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A guide to the Ichabod Washburn papers

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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MS 26 Ichabod Washburn

Ichabod Washburn Papers

MS 26

Personal Papers

ABSTRACT

The Ichabod Washburn Papers (1865-1978) contain bills, receipts, and accounting relating to the building of Washburn Shops, as well as biographical materials.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ichabod Washburn was born August 11, 1798 in Kingston, Massachusetts. His family was very poor, and he was apprenticed at the age of nine to a chaise, harness, and trunk maker in Duxbury. By the age of sixteen, Washburn had moved to Leicester and was apprenticed to a blacksmith. A few years later he established his own business in Millbury making agricultural implements. By 1820, he had come to Worcester and, with Benjamin Goddard, established a business making woolen machinery. In 1824 he began making card wire at a factory in Northville. By the 1830s, when Mr. Goddard retired from the business, Mr. Washburn, with the help of Stephen Salisbury II, had moved his business to Grove Street and the company was making piano wire and wire for many other uses. In 1850, his son-in-law became a partner of the firm, known as Washburn & Moen Manufacturing Company (later a subsidiary of U. S. Steel). By 1865, Washburn & Moen was the largest wire mill in the world.

Mr. Washburn gave much of his wealth to worthy causes during his lifetime and bequeathed much of his estate to help the poor and needy. He had, for some years before John Boynton's offer of money for an endowment and support for a school, hoped to establish a school which would train young people for mechanical trades. Boynton's offer was made on the condition that the people of Worcester provide the land and buildings for a school. Seth Sweetser and Emory Washburn, who Boynton approached, broadened the aim of the school to provide an "industrial education." It was Ichabod Washburn, who received a letter from the original committee set up to solicit money and land to build the school, who insisted that this industrial education have a strong practical component. To that end, he offered to build and equip a machine shop for the school. Mr. Washburn died December 30, 1868, before the shops were completed, but his will provided for their completion.

Reading the biographical materials in this collection, as well as Mildred McClary Tymeson's account in Two Towers, will provide more information, and opinions, as to the central role Ichabod Washburn played in establishing the school which became Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The bulk of the materials in this collection is bills, receipts, and accounting relating to the building of Washburn Shops, ranging from 1868 to 1873. This includes a list of expenses over the years which totaled over \$52,000. in 1872. Also included is a copy of the original 1865 subscription list for the "Scientific School in Worcester," with Mr. Washburn's offer to erect and equip a machine shop for the school. Mr. Washburn's will is also part of the collection. These materials came from the American Antiquarian Society, and were arranged by date in five folders, which are at the back of the collection.

The collection also includes biographical materials, ranging in date from 1928 to 1978. A booklet by George I. Rockwood, published in 1943 and titled "The Founder of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute," makes a case for declaring Ichabod Washburn the real founder. A photograph of Mr. Washburn is at the end of the collection.

Container List

Container	Folder	Date	Title
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Folder 01	June 25, 1946 & 2006	Explanatory letter from American Antiquarian Society re. Ichabod Washburn materials <i>plus record of Washburn materials AAS has</i>
Folder 02	1928-1978	Biographical information <i>card</i> <i>two-page biographical sketch</i> <i>article from "Stamping Life"</i> <i>"The Founder of Worcester Polytechnic Institute" by George Rockwood</i> <i>"Ichabod Washburn made wire work for him"</i>
Folder 03	March 27, 1865	Copy of original subscriptions to the Scientific School in Worcester
Folder 04	1868	Bills to Ichabod Washburn for construction of Industrial Shop
Folder 05	December 1868 and June 8, 1869	Will and Testament of Ichabod Washburn and Inventory
Folder 06	1866-1870 [most are 1869]	Bills and checks for Washburn Shop
Folder 07	January 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 08	February 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 09	March 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 10	April 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 11	April and May, 1869	3 documents re. ownership of machine shop <i>Demand for payment by WFHS</i> <i>Decision in favor of same</i> <i>Acknowledged receipt of Deed of Conveyance from Ichabod Washburn Estate</i>
Folder 12	May 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 13	June 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 14	July 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 15	August-December 1869	Bills, receipts, accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 16	1870	Receipts for payments from Estate of Ichabod Washburn and related documents
Folder 17	1872	Receipts and accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop <i>including total accounting to date</i>
Folder 18	1873	Receipts and accounting from Estate of Ichabod Washburn for Washburn Shop
Folder 19		American Antiquarian Society Folders 1-5
Folder 20	n.d. and 1814 (?)	Photographs of Ichabod Washburn and list with Washburn's signature