



Bessey Family Papers UA.10.3.416

This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on August 07, 2023.

Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

University Archives and Historical Collections

Conrad Hall

943 Conrad Road, Room 101

East Lansing , MI 48824

Business Number: 517-355-2330

archives@msu.edu

URL: <http://archives.msu.edu/>

Table of Contents

Summary Information	3
Biography of Charles Edwin Bessey	3
Scope and Contents	5
Arrangement	7
Administrative Information	7
Related Materials	8
Controlled Access Headings	8
Collection Inventory	9
Biographical Data	9
Manuscripts and Publications	9
General	10
Correspondence	10
Scrapbooks	13
Oversized Materials	13
Photographs	13

Summary Information

Repository:	University Archives and Historical Collections
Creator:	Bessey, Charles E. (Charles Edwin), 1845-1915
Creator:	Bessey, Ernst Athearn, 1877-1957
Source - dnr:	Kuhn, Madison, 1910-1985
Title:	Bessey family papers
ID:	UA.10.3.416
Date [inclusive]:	1878-1968
Physical Description:	1 Cubic Feet
Language of the Material:	English .

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: "Item title, Collection title, Collection Identifier, Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections, East Lansing, Michigan."

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Biography of Charles Edwin Bessey

Born in 1845, Charles Bessey was to become a prominent leader in the development of modern botanical science, active in research, teaching, administration, and the professionalization movement of American botanists. Bessey entered Michigan Agricultural College (M.A.C., now Michigan State University) in 1866 and studied under Albert Nelson Prentiss and William James Beal, two botanists noted for their teaching skills.

Graduating from M.A.C. with a B.S. in 1869, Charles Bessey began his career in 1870 at Iowa Agricultural College (now Iowa State University) as an instructor in botany and horticulture. In later years he was awarded honorary degrees from M.A.C. (1872), the University of Iowa (1879), and Grinnell College (1898).

In August 1872, as a newly-elected member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (A.A.A.S.), Charles Bessey met Asa Gray, a major figure in early American botany. During the winter months of 1872-1873, he studied with Gray at Harvard. In 1884, Bessey resigned his position at the Iowa Agricultural College, moving to the University of Nebraska to serve as chair of Botany and dean of the Industrial College, a position he was to hold until his death in 1915. During his years at Nebraska, he also acted in interregnum periods as Chancellor of the University (1888-1891 and 1899-1900).

Charles Bessey played a prominent role within the professionalization movement of American botanists. He is considered the prime mover in the establishment of the Iowa Academy of Science, and was elected its president in 1875. He continued this trend of leadership in Nebraska, serving as botanist for the State Board of Agriculture, as a member of the State Horticultural Society, as first director of the Experiment Station, and in many other capacities. He supported the development of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and was active in international botanical societies.

In addition to these professional activities, Charles Bessey was also active in reforming university and secondary education to provide a scientific basis for agriculture. He introduced the laboratory method of teaching botany in 1870 at Iowa and began writing textbooks on the subject in 1880. He pioneered the undergraduate teaching method of physiological botany, and at Iowa State University founded the first experimental laboratory for this purpose. As a leader in the "New Botany Movement" (a shift from the traditional concentration on taxonomy toward evolution and physiology in botany), he wrote a pioneer textbook: *The Essentials of Botany*, published by Henry Holt, who in 1879 began publishing a series of scientific text books. The first edition appeared in 1880. In 1914, after eight editions, the last edition was published under joint authorship with Ernst A. Bessey. This book revolutionized the teaching of botany in America, being the first to advocate laboratory work.

Charles Bessey was also instrumental in the development of the National Forest at Halsey, Nebraska. In cooperation with Bernhard E. Fernow, chief of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture, and Gifford Pinchot, USDA Forester, he worked to establish a forest in the Sand Hills region of Nebraska.

