A guide to the Ichabod Washburn papers

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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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

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Folder 01  June 25, 1946 & 2006  Explanatory letter from American Antiquarian Society re. Ichabod Washburn materials  
plus record of Washburn materials AAS has

Folder 02  1928-1978  Biographical information  
card  
two-page biographical sketch  
article from "Stamping Life"  
"The Founder of Worcester Polytechnic Institute" by George Rockwood  
"Ichabod Washburn made wire work for him"

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  
Demand for payment by WFHS  
Decision in favor of same  
Acknowledged receipt of Deed of Conveyance from Ichabod Washburn Estate

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  
including total accounting to date

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