



Smithsonian Institution Archives

C. S. (Constantine Samuel) Rafinesque Papers, 1815-1834 and undated

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Creator:	Rafinesque, C. S. (Constantine Samuel), 1783-1840
Title:	C. S. (Constantine Samuel) Rafinesque Papers
Dates:	1815-1834 and undated
Quantity:	0.1 linear meter.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

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Historical Note

Constantine Samuel Rafinesque (1783-1840) was born near Constantinople. In 1792, he moved with his family to Leghorn, Italy, where he was educated by private tutors. Rafinesque showed an early enthusiasm for the study of nature, beginning the systematic collection of a herbarium when he was eleven years old. In 1802, he traveled to Philadelphia, where he became acquainted with several American scientists, including Benjamin Rush and William Bartram. During his three years in America, Rafinesque made several field trips, collecting botanical and zoological specimens. He returned to Italy in 1805 and for the next ten years resided in Sicily. While studying the ichthyology of Sicilian waters, Rafinesque worked as secretary and chancellor to the American Consul and as an exporter of squills and medicinal plants. A series of personal problems caused him to return to America in 1815. Surviving a shipwreck off Long Island, he settled in New York where he worked at times as a private tutor. From 1815 to 1818, he studied the flora and fauna of the Hudson Valley, Lake George, and Long Island. In 1819, Rafinesque was appointed Professor of Botany, Natural History, and Modern Languages at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, where he remained until 1826. From 1826 until his death, he lived in Philadelphia and continued to make field trips and study the flora and fauna of the region.

Rafinesque's chief interests were botany and ichthyology. Despite a peculiar personality that alienated many colleagues, he contributed significantly to nineteenth century scientific thought. He was one of the first American naturalists to depart from the Linnaean system of classification and adopt the emerging schemes of natural plant classification. Rafinesque was an early advocate of evolutionary theory and his ideas were acknowledged by Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*.

Introduction

This finding aid was digitized with funds generously provided by the Smithsonian Institution Women's Committee.

Descriptive Entry

This collection consists of notebooks kept by Rafinesque on his many trips, containing natural history notes and observations; ichthyological and botanical drawings; sketches of landscapes and places visited; itineraries; and trip journals. Some of the notebooks are in French

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Botany
- Ichthyology
- Natural history

Types of Materials:

- Field notes
- Scientific illustrations

Container Listing

Box 1

Folder 1 Notebook containing notes and observations on the natural history of the Hudson Valley, circa 1815-1816. Also included are drawings and maps. Most of the notes are written in French.

Folder 2 Notebook containing itinerary for May and June 1817; natural history notes; and ichthyological and botanical drawings. The itinerary and notes are written in French.

Folder 3 Notebook kept by Rafinesque on a trip from Philadelphia to Kentucky, 1818. Included are lists of places visited, natural history notes, and drawings. The notes are written in French.

[Digital Content](#)

Folder 4 Notebooks containing a journal kept on Rafinesque's trip from Lexington, Kentucky, to Philadelphia, 1826; notes on his travel to New York and Massachusetts, 1827; a list of his travels, 1819-1830; natural history notes; and drawings, especially of fishes.

Folder 5 Notebook containing "Views, Maps and Sketches of my travels in 1832, 1833, 1834," consisting of pencil drawings, mostly of scenes from the Delaware Valley. Also included is research data on "comparative Decimals in all the Principal Languages and dialects of the Earth, 1822."

Folder 6 Notebook containing scenic sketches; natural history notes & drawings, especially of fishes, and misc. jottings, undated.

Folder 7 Miscellaneous notebooks containing natural history notes; botanical and ichthyological drawings; and landscapes and other sketches. Includes: Envelope 1 - Book 21; Envelope 2 - Notebook with itineraries, sketches, and miscellaneous notes; Envelope 3 - Notebook with sketch and field note; Envelope 4 - Notebook with miscellaneous notes; Envelope 5 - Miscellaneous notes of an unknown researcher.