He married Lucy Athearn, a music teacher at the Lansing Academy of Music, on December 25, 1873. They had three sons: Edward, Ernst, and Carl, all of whom graduated from the University of Nebraska. Ernst followed in his father's footsteps, becoming an internationally known botanist and mycologist. Charles E. Bessey passed away in his home on February 25, 1915.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Biography of Ernst Athearn Bessey

Born in Ames, Iowa, Ernst Athearn Bessey became an internationally known botanist specializing in mycology, a branch of botany dealing with fungi. He received his A.B., B.S., and M.A. from the University of Nebraska in 1896, 1897, and 1898 respectively.

Between 1899 and 1908, Ernst Bessey worked for the United States Department of Agriculture. From 1902 to 1904, he traveled extensively in Russia, the Caucasus, Upper Armenia, the Trans-Caspian provinces, Russian Turkestan, Algeria, and central Europe on an agricultural mission for the Office of Seed and Plant Introduction. In 1903, his father traveled with him to Russia and the Caucasus. Interspersed with his travels, Ernst studied at the University of Halle, Germany, receiving a PhD in 1904.

From 1908 to 1910, Ernst served as a professor of botany and bacteriology at Louisiana State University. He spent the remainder of his career, from 1910 until his retirement in 1946, at Michigan State College (now Michigan State University). He succeeded W. J. Beal as professor of botany from 1910 to 1920, was made head of the Botany Department in 1920, and later served as acting dean of the Applied Science Division from 1927 to 1930. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Graduate School at Michigan State, and became its first dean in 1930.

In 1946, he retired, and was named professor emeritus of the Graduate School. In 1956, he was named among the nations 50 outstanding botanists by the Botanical Society of America.

Ernst Bessey was active in the development of the U.S. date palm industry, authored standard mycology texts, and became the first president of the Michigan Academy of Science. He was fluent in many languages, including Latin, Greek, German, French, Swedish, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Russian.

He married Edith Carleton Higgins of Omaha, Nebraska, and had two sons. He died on July 17, 1957, in East Lansing.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Contents

The Bessey family papers have been arranged into the following series: Biographical Data, Manuscripts and Publications, General, Correspondence, Scrapbooks, Oversized materials and Photographs.

The biographical data series includes information on Charles and Ernst Bessey, and on relatives of Edith Carleton Higgins (Mrs. Ernst A. Bessey), including her mother, Ella M. (Noyes) Higgins

(1851-1913); her sisters, Mabel Cornell Porter and Bertha Noyes and, her brothers, Leslie A. Higgins (1886-1951) and Harry A. Higgins.

The manuscripts and publications series contains letters from Ernst Bessey to his father while he was in Halle, Germany and Algeria; publications of Ernst Bessey; a manuscript by Charles Bessey on his experiences in the Caucuses; botanical manuscripts by Charles Bessey and colleagues, and the lecture notes of Charles Bessey. Of note are: the publication *Vegetationsbilder aus Russisch Turkestan* (1905), by Ernst Bessey; a partial manuscript of the *Essentials of Botany*, by Charles Bessey, a pioneer textbook of the "New Botany" movement; and the lecture notes by Charles E. Bessey for the seminary, "Plan and Purpose in Nature", (these notes are valuable since they are informative on early teachings of evolutionary theory in botany). Supplementary to this series regarding the Besseys' travels are two scrapbooks with photographs and notes depicting the agriculture, people, geography and culture of Russian Turkestan compiled by Ernst Bessey, and a scrapbook of Europe and the Caucuses supplemented by published articles on Russian agriculture by Charles Bessey.

Within the general series can be found receipts of contributions to the Royal Botanical Gardens Society of London by Charles Bessey; newspaper clipping from the *Omaha World Herald*; and botanical drawings and exams probably pertaining to a later era.

The Bessey family papers contain primarily correspondence between Charles E. Bessey and colleagues, circa 1880-1905. An important feature of Charles Bessey's correspondence is the continued contact he kept with his students, including Joseph C. Arthur, one of his first students at Iowa in 1870, who later became the foremost mycologist of this country. Correspondence with many noteworthy botanical leaders of the era is available in the collection, including Liberty Hyde Bailey and William J. Beal from the Michigan Agricultural College; Bernhard E. Fernow and Gifford Pinchot from the USDA Forestry Division; and with botanists from other USDA Departments and American universities.

