

Epaphras Hoyt Sketch-book Collection (1820-1849)
S 920.71 H869sk Manuscript

**Purchased with funds provided by Margaret E.C. Howland, Ann Lord, Deborah Dearborn,
and the Estate of David Proper**

Biographical Note:

Epaphras Hoyt (1765-1850) was born in the old Indian House in Deerfield, the son of David and Silence King Hoyt. Throughout his life, Epaphras showed a keen interest in military history and affairs. He achieved various ranks in the Massachusetts militia and published two works on military science. He also showed great interest in politics and served at least one term in the General Assembly and in numerous town and county offices. He worked as a surveyor for the state government, surveying the borders of the state. He also worked locally to survey potential canals and roads in the Valley. He encouraged his son and nephews to become civil engineers. Epaphras was also a student of natural sciences, often remarking on local flora and fauna, and recording astronomical observations and weather observances. He was an avid reader throughout his life, reading everything from poetry to military and historical texts to book reviews, travel literature and local newspapers.

Epaphras lived most of his life in Deerfield. He traveled extensively, often touring battlefields at Saratoga and Lake George. He also spent some time in western New York State, where he tried to establish a trading business. He also lived part of the time in Boston, while serving as a General Assembly member. While based in Deerfield in his later years, he often received correspondence from various family and friends from the Midwest, Florida, western New York and Boston. This enabled Epaphras to stay current on all of his interests.

About the Collection:

In December 2015 and August 2016, Historic Deerfield acquired at auction, with the help of several individuals, 15 journals written by Epaphras Hoyt. These 15 journals are added to the existing journal of Hoyt's already in the possession of Historic Deerfield to form this collection. The existing journal was a library purchase in 2015. In January 2017 through a private purchase, another partial journal to add to the collection. Together, these 17 journals contain Hoyt's everyday thoughts and experiences from 1820-1849.

The bulk of the collection is what Hoyt labels as "Sketch-books." These are sequentially numbered, and are day-to-day journal entries. Most days Hoyt begins with a weather report and then continues on with special events of the day, a book review, a commentary on politics or other issue, an essay on a scientific topic, a travelogue of a trip, or drafts of his various military or historic writings. Present in the collection are journals from 1835-1840, and 1846-1849.

The remainder of the collection consists of one unnumbered journal kept between January and March of 1832, while Hoyt was living in Boston and serving as a member of the General Assembly; and 2 notebooks, labeled "C" and "D." These notebooks contain research notes on the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. It is likely they were used when Hoyt was writing his *Antiquarian Researches* and his unpublished Saratoga campaign manuscript.

In all but five of his “Sketch-books” Hoyt made a table of contents of the topics he writes about. These have been transcribed below. Of the books without a table of contents, a brief summary of topics covered is provided.

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Drawer 19:

[Sketch-book No. 20, part 1]--January 23-March 19, 1846.

This sketch-book is missing the first two pages, and begins on page 3 and continues through page 60. With the lack of the first page, the sketch-book number has been inferred from his existing numbering sequence. The year of this sketch-book is taken from Hoyt's mentioning of the death of his nephew, Ebenezer Hoyt, which occurred in 1846. As this is a fragment of a much larger work, it does not contain a Table of Contents. This sketch-book is a loosely sewn together gathering of pages. It is oversized, and therefore shelved separately from the existing sketch-books.

His journal entries deal primarily with national events and politics. His biggest concerns are the state of the Militia, the possibility of war with Great Britain over the Oregon Territory, and his opinions of President Polk. As in most of his journals, he also notes daily weather reports, and includes some reviews of books he has read. Hoyt also notes the ordination of John F. Moors as the Unitarian minister, and his first sermon; as well as reporting on the Northampton and Greenfield railroad. Two other entries of note include his opinion about a soup diet for the poor, and his opinion on the moon and its effects on mental health.

