, leather bound, Herbarium, "Sarah C. Parson, East Gloucester, Mass. Collector of Mosses," undated
- II. Subseries 2: Envelopes
- I. Sea moss grouped by location: Fortress Munroe, Massachusetts, Scotland. Florida (empty), Rhode Island, undated
 - II. Green paper fold-out with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - III. Handmade paper envelope with brown paper fold-out with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - IV. Handmade paper envelope with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
- III. Subseries 3: Unmarked cards
- I. Envelope 1, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - II. Envelope 2, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - III. Envelope 3, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - IV. Envelope 4, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - V. Envelope 5, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - VI. Envelope 6, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
 - VII. Envelope 7, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated

- VIII. Envelope 8, Unmarked cards with pressed sea moss and seaweed, undated
- III. Series 3: Objects, 1885, undated
 - I. Prize ribbon, First Honorable Mention by Committee of Awards, Women's Department, World's Exhibition, New Orleans, 1885
 - I. Removed from Book, leather bound, Herbarium, "Sarah C. Parson, East Gloucester, Mass. Collector of Mosses," undated
 - II. Small, leather covered box, undated