The correspondence series covers educational and administrative, personal, and professional topics. Pertaining to his educational and administrative interests are exchanges concerning the acquisition of scientific equipment and the teaching of botany in the American school system. Subjects of interest include correspondence with Julius Sterling Morton, Secretary of the USDA, regarding the tariff bill and its effect on universities. Correspondence containing matters of a personal nature include "gossip" about colleagues; a collection of funds for a birthday gift for Asa Gray; on Gray's illness and death, and on the deaths of other colleagues. Professional exchange includes discussions on a wide variety of technical botanical matters including botanical evolution and structural physiology; exchange of criticisms and remarks on scientific manuscripts; job requests and recommendations; and discussions on forest conservation and management. Subjects of interest include correspondence with Bernhard E. Fernow on state tree designation and on reforestation of the Sand Hills of Nebraska and with Gifford Pinchot on forest management and the establishment of the reserves at Halsey, Nebraska.

Also available within the correspondence series are exchanges with Henry Holt, Bessey's publisher, regarding the progress of Charles E. Bessey's publications and sales, and an official

statement from George A. Gates, president of Iowa College, regarding the conferring of an LL.D. upon Charles Bessey.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Arrangement

Arranged in seven series: Biographical Data, Manuscripts and Publications, General, Correspondence, Scrapbooks, Oversized materials, and Photographs.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

University Archives and Historical Collections

Conrad Hall
943 Conrad Road, Room 101
East Lansing , MI 48824
Business Number: 517-355-2330
archives@msu.edu
URL: <http://archives.msu.edu/>

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Permission to publish material from this collection must be obtained from University Archives & Historical Collections, Michigan State University.

Conditions Governing Access

Legal Status: Donor(s) have transferred any applicable copyright to Michigan State University but the collection may contain third-party materials for which copyright was not transferred. Copyright restrictions may apply. Property Rights: Michigan State University.

Custodial History

Gift of Ellen Kearns, Madison Kuhn, Laurence E. McKune.

Processing Information

Record group changed from 00116 to UA 10.3.416 to reflect the Bessey family's connection to Michigan State University. M. Badgley-Malone, November 2020.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials

See also Charles E. Bessey papers, 1865-1915, at the University Archives & Special Collections at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska. Microfiche available at the Michigan State University Library.

See also Charles E. Bessey papers, 1869-1932 (UA 10.3.157), at the University Archives & Historical Collections, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

See also Ernst A. Bessey papers, 1904-1952 (UA 17.5), at the University Archives & Historical Collections, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Controlled Access Headings

- Botanists -- United States
- Botany -- United States
- Education
- Mycology
- Russia -- Description and travel
- Letters (correspondence)
- Photographs
- Scrapbooks
- Arthur, Joseph Charles, 1850-1942
- Bailey, L. H. (Liberty Hyde), 1858-1954
- Beal, W. J. (William James), 1833-1924

- Bessey, Edith Carleton Higgins
- Fernow, B. E. (Bernhard Eduard), 1851-1923
- Higgins, Ella Noyes, 1851-1931
- Higgins, Harry Noyes
- Higgins, Leslie A., 1951
- Holt, Henry, 1840-1926
- Noyes, Bertha Higgins
- Pinchot, Gifford, 1865-1946
- Porter, Mable Cornell Higgins
- Bessey family (Charles Bessey, 1845-1915)
- Iowa Agricultural College
- Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College
- Michigan State University
- United States. Department of Agriculture
- University of Nebraska at Omaha
- Kuhn, Madison, 1910-1985

Collection Inventory

Biographical Data

Title/Description	Instances	
Bessey, Charles Edwin - Biographical Information, 1911-1954	box 6376	folder 1
Bessey, Ernst Athearn - Biographical Information, 1910-1968	box 6376	folder 2
Higgins, Edith Carleton - Biographical Information on Relatives, 1931-1951	box 6376	folder 3

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Manuscripts and Publications

