

**Sturgis Library Archives  
Genealogical and Personal Document Collection**

MS. 20

**WILLIAM STURGIS FAMILY PAPERS**

Content: Papers of William Sturgis, his wife Elizabeth Davis Sturgis, his son William Watson Sturgis, his sister-in law Ellen Davis Goodwin, and estate papers for his father-in-law Judge John Davis.

Volume: c. 1 linear foot

Provenance: Donated by Sturgis Warner and Gray Thoron, 1977.

Restrictions: None stated

Processed by: Pamela Narbeth, June 1998; recataloged by Lucy Loomis April 2014.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

William F. Sturgis was born in Barnstable, February 25th, 1782. His father, William E. Sturgis, was a respectable ship master in Barnstable and was a lineal descendant from Edward Sturgis, the first Sturgis in this country who came over in 1630. Edward Sturgis moved to Yarmouth and became the first planter in that town. This historical background gave William F. Sturgis a tradition to maintain and build upon, which he did resolutely.

William F. Sturgis entered into the counting house of his uncle Russell Sturgis in 1796. A year and a half later he became connected with James and Thomas Handasyd Perkins who were engaged in the booming fur trade on the northwest coast and China. Upon the death of his father in 1797, he was forced to go to sea to support the family. After many voyages and thrilling experiences, well documented in Henry Kittredge's books *Shipmasters of Cape Cod* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1935) and *Cape Cod, Its People and Their History*, (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1930) he returned to Boston in 1810 to go into a trading copartnership with John Bryant. From 1810 to 1850 more than half of the trade carried on with the Pacific Northwest coast and China was under their direction. He was known for his fair dealings with the natives in the Pacific Northwest and China, whose languages he had learned while trading with them as a young man. The firm of Bryant and Sturgis continued for more than fifty years and was terminated only by the death of Captain Sturgis.

In 1810 Captain Sturgis married Elizabeth M. Davis and sired one son and five daughters. He took great interest in public affairs, especially relating to the Pacific Northwest, and was for the greater portion of the next thirty years, a member of the Massachusetts House or Senate. For some years he was a member and former President of the Boston Marine Society. He was also a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

William F. Sturgis died October 21, 1863 at the age of 81 leaving a great legacy including the famous Sturgis Library in Barnstable, renowned for its archival and genealogical works. He had

bought the house, where he had been born, from the Chipman family and donated it to Barnstable to establish a public library for the village. He donated his own 1,300 books to begin the collection, and \$15,000 to establish an endowment.

### SCOPE AND CONTENT

The William Sturgis Family Papers contain correspondence, manuscripts, estate papers, deeds, stock certificates, lectures and a family Bible. The Papers are divided into six personal series - I: William Sturgis; II: Elizabeth Davis Sturgis; III: William Watson Sturgis; IV: Ellen Davis Goodwin; V: Judge John Davis; VI: Sturgis Family Artifacts.

Series I. William Sturgis has business correspondence, receipts, copies of manuscripts of journals, articles and lectures, and papers relating to his estate. The papers range from 1799 to 1863. There is both a photostat copy of the original handwritten "Journal of William Sturgis" (but not in his handwriting) and a typescript done in 1976. The lectures are also typewritten transcripts. The memorandum that was prepared under his direction for his obituary is modest, unassuming and very interesting. His estate papers include a published version of his will in the Barnstable Patriot, receipts for debts and bills to the estate. There are also deeds of Sturgis property, mostly in Boston.

Series II, Elizabeth Davis Sturgis contains one folder of correspondence of William Sturgis' wife Elizabeth.

### WILLIAM STURGIS FAMILY PAPERS CONTAINER LIST

#### Box Folder Contents

#### SERIES I - WILLIAM STURGIS (1782-1863)

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | 1  | Family biographical data, and collection provenance information  |
| 1  | 2  | Business Correspondence and Receipts, 1839-1863  |
| 1  | 3  | Sketch by William Sturgis of the Duke of Wellington, n.d   |
| 1  | 4  | "Journal of William Sturgis," 1799; photostat copy of manuscript, 185pp.   |
| 1  | 5  | "Journal of William Sturgis," typewritten copy of manuscript done in 1976.   |
| 1  | 6  | "Summary of Northwest Coast Fur Trade by U. S. Vessels, 1799 - 1804" photostat copy of manuscript.                 |
| 1  | 7  | 3 Lectures about the Northwest Sea Otter Trade & Northwest Coast Indians, 1845-1846. Transcripts prepared in 1976. |
| 1  | 8  | Memorandum for preparation of an obituary, c. 1862, prepared at his direction.                                     |
| 1  | 9  | Estate of William Sturgis - newspaper account and will, Barnstable Patriot, Nov. 3, 1863                           |
| 1  | 10 | Estate papers - receipts for debts, 1863-1880  |
| 1  | 11 | Estate papers - bills, 1863  |
| 1A | 1  | Legal documents, deeds, 1821 - 1859 (21 items)   |

**SERIES II - ELIZABETH DAVIS STURGIS, wife of William Sturgis:**

**Box Folder Contents**

1 12 Correspondence, 1828

**SERIES III - WILLIAM WATSON STURGIS, (1810 - 1826), son of William and Elizabeth Sturgis:**

1 13 Correspondence, 1815-1823

1 14 Correspondence, School papers, 1824

1 15 Correspondence, 1825-1826

**SERIES IV - ELLEN DAVIS GOODWIN, sister-in-law of William Sturgis.**

1 16 Correspondence, 1812-1825

1 17 Correspondence, 1826-1832

**SERIES V - JUDGE JOHN DAVIS, (1761-1847) , Father-in-law of William Sturgis.**

1 18 Stock certificates and shares, estate papers, 1803 - 1848, John Davis of Plymouth, William Sturgis, Trustee.

1 19 Estate and trust papers, 1848-1863, William Sturgis, Trustee.

2 1 Bible of Judge John Davis, including genealogical notations

**SERIES VI - STURGIS FAMILY ARTIFACTS:**

3 1 Boxed watch of William Sturgis

3 2 Wallet of William Sturgis

3 3 Woodcut seal of signature of William Sturgis.