Box 2:

Sketch-book no. 20—Oct. 8-Dec. 31, 1846

Hoyt uses a book previously owned by his son-in-law, Elijah Williams as his journal. The first fifteen pages are in Elijah's hand, and records various legal definitions and notes. Hoyt begins his journal entries on the next blank page. He notes at the top that this book is a continuation of No. 20, beginning with page 337 and ending with page 493. He does not include a table of contents for this journal.

His journal entries are primarily about the Mexican War and Hoyt's opinions of the strategy and causes of the war. He also spends much time discussing the politics of the Whigs and the Democrats, and the state of the volunteer militia that is fighting the war. Hoyt also writes about local railroad activity, weather reports, the discovery of Neptune, and the U.S. Exploring Expedition.

Box 2:

Sketch-book No. 21—January 1-March 15, 1847

Hoyt uses a previously owned account book belonging to his son-in-law, Elijah Williams for his entries. The book labeled “Bar Book-Pocumtuck House” was used by Elijah Williams or his manager, from December of 1827 through 1828 while Elijah either worked or managed a tavern/inn owned by his father Ebenezer Hinsdale Williams. The tavern entries cover only a few pages. Hoyt writes around these entries for his own journal.

Like the previous journal, Hoyt’s main topic is the ongoing Mexican War, and his feelings towards it, President Polk, and the volunteer militia fighting it. His entries usually begin with observances of the weather. He also occasionally writes of other topics. He mentions his eyesight starting to fail, the reading habits of youth, local and national railroads, and more analysis of the U.S. Exploring Expedition.

He writes no table of contents for this journal. He notes on the cover that is part 1 of No. 21. Part 3 of No. 21 is contained in the next volume. Part 2 is currently unaccounted for.

Box 2:

Sketch-book Nos. 21, 22, & 23—1847-Nov. 1849

Hoyt wrote no table of contents for this journal. It was the second to last journal he would ever produce. It is the last journal that he wrote himself. (His last journal was written by others, as he was blind by then. The last journal is available in PVMA)

In this journal, which he does label “Sketch-book No. 21, 22, 23” Hoyt writes about various topics important to him. Much space is given to Hoyt’s feelings toward the Mexican War, President Polk, and the military strategy towards the war. Hoyt also writes of his Anti-Masonic feelings; political party conventions; the Massachusetts state election of 1847; the national election of 1848; local deaths; preserving and later demolishing the old Indian House; procuring a new gravestone for his daughter Fanny’s grave; updates on his son Arthur, his great-nephew David Starr Hoyt, and Charles Boutelle; and various diseases and illnesses in the country. Throughout the whole journal, Hoyt regularly records the weather. Towards the end, his entries are only weather reports.

Hoyt’s journal contains several leaves laid in at the end, where his handwriting gets bigger and harder to read. His entries grow shorter. These entries show when Hoyt began to struggle with his eyesight and mobility.

Box 2:

Un-numbered journal from Jan. 2-March 17, 1832

This small journal was kept by Epaphras Hoyt while he was a state representative in the General Assembly. The journal begins with his arrival in Boston, and ends in mid-March, while he was still in session. There are likely other journals that continue from this point, but are not currently known of.

Hoyt's journal at first shows little interest in General Assembly affairs. He notes when he attends the Assembly, with only a sentence or two about it. The rest of his entries focus on the book stores he visits, friends he meets, business he conducts, and newspapers and books he has read. Hoyt also helps his son Arthur with the printing and proofing of Arthur's topographical map of the county. As the journal progresses, he shows more interest in the General Assembly, devoting several pages for each entry on the goings on in the Legislature.

Box 2:

“Book C”—a journal kept by Hoyt to record notes and research on Burgoyne’s Northern Campaign, and on the French and Indian wars of the 1750s. He provides a partial table of contents.

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Book C also includes a letter from Thomas Longly of Hawley, Massachusetts laid in—discussing the battle at Lake George.

Box 2:

“Book No. 2 or D—Notes and Extracts, Deerfield 1820, Containing data for History”

Hoyt’s journal contains his notes and research on the French and Indian Wars of the 1750s.

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Laid in are further journal pages continuing the same numbering system. Also laid in are poetical extracts relating to the battles, as well as one page removed from a different journal.