Title/Description	Instances	
Bessey, Charles Edwin		
Lecture Notes, Undated	box 6376	folder 4
Manuscripts, Undated	box 6376	folder 5-6
Manuscripts Written by Colleagues of Charles Edwin Bessey, Undated	box 6376	folder 7
Manuscripts - Author Unknown, Undated	box 6376	folder 8

Bessey, Charles Edwin -- Manuscript of "Travel to Caucuses", 1903-1904	box 6376	folder 9
Bessey, Ernst Athearn		
Letters from Abroad, 1903-1904	box 6376	folder 10
Publications, 1905, 1918, 1942	box 6376	folder 11
Bessey, Charles Edwin -- Lecture Notes "Plans and Purpose in Nature", circa 1895	box 6376	folder 12

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

General

Title/Description	Instances	
Bessey, Charles Edwin - Royal Botanic Gardens Contributions Receipts, 1885-1902	box 6376	folder 13
Newspaper Clippings - <i>Omaha World-Herald</i> , 1914, 1952	box 6376	folder 14
Bessey, Charles Edwin - Botanical Drawings, Exams Clippings, Fragmented Speeches, Undated	box 6376	folder 15
"On the Affinities of Ceratophyllaceae", 1837	box 6376	folder 74

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Correspondence

Title/Description	Instances	
Arthur, Joseph C.		
New York Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, 1882-1885	box 6376	folder 16
New York Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, 1886-1887	box 6376	folder 17
Agricultural Experiment Station of Indiana, 1887-1903	box 6376	folder 18
Austin, C.F., Undated	box 6376	folder 19
Bailey, Liberty Hyde		
Michigan Agricultural College, 1885-1887	box 6376	folder 20
Cornell University, 1890-1900	box 6376	folder 21
Barnes, Charles Reid, 1884-1897	box 6376	folder 22
Barnes, Charles Reid, 1898-1903	box 6376	folder 23
Beal, Foster E.L., 1885-1886	box 6376	folder 24

Beal, William James - Michigan Agricultural College, 1885-1903	box 6376	folder 25
Bebb, M.S. - Rockford, Illinois, 1881-1885	box 6376	folder 26
R & J Beck Manufacturers and Importers of Scientific Equipment, London - W.H. Walmsley, Manager, 1881	box 6376	folder 27
Brewer, W.H. - Sheffield Scientific School of Yale, 1887-1898	box 6376	folder 28
Britton, Elizabeth Gertrude - Columbia College, 1886-1902	box 6376	folder 29
Britton, Nathaniel Lord - Columbia College, 1885-1894	box 6376	folder 30
Britton, Nathaniel Lord - Columbia College, 1895-1904	box 6376	folder 31
Burrill, Thomas Jonathan - University of Illinois, 1886-1903	box 6376	folder 32
Carleton, Mark Alfred - Cerealist, USDA, 1897-1902	box 6376	folder 33
Coulter, John Merle - University of Chicago, 1881-1895	box 6376	folder 34
Coulter, John Merle - University of Chicago, 1897-1903	box 6376	folder 35
Curtiss, A.H. - Jacksonville, FL, 1885-1895	box 6376	folder 36
Curtiss, A.H. - Jacksonville, FL, 1896-1903	box 6376	folder 37
Ellis, Job Bicknell - Mycologist; Newfield, NJ, 1878-1887	box 6376	folder 38
Ellis, Job Bicknell - Mycologist; Newfield, NJ, 1888-1899	box 6376	folder 39
Fernow, Bernhard E. - USDA, Division of Forestry, 1892-1902	box 6376	folder 40
Gibbes, M., 1897-1898	box 6376	folder 41
Goodale, George L. - Harvard University, 1893-1898, Undated	box 6376	folder 42
Greene, E.L., 1887	box 6376	folder 43
Henry Holt, Publisher		
New York, NY, 1879-1886	box 6376	folder 44
New York, NY, 1887-1904	box 6376	folder 45
New York, NY - Publication Sales (receipts), 1881-1894	box 6376	folder 46
Kellerman, William Ashbrook		
Kansas State Agricultural College, 1883-1889	box 6376	folder 47
Ohio State University, 1895-1899	box 6376	folder 48
Leummings, Clara E. - Wellesley College, 1885-1903	box 6376	folder 49
McClathchie, A.J. - Throop University, Pasadena, CA, 1892-1893	box 6376	folder 50

