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## Josiah D. Canning, *The Shad-Fishers Manuscript*

1854

1 vol. (0.1 linear foot)

Call no.: MS 1009 bd



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The "Peasant Bard" of Gill, Mass., Josiah D. Canning, published five books of poetry between 1838 and 1892 extolling the spiritual virtues of nature and the agrarian life. The son of a minister, Canning worked as a printer for several years before settling down to farming life, churning out poetry that reflected his reverence for the land.

This small collection consists of a printed copy of Josiah Canning's fourth book, *The Shad-Fishers*, published by R.C. Graves in Greenfield, Mass., in 1854, along with a manuscript copy of the same work bound in workmanlike leather over boards. Although it is not possible to determine with certainty, the manuscript may be Canning's own.

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## Background on Josiah D. Canning

A native of the miniscule western Massachusetts town of Gill, Josiah Dean Canning enjoyed a brief popularity during the nineteenth century as a poet of rural life and the virtues of the land. The "Peasant Bard" was born in Gill on August 31, 1816, the third of five sons of a minister and Williams College graduate, Josiah Weeks Canning and his wife Almira. Raised in home that prized education, Josiah grew into a minor prodigy, marking out his future in literary endeavors at an early age. At fifteen he built a printing press and published his own newspaper off and on for three years, ending the last issue in April 1834 with an original poem, "The Village Post's Finale."

Anxious to see a wider world, Canning ventured to Detroit in July 1834 to join his brother as a printer on the staff of the *Detroit Courier*, but when the brother died of cholera, Josiah returned home again. Although he took work as a printer in nearby Greenfield, he remained footloose and subsequently took printing positions in Virginia and Wisconsin before settling in Gill once and for all in 1837.

Canning's return signaled a change in life in several regards, most notably his turn away from printing work to farming and the blossoming of his career as a poet. Canning began writing more seriously and publishing poetry that drew inspiration from nature and extolled the virtues of agrarian life. The first of his five books of poetry, the accurately-named *Poems* (Greenfield, 1838), garnered wide notice after the influential literary periodical, *The Knickerbocker* ran a laudatory review, calling Canning the "farmer's boy, from a sequestered vale of the Connecticut, who draws his figures from ever-glorious nature!" The author of the review, Louis Gaylord Clarke, referred to Canning as the Peasant Bard, a name which he gladly adopted.

Tinged by the romantic writers he admired and frequently nostalgic, Canning's subject matter was firmly planted in place, extolling the spiritual virtues of farming in general, or the familiar trope of the vanishing Indian, but with an eye toward local specificity. Later in life, Canning became a supporter of local historical and antiquarian endeavors, as an officer of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, and was engaged in local politics in Gill.

## Scope of collection

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Eugene Povirk, Jan. 2018.

### Bibliography

For a biography of Canning see Christine A. Modey, "Josiah D. Canning (1816-1892)," in Eric L. Haralson, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century*, p. 62-64. Chicago : Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998.

### Related Material

SCUA owns copies of four of Canning's five books, though all but the current are held in inaccessible storage.

*Poems*. Greenfield, Mass. : Phelps and Ingersoll, 1838. PS1252.C6 P6 1838

*Thanksgiving Eve*. Greenfield, Mass. : Merriam and Myrick, 1847.

*The Harp and Plow*. Greenfield, Mass. : M. H. Tyler, 1852. PS1252.C6 H3 1852

*The Shad-Fishers*. Greenfield, Mass. R. C. Graves, 1854

*Connecticut River Reeds, Blown by the 'Peasant Bard'*. Boston : J. C. Cupples, 1892. PS1252.C6 C75

The Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association has a small collection of **Cannon-Canning Family Papers** that includes some original poems, a "Register of a journeyman printer" kept while in Detroit, 1834-1836, and some copies of the newspaper he published as a boy.

### Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Jan. 2018.

### Language:

English

## Copyright and Use (More information )

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Canning, Josiah D. (Josiah Dean), 1816-1892

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### Contributors

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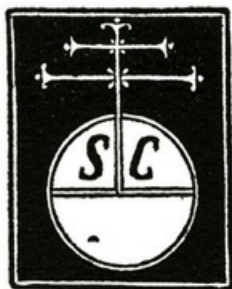
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