



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to MS 3146 Edwin Hamilton
Davis papers, circa 1855-1937

National Anthropological Archives
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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical Note	1
Scope and Contents	2
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	

Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	MS 3146 Edwin Hamilton Davis papers
Date:	circa 1855-1937
Identifier:	NAA.MS3146
Creator:	Davis, E. H. (Edwin Hamilton), 1811-1888 Squier, E. G. (Ephraim George), 1821-1888 (Artist)
Extent:	18 Linear feet (21 folders and 1 box)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Provenance

The collection was donated to the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) by Betsey Davis, daughter of Edwin Hamilton Davis, in July 1929. The four drawings by Ephraim G. Squier were transferred to the BAE archives by Matthew Stirling in 1958. It is unclear if these materials were donated by Betsey Davis in 1929 or if they came from another, undocumented source.

Related Materials

The British Museum holds Davis' collection of artifacts, many of which are illustrated in the portfolio.

Processing Information

The materials in this collection were originally described under MS 3146-a, MS 3146-b, and MS 3146-c. In 2022, the collection was reprocessed and all materials were incorporated into a single collection under MS 3146.

Preferred Citation

MS 3146 Edwin Hamilton Davis papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Access to the collection requires an appointment.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Biographical Note

Edwin Hamilton Davis (1811-1888) was an archaeologist and physician who is best known for his excavation of the mounds in the Mississippi Valley and his collection of prehistoric artifacts.

Davis graduated from Cincinnati Medical College in 1838, and practiced medicine in Chillicothe, Ohio. In 1850, he joined the faculty of New York Medical College. He also served as an editor of the *American Medical Monthly*.

A self-taught archaeologist, in 1836 Davis aided Charles Whittlesey in his explorations of mounds in Ohio. From 1845 to 1847 with Ephraim G. Squier, Davis surveyed nearly one hundred earthworks, including the Serpent Mound in Peebles, Ohio and the Mound City Group in Chillicothe, Ohio. The results of these surveys were published as "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley" in the Smithsonian's first publication, *Contributions to Knowledge*, v. 1. In 1854 he delivered a series of lectures on archaeology at the Lowell Institute Boston, and also in Brooklyn and New York City. He was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1858. Davis gathered a large collection of mound relics, which became part of the collection at the Blackmore Museum in Salisbury (UK). The collection was acquired by the British Museum in 1931.

Davis died in 1888 in New York City and was buried at the Grandview Cemetery, Chillicothe in Ohio.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists primarily of a portfolio of 92 drawings of Davis' collection of artifacts and related documentation. The collection also contains letters to Davis, notes, and drawings relating to Peruvian, Mexican, and Central American artifacts, as well as drawings by Ephraim G. Squier presumably used as references for some of the drawings in the portfolio.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Exhibition Note

The portfolio was exhibited by the Florida Archaeology Society and Tampa Bay Museum in 1937.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Archaeology
- Mounds

Types of Materials:

- Drawings
- Works of art

Places:

- Central America
- North America
- South America

Container Listing

Folder 1-21	<p>Sketches of Monuments and Antiques Found in the Mounds, Tombs, and Ancient Cities of America, 1858 1 Item (black portfolio; 19 x 27 inches) 92 Pages Image(s): North American (Mississippi Valley and Ohio), Central American and Peruvian antiquities - North American (Mississippi Valley and Ohio) Image(s) Notes: A portfolio containing 92 drawings of objects found in mounds, tombs, and ancient cities of the Mississippi Valley, Mexico, Central America, and Peru arranged, classified, and described by Davis. The drawings were made by James Plunkett. Most of the objects were in Davis' personal collection.</p> <p>Five deteriorating acetate negatives that originally came with the collection have been discarded. Four were copy negatives of some of the drawings. The fifth negative, which has been digitized, is a photograph of an artifact not found among the drawings. The image is a side view of a pipe carved in the shape of a frog crouched to spring. A print made from the digital image has been placed with the collection.</p> <p>North American (Mississippi Valley and Ohio), Central American and Peruvian antiquities - North American (Mississippi Valley and Ohio)</p>
Box 1, Folder 1	<p>Documents related to Sketches of Monuments and Antiques..., 1928-1937 Notes: Consists of an inventory of the portfolio <i>Sketches of Monuments and Antiques...</i>, as well as brochures from an exhibit of the portfolio held by the Florida Archaeological Society and Tampa Bay Museum in 1937.</p>
Box 1, Folder 2	<p>Letters and notes, 1856-1867 Notes: Letters to Davis from Thomas Jennings Hand and Joseph Hawes, as well as notes related to Incan artifacts.</p> <p>Also includes a copy of <i>Prospectus of Messrs de Schlagintweits' Collection of Ethnographical Heads from India and High Asia</i>, a catalogue produced by John Ambrose Barth, Bookseller and Publisher, Leipzig. Germany, of plaster casts made from living people of heads and hands. Published in 1859 by C. and F. Unger, Berlin.</p>
Box 1, Folder 3	<p>Drawings and wax impression, circa 1855-1865 Notes: Consists of 4 drawings of Mexican and Peruvian artifacts, 2 maps of North and South America, and a wax impression of the Grave Creek tablet.</p>
Box 1, Folder 4	<p>Ephraim G. Squier drawings of gold artifacts found in Panama, undated 4 Drawings (visual works) Image(s): Four drawings of gold artifacts found in Panama</p>

[Image\(s\)](#)

Notes:

Four drawings by Ephraim G. Squier of gold artifacts found in Panama. Copies of these drawings appear in *Sketches of Monuments and Antiques*. The original objects were destroyed.