McClathchie, A.J. - Throop University, Pasadena, CA, 1894-1903	box 6376	folder 51
Manatt, James Irving - University of Nebraska, 1884-1886	box 6376	folder 52
Meehan, Thomas, 1885-1900	box 6376	folder 53
Moll, Francis, 1887	box 6376	folder 54
Morgan, A.P. - Preston, Ohio, 1886-1892	box 6376	folder 55
Morton, Julius Sterling - Secretary, USDA, 1887-1895	box 6376	folder 56
Pinchot, Gifford - U.S. Forester, 1894-1904	box 6376	folder 57
Prestiss, A.N. - Cornell University, 1890-1895	box 6376	folder 58
Riley, Charles Valentine - USDA, Division of Entomology, 1885	box 6376	folder 59
Robinson, Benjamin Lincoln - Gray Herbarium, Harvard, 1894-1903	box 6376	folder 60
Sargent, Charles Sprague - Arnold Arboretum, Harvard, 1880-1896	box 6376	folder 61
Sargent, Charles Sprague - Arnold Arboretum, Harvard, 1897-1904	box 6376	folder 62
Sturtevant, Edward Lewis - New York Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, 1884-1886	box 6376	folder 63
Underwood, Lucien Marcus - Columbia University, 1885-1903	box 6376	folder 64
Vasey, George - USDA, Bureau of Botany, 1885-1891	box 6376	folder 65
Vasey, George - USDA, Bureau of Botany, 1892-1893	box 6376	folder 66
Watrous, Charles Leach - Capital City Nurseries, Iowa, 1894-1895	box 6376	folder 67
Watson, Sereno - Herbarium of Harvard University, 1884-1890	box 6376	folder 68
Webber, H.J.		
Washington University, MO, 1890-1892	box 6376	folder 69
USDA, Division of Vegetable Pathology, 1892-1901	box 6376	folder 70
USDA, Bureau of Plant Pathology, 1903-1904	box 6376	folder 71
General Correspondence, 1881-1902	box 6376	folder 72
Fragment Letters, 1881-1902, Undated	box 6376	folder 73

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Scrapbooks

Title/Description	Instances
Russian Photographs, 1902	volume SB 343
Russian Photographs, 1902	volume SB 344
European Photographs, 1903	volume SB 345
Family Album, 1935-1938	volume SB 346
MSU Class of 1940. Record Book, 1940	volume SB 347

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Oversized Materials

Title/Description	Instances
Certificate of appointment of H.N. Higgins as First Lieutenant by the Department of Military Science, University of Nebraska. 1902; Nebraska High Schools, Omaha - diplomas of Bertha Noyes Higgins, Edith Carleton Higgins, and Mabel Cornell Higgins, 1896, 1897, 1899	box 5753
Mycological Society of America. Meeting	box 5753
Russia. Moscow	box 5753

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Photographs

Title/Description	Instances
Christmas Cards (3 folders)	box 6376 folder 75-77
People. Bessey, Charles E.	box 6376 folder 78
People. Bessey, Charles E.	box People Photo 3
People. Bessey, Ernst A.	box 6376 folder 79
People. Bessey, Ernst A.	box People Photo 3
People. Bessey, Marim Elizabeth	box 6376 folder 80
People. Bessey, Mrs. Ernst	

	box People Photo 3	
People. Cole	box 6376	folder 81
People. Cole, Dolores Maureen	box 6376	folder 82
People. Frutchey, Frank Burr	box 6376	folder 83
People. Groups	box 6376	folder 84
People. Newcomer, Peter Jay	box 6376	folder 85
People. Porter Family	box 6376	folder 86
People. Unidentified	box 6376	folder 87
People. Wilde Family	box 6376	folder